Who plans small towns and how?
Multiple *Orders of worth* in spatial planning at the local level in Sichuan, China.

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Berlin, 2021

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Datum der Disputation: 15.06.2021

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die am Fachbereich Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin zur Promotion eingereichte Dissertationsschrift mit dem Titel „Who plans small towns and how? Multiple *Orders of worth* in spatial planning at the local level in Sichuan, China" an der Graduate School of East Asian Studies der Freien Universität Berlin selbstständig und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt habe. Bei der Verfassung der Dissertation wurden keine anderen als die im Text aufgeführten Hilfsmittel verwendet.

Abstract

English version

This dissertation maps the process of spatial planning for small towns in Sichuan as it takes place between local politics, public administration, and professional planners. It argues that spatial planning is informed by ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness, which following *Sociology of Conventions,* are framed here as *orders of worth.* Five *orders of worth* are identified and described: 'Planning as a craft,' 'planning as regulation and public provision,' 'planning as a business,' 'planning for development and growth,' and 'planning for ecology and civilization.'

With the involvement of an administrative apparatus and professional planners in the planning process, there are many influences on a spatial plan's contents apart from political negotiation and political strategy. In empirical chapters separate from the analysis, first, a description of the administrative structure and processes of spatial planning argues that politicians and administrative staff constitute two separate groups of actors and that an understanding of the workings of the administration is necessary to explain policy decisions and outcomes. Second, an investigation into the planning profession demonstrates that the marketization of spatial planning affords professionals certain independence. This chapter also shows that in the planning profession, analytical capacities and policy consultation are increasingly valued.

Data has been obtained through nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sichuan.

Zusammenfassung: Deutsche Fassung

Diese Dissertation bildet den Prozess der Raumplanung kleiner Städte in Sichuan ab, wie er zwischen lokaler Politik, öffentlicher Verwaltung und Raumplaner*innen stattfindet. Das Argument ist, dass Raumplanung von Idealvorstellungen und der Zuweisung von Wertigkeiten geleitet ist, die in dieser Arbeit, der *Soziologie der Konventionen* folgend, als *Wertigkeitsordnungen* gefasst sind. Fünf *Wertigkeitsordnungen* werden identifiziert und beschrieben: ‚Planung als Handwerk,' ‚Planung als Reglementierung und öffentliche Versorgung,' ‚Planung als Geschäft,' ‚Planung für Entwicklung und Wachstum,' sowie ‚Planung für Ökologie und Zivilisation.'

Angesichts der Einbindung von Verwaltung und professionellen Planer*innen in den Planungsprozess, lassen sich viele Einflussfaktoren jenseits politischer Verhandlung und Strategie auf die Inhalte eines Raumplanes feststellen. In von der Analyse getrennten empirischen Kapiteln wird erstens anhand der Verwaltungsstrukturen und -prozesse der Raumplanung argumentiert, dass Politiker*innen und Verwaltungspersonal zwei unterschiedliche Akteursgruppen darstellen und dass ein Verständnis von Verwaltungshandeln notwendig ist, um politische Entscheidungen und Ergebnisse zu erklären. Zweitens zeigt eine Untersuchung der Profession der Raumplanung auf, dass die marktorientierte Neuorganisation von Raumplanung den Expert*innen eine gewisse Unabhängigkeit gewährt. Hier wird ebenfalls aufgezeigt, dass analytische Fähigkeiten und Politikberatung in der Raumplanung zunehmend an Stellenwert gewinnen.

Die Daten wurden in neun Monaten ethnographischer Forschung in Sichuan gewonnen.

Acknowledgments

Berlin, September 2021

Lisa Melcher

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List of Persons

All names are pseudonyms

Wanderlust township planning team at New Town Company	
Han Ruishan	Team leader, loves to draw maps by hand.
Chu Weide	Team member, had been in the previous Wanderlust planning project, too. Went back to university towards the end of my fieldwork.
Gao Yuanchao	Team member, did much of the technical / routine parts of the project.
Yan Weining	Youngest team member, only joined in the course of the project.

Members of government and administration engaged in the Wanderlust planning project	
Secretary Liu	Party secretary and head of government of Wanderlust township.
Deputy Mayor Wang	Has worked in the planning office before and thus, on the one hand, has some expert knowledge on spatial planning, and on the other hand, knows the New Town Company from previous projects.
Mr Zhang	Head of the Wanderlust township land administration office.
Mr Chen	Rural planner dispatched to Wanderlust township.

Further planners at New Town Company	
Teacher Zhao	One of the owners of New Town Company, had the oversight of the Wanderlust planning project and is an distinguished planner in the region. Took a special interest in developing Wanderlust town into a lively Sichuanese town.
Teacher Yuan	One of the owners of the company, used to work for a government planning institute. My initial contact who gave me access to the company.
Sun Beihai	Youngest of the owners of the company, met with me regularly for dinner in order to exchange ideas and knowledge.
Gong Zhetai	The ascending talent at the company, as a department-leader in a mid-level management position; had not studied planning but economic geography.
Fan Jianhong	Department-leader at New Town Company, the immediate superior of Han Ruishan.
Luo Zhicheng	One of the planners who worked longest at the company; was especially strong in design and illustration and a proud father.
Jiang Wenxue	Joined the company during the time of my fieldwork and left a planning institute for this job.

Further members of government and administration

Director Ba	Senior employee at a provincial ministry, whom I got to know by listening in on an interdisciplinary research project on rural development.
Mr Zhao	Senior employee at the municipal planning bureau.
Ms Wu	Young aspiring planner in Mountain city; had a top-notch education and was clearly moving on towards a career.
Mr Zhu	Deputy-leader of a Humble county planning bureau.
Ms Deng	Employee and head of an office in the Reverence county planning bureau.
Feng Yong	Rural planner in Humble county, who had worked at New Town Company before.

Planners from other organizations

Huang Tianming	Head of one office in a government-owned planning institute (public service unit).
Ming Lili	Member of Huang Tianming's team, very recent university graduate.
Lin Xiuying	Member of the Mountain city planning team.

1 Introduction

On its first slide, the almost finalized general plan for Wanderlust township shows a black-and-white rendering of Wanderlust's pagoda in front of dramatic clouds. Below, in calligraphy writing, the title of the general plan is given. On the right-hand side, a line of classical poem alludes both to the characters in Wanderlust's real name as well as to a longing for home.[1] On slide two of the Powerpoint presentation, there is a list of national and regional policies that impact Wanderlust. An elaboration of how it will be turned into an opportunity by and for the township accompanies each listed policy. Slide three gives an overview of the structure of the presentation: first, the research at the basis of this plan; second, the plan for the township area (镇域), i.e., for the rural areas of the township; third, the plan for the central town (镇区) of the township. Each of these chapters is twenty slides long and is preceded by an overview of its internal structure.

This document and preceding and subsequent versions have been given to me by the project team at New Town Company, which was commissioned by the Wanderlust township government with compiling this plan. In 2016, I accompanied the planners at New Town Company for nine months to understand both the processes of plan-making and the ideal imaginations and objectives that inform spatial planning in rural Sichuan.[2]

The project team presented this version of the general plan at an expert and administration hearing in the planning bureau of Reverence county.[3] As usual, the project team from New Town Company – Han Ruishan, Chu Weide, and Gao Yuanchao – presented the analyses, strategic orientations, and planning decisions that comprise the general plan in the form of a Powerpoint presentation. The legally required documents for a spatial plan, which are its legal text, the maps, and a written explanation, were not finalized yet and had to be handed in before the next assessment meeting with politicians from the county bureaus (FN #39).[4]

Present at the expert and administrative assessment meeting (专家会议 and 技术会议) were the project team from New Town Company, which had prepared the general plan based on a contract with the Wanderlust township government.[5] On the part of local government,

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[1] In order to protect my interlocutors, all names of individuals, institutions, and localities, with which I have been in personal contact, have been changed; information by which any individual, institution, or locality could be identified has, to the best of my knowledge, been changed, blurred, or left out. Thus, Wanderlust township in reality has another name.

[2] This presentation is important also because the general plan for Wanderlust township will be brought up frequently in the course of this dissertation. This is the project which I accompanied most intensively and most continuously during my fieldwork and it provides a recurrent theme throughout this dissertation.

[3] The county level is one layer above the township level in the administrative hierarchy. The hierarchy is: village – township – county – municipality – province – central government. This will be explained in more detail in the course of the dissertation, chapters 2.2 and 5.5.1.

[4] References labelled with 'FN' refer to fieldnotes from my research. The appendix offers an overview of fieldnotes.

[5] Unfortunately, I was not present at this specific meeting, but have witnessed others of this kind. This, therefore, is a reconstruction of the format which would be expected.

there were Party Secretary Liu, head of Wanderlust township government, and Deputy Mayor Wang from Wanderlust, responsible for construction and land use. Administrative representatives from the relevant county bureaus and three or four senior planners from other planning institutes or universities were invited by the planning bureau to assess the plan. A senior official from the county planning bureau moderated the meeting. Thus, representatives from all relevant groups of actors were present in the room: politicians, planning administration, and a team of professional planners.

Wanderlust township is located in Reverence county and on the outskirts of Chengdu municipality. In this area, industrial development restrictions apply to protect landscape, agricultural land, and environmental resources. The township's central town, Wanderlust town, has a historic core, dotted with some newer structures; from there, the towns' building stretch along the major roads towards neighboring towns. Dispersed settlements, which are typical for Sichuan province, characterize the rural areas of the township. Despite the high fertility of the land, the area is relatively poor.[6]

In the following, I present the contents of the Powerpoint document of this meeting to the reader. My initial motivation for doing this research was an interest in the meaning behind such documents: What sorts of imaginations do they represent? How do the persons formulating the plan imagine this locality's future? Therefore, this dissertation is about making spatial plans in the rural areas of Chengdu municipality: Which ideal imaginations and social orientations inform the making and spatial plans' contents? To this end, it is also necessary to know who formulates spatial plans, in which setup and context, and through which processes. By giving an overview of one such general plan (总体规划), not only do I intend to give the reader a sense of what spatial planning in Sichuan is about, but also aim to impart some of the fascination and questions that such planning documents raised in me.

The 64-page long Powerpoint document comprises three chapters: Analyses and research; plans for the whole township; plans for the central town. The first chapter, containing the research and analysis that form the basis for the plan, starts with the physical, economic, and cultural geography of the township and its regional context as well as an assessment of the current infrastructure and land-use patterns. These analyses are, for the biggest part, rendered in the form of thematic maps. In the following, the strengths and weaknesses of the status quo concerning opportunities for future development are assessed: According to this assessment, while the township's location is beneficial with regard to transport connections and comprises attractive landscape features, the location is also peripheral and the strengths go unused. While there is a comparatively large population and the central town is not small, the population is too dispersed to ensure good public facilities coverage. Both agriculture and established industries are stable, but they are structured in rather old-fashioned ways. It is unclear how they can adapt to the requirements of a modern market. Also, the tourism infrastructure is deficient.

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[6] For purposes of anonymization, no more detail can be given.

The text on the next slide is too small to be read by the audience of a presentation. It defines the terminology, lists relevant regulation of higher levels of government, and states the core rationale and principles guiding the project team. Four principles are listed and elaborated: the planning of urban and rural areas as one whole, respect for ecology, historical continuity, and effective land use.[7] The following provides an assessment of the previous general plan of Wanderlust township. All these elements are analytical in that the township's situation is evaluated in physical, economic, and social terms and that the basic tenets of this project are made transparent.

However, the first chapter of the document also entails strategic elements. It includes the core strategic positioning (定位), the plan's strategic objectives, and implementation strategies. Strategic positioning can be understood here as branding: What are the characteristics that set this locality apart? Why would someone want to come and visit? Here, the presentation again recurs to Wanderlust's landscape, the historic center of the town, and the local handicraft industry, which is to be strengthened.

Chapter two contains the plans for the rural areas of the township. About half of this chapter is filled with the economic strategy for different sectors of the economy. Concerning agriculture, the plan maps out which area in the township should specialize in which intensity of agriculture; for industrial and artisanal production, it provides an overview of government measures can support further development of critical local branches; with regard to tourism, the plan gives a summary of which kinds of facilities should be established and which structures and attractions already exist. Chapter three, the plan for Wanderlust's urban territory, includes a conceptualization of the core town's spatial development along growth axes and functional zones.

Spatial planning in China is commonly differentiated between statutory (法定规划) and non-statutory (非法定规划) plans. The strategic elements described above are the non-statutory parts of this plan, i.e., the contents that are not legally mandated and are not legally binding for the local government. Statutory contents, in contrast, have to be included according to planning legislation. Once the plan has passed assessment and has been enacted by the local People's Congress, the plan's contents are binding not only to investors and the local population but also to the local government. In the chapter on the rural parts of Wanderlust township, such statutory contents include a plan for the settlement system (镇村体系规划). This plan demarcates the locations and population sizes of villages and settlements, as well as the number of persons to be relocated to each specific settlement. Some of these settlements already exist, others are still to be constructed; in all places, a large proportion of the dispersed rural population is to move to more concentrated villages. There is a plan on the equipment of settlements with social facilities and plans for the transport network, land use, water, electricity, and other infrastructures. All of these are to be constructed by the local government. The statutory elements in the land-use planning for the central town

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[7] Again, for the sake of anonymization, I have abstained from providing the original formulations.

are detailed maps of current and future land use and a zoning map for future construction. These constitute the binding regulation about what sorts of buildings, facilities, and infrastructures can be constructed in which places. The spatial plan also includes highly restrictive prescriptions for construction prohibition zones, construction restrictions, and construction land throughout the territory. These elements constitute an implementation of higher-level policy which aims at the protection of landscape and environment.

With this, the general plan offers an intriguing mixture of a) binding regulation with b) considerations about development strategy for local business and c) implementation of higher-level prescriptions. There is much technical detail, such as the maps for infrastructure and the distribution of public facilities. However, next to this, the beautiful landscape and values of local historical heritage are evoked. The plan presents analyses of the status quo of Wanderlust township; at the same time, illustrations about how this town can be five or fifteen years from now are among the core contents. Thereby, the politicians, administration, and professional planners involved in the planning process have formulated an ideal image of the future of Wanderlust township. This dissertation follows the Wanderlust general planning project process to identify and describe attributions of worthiness, which inform the formulation of both the planning documents and the ideal image. To this purpose, this dissertation also provides a detailed mapping of actors and procedures involved in the making of a general plan in rural Sichuan.

1.1   Object and objective of research

This dissertation revolves around the research question of how spatial plans are made and, specifically, which imaginations and attributions of worthiness inform the decisions made in spatial planning. The objective is to identify and produce a description of the *orders of worth* that planners, politicians, and persons working in the administration employ to evaluate the contents of a spatial plan and that define the objects and objectives of planning for small towns in Sichuan.

As shown in the vignette above, the plan is not only regulating construction and implementing higher-level policy, even though these are core aspects. It is also a vision about which future might be good for this specific locality and a road map for government to help pursue this vision. As I will show in this dissertation, Party Secretary Liu (even though he had a relevant voice in the process) has not dictated this vision. Instead, it has been discussed numerous times between the local government and the planning project team, accompanied by administrative personnel from both the township and county levels. Each of these parties has their own priorities and a certain amount of power in this process: While local government takes decisions and sets new questions on the agenda, administration controls whether the spatial plan conforms to higher-level regulation and has the power not to let it pass assessment; spatial planners draw the plans and formulate the documents. In doing so, they

are obligated not only to the local government's ideas and wishes but also to planning law and the professional discourse about good planning practice and state of the art.

This dissertation asks which objectives and ideal imaginations inform spatial planning. Therefore, it is central to this dissertation to avoid measuring planning documents and planning processes against pre-conceived, theoretically derived notions of the purposes and quality standards of spatial planning. I do not work with a definition of spatial planning which I derived from the literature. Instead, for the purposes of this research, I define spatial planning as *what spatial planners do*; the products of their work are, by definition, spatial plans (Alexander 2016; Mackrodt/ Lerch 2017).

There are nevertheless three characteristics of spatial planning which have informed my analysis: First, I understand spatial planning as political, bureaucratic or administrative, and technical at the same time. It is a political process insofar as it sets an agenda for local government, as it has to adjudicate between conflicting objectives or interests, and insofar as politicians are involved. Spatial planning is administrative in so far as there is an administrative apparatus behind it, implementing regulation and spatial plans and holding the legal and procedural knowledge necessary for spatial planning. Finally, spatial planning is a technical profession, comprising an academic discipline and experts working outside the government and providing expertise. Consequently, my empirical data on the planning process covers all three groups; I tell a story about how a spatial plan is made in interaction between these planners, administrative staff, and politicians.

The second characteristic of spatial planning, as already mentioned, is its orientation towards the future of a locality (Abram/ Weszkalnys in: Abram/ Weszkalnys (eds.) 2013). It therefore has to engage ideas and imaginations about what a promising future of this place could or should look like. Third, planning problems do not have any single best solution. Spatial planning is confronted with complex constellations and problems on the ground and with a complex array of priorities and demands. Each intervention, while addressing partial problems, will hurt some objectives (Rittel/ Webber 1973). Therefore, any decision in spatial planning is a decision for something, but also against something else, which might also have constituted a priority. With these characteristics, spatial planning processes provide rich empirical grounds to analyze such prioritization, and thus the objectives and ideal imaginations in a specific social and political context.

At the example of the Wanderlust general plan presented above, I ask questions such as: What lies behind the detailed conceptualization of protective measures for historical heritage and environment? Which ideas guided the discussions of how the central town should look like in future? Which principles informed the structure of roads, buildings, and green spaces? For such questions about priorities, an answer based on the Chinese state's political structure and on the incentivization built into this system can be given. I will explore these answers shortly. However, each of the decisions and arguments in the Wanderlust general plan's presentation could have been taken or made differently, with a focus on other factors on the

ground or on other objectives (political or otherwise). I argue that such decisions go beyond the explanatory scope of accounts which explain policy-making based on rational actors who move strategically in light of structures and incentives. In preparing the plan, problems, analyses, and finalized spatial concepts were discussed, changed, and sometimes dropped from the plan. These were in no way arbitrary decisions, but they were based on arguments and justifications while being contested by other positions. Because choices had to be made between interests or positions, it is always possible to criticize any spatial plan and any planning system for their blind spots and prioritizing some issues (or interests) over others.

This dissertation looks at who formulates spatial plans through which processes and in what kind of setup. It does *not* aim to propose, from an outsider's point of view, how planning could be done better, more efficiently, more impartially, or more sustainably. Instead, it is my ambition to identify and elucidate the sometimes contradictory, sometimes mutually supporting ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness of persons involved in the plans' formulation. This will be done based on an adaptation and reformulation of Boltanski and Thévenot' (1991/2006) 'Orders of Justification,' in which they identify socially shared *orders of worth.* Persons switch reflexively between *orders of worth* and refer to them in argumentation and justification.

My analysis draws on data from eight months of ethnographic research at New Town Company, a planning company based in Chengdu. I was allowed to accompany the planners working there through daily work and in planning projects for townships and villages around the Chengdu municipality's rural periphery. The analytical focus on *orders of worth* and the data gathered through ethnographic research make it possible for me to provide an innovative perspective on the process of formulating spatial policy and regulation. In addition, I demonstrate that a planning process plays out between the three groups of actors already identified: politicians, administrative staff, and professional planners. In looking at the Chinese local state, I shift the focus away from the political leadership and look at the administrative apparatus which prepares, structures, and implements political decisions. An investigation of the workings of the planning profession, which provides commodified consultancy and technical services to local governments while at the same time being committed to both professional standards and to the implementation of higher-level regulation, complements the account.

This analytical perspective on planning processes and the objectives and ideal imaginations held by persons involved in spatial planning allows me to tell a story about local policy-making, which builds upon but is radically different from existing narratives. These narratives, for example, illustrate how spatial planning is often made subservient to the exclusive growth-orientation of local governments (e.g., Bray in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; Bray in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Wu 2015; Yu 2014), they tell about cadres' pursuit of personal career aspirations in a strictly structured yet often flawed institutional setting (e.g., Teets/

Hurst in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015; Whiting 2001), or theorize the different modes of negotiations of local or organizational particular interests in the face of large-scale projects (e.g., Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Habich 2016; Lieberthal/ Lampton (eds.) 1992; Lieberthal/ Oksenberg 1988).[8] I shift the analytical perspective towards the process between political, administrative, and professional spheres and towards the objectives and ideal imaginations that inform a spatial plan. I thereby depict the process of how a political position is formulated and which the inputs are. I identify five *orders of worth*: professional standards, an effective state, a business logic, development and growth, as well as ecology and history; I demonstrate that orientations towards these ideals indeed inform spatial planning. Thereby, I aim to put forward a constructive criticism of the often implicit normativities in some contemporary research on spatial planning in China. Moreover, by looking at the interactions between politicians, administration, and professional planners, I demonstrate the boundaries of political negotiation and interest.

I develop this aspect further in two condensed literature reviews in the next section. There, I present the state of research on spatial planning in China and of research on local policy-making in China studies. This will be followed by a short outline of the research design and an overview of this dissertation's structure.

1.2   Contributions: Spatial planning in China and local policy-making in China

Spatial planning is a profession and an academic discipline; at the same time, it is a branch of public administration, and it is one field of spatial policy-making. This research looks specifically at spatial planning in small towns, i.e., at the local level in predominantly rural contexts. This dissertation aims to contribute to those two bodies of literature within China studies which tell the most about this empirical setting: First, there is a small but developing literature about the concepts, mechanisms, and logics of spatial planning in China. This discussion is closely related to urban studies on China, but not enough to map it as a subfield. My dissertation will contribute to this field by adding much empirical detail about the administrative processes and setups of spatial planning at the local level. By looking at ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness, I am also able to comment critically on many of its authors' implicit normative assumptions.

The second field of literature which offers an anchor point to this dissertation is the literature about local policy-making in China. This is a relatively wide field, and in contrast to urban studies or literature on spatial planning, rural areas are well-covered here. In terms of their research and empirics, three sub-fields of this literature are especially relevant for this dissertation: Research on institutions of local governance and of pursuing growth and

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[8] Notable exceptions are Hillmann (2014); Lora-Wainwright (2015); Heberer/ Schubert (2012).

development; the discourse on central-local relationships in the context of fiscal decentralization; as well as the insights into administrative structures and coordination processes generated under the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework*. These bodies of research provide detailed accounts of the logics, restrictions, and formative factors of local policy decision making. However, their narratives always tell of rational actors, pursuing their interest while restricted by regulations and institutions.

While my research would not have been possible without these giants' shoulders on which I stand, my account of ideals and social *common good*s contrasts these narratives of policy-making for the sake of particular interest. To this field, I also add a detailed account of how the work of administration complements politics and how a political position is formulated in interaction with external experts. To both bodies of literature, this dissertation adds an account of how policy decision making in the field of spatial planning in Sichuan is oriented towards five *orders of worth*: the craft of spatial planning, regulation and public provision, business relationships between government and professional planners, development and growth, and protection and preservation.

1.2.1   Literature on spatial planning

The existing literature on spatial planning in China is highly critical of both the profession and its role in policy-making. Even presentations of the overall planning system and its development over time add criticisms to their analytical contributions: Abramson (2006) looks at the historic development of urban planning in China, highlighting how, on the one hand, spatial planning continues to serve government legitimacy and is bound up in a strictly hierarchical system (Abramson 2006: 198-202). On the other hand, he shows how, in the context of marketization, spatial planning is a tool for the pursuit of expansive spatial and economic growth. This leads to large-scale relocations, demolitions, and inhospitable urban landscapes:

> *Designs that rely on traditional axiality, regularity, and monumental scale must erase more of the historic humanscaled environment than more flexible designs would, and they tend to make the new public spaces particularly unhospitable to pedestrians*
> *(Abramson 2006: 205).*

This criticism of spatial planning serving expansive growth at the cost of locally adapted plans which take the interests of both local stakeholders and environmental concerns into account finds ample echo in the literature. For example, Zhao's (2015) account of the 'evolution from imperial planning to socialist and, subsequently, to modern planning' (Zhao 2015: 283) tells the story of how transforming relationships between levels of government as well as between state and market have driven changes in the planning system. He identifies similar continuities as Abramson (2006), emphasizing how spatial planning served government legitimacy and stabilized the current socio-economic system instead of strengthening public

participation, addressing social inequalities, and countering the effects of unrestricted growth (Zhao 2015: 283-284). Yu (2014) looks at the current planning system instead of the evolution over time, showing that spatial planning today is guided by techno-rationalism, i.e., by a notion that there are 'objective' approaches to achieve good planning outcomes (Yu 2014: 52f). His core criticism of the planning system is that, due to the hierarchical structure, it does not accommodate the complexity of local challenges and needs (Yu 2014: 39); therefore, he calls for more devolution of both decision-making power to the local level, for a simplification of the prescribed procedures of spatial planning, and for strengthening access of a diversity of stakeholder groups to the planning process (Yu 2014: 273f).

Yin (2011) compares the contents, functions, and applications of the Chinese regulatory plan to the German *Bebauungsplan*. He finds that the former's institutional setup does not ensure sufficient consideration of public interest and realization of objectives set by higher government levels. His critique centers on a lack of resources in planning administration that precludes a more strategic outlook in planning, necessitating an ad-hoc determination of regulations for each construction project. Furthermore, he criticizes the limited capacity of the administration to enforce its prescriptions over political decisions. Huang's doctoral thesis (2012) analyzes planning education in a comparative perspective to the US. He finds that architectural techniques and skillsets predominately inform planning education in China. Ecology, social and economic sciences, as well as the communicative skills, so Huang's (2012) assessment, are underrepresented in the standardized curriculum, even though such knowledge would be expected in planning practice and would be necessary for critical self-assessment.

All these publications investigate the formal planning system, whether they focus on its development over time, on the formal structures and institutions of planning administration, or on the state's regulation of the planning profession. They criticize the top-down, highly regulated, and very design-oriented structure of the planning system, which, in these accounts, lead to one-size-fits-all solutions in spatial planning. The idea that these authors contrast (more or less implicitly) with this constellation is an approach to planning that starts from local stakeholders' interests and environmental considerations to compile a plan for a locally specific constellation of challenges.

Among the literature that looks more at the logics and objectives of spatial planning, Leaf (in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005) departs from a similar description of the Chinese planning system. He argues that this system reinforces a modernist understanding of spatial planning, which is

> *the idea that there is a relatively undifferentiated proper, or 'scientific,' means by which plans should be formulated. Although, in practice, plan-making will necessarily incorporate or respond*

to specific conditions of localities, the underlying premise is that such a systematic approach to
planning will largely be able to transcend local interests.
(Leaf in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005: 106f).[9]

Bray (in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013: 81-85) confirms this: Analyzing both interviews with practitioners and planning exhibitions, he shows that spatial planning is understood as a science and criticizes this thinking as similar to an earlier belief in high modernism. In the context of the current extension of planning practice to rural areas, this understanding of planning is often coupled with equating 'rural' to 'backwardness.' Backwardness, in turn, has to be remedied through urbanization, brought about by the planning of rural settlements. In another article, Bray (in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013: 54) shows that the logic underpinning this extension of urban planning to rural areas is found in the 'marriage' of the discourses of urban planning and rural development. In both articles, Bray criticizes a modernist belief in development and a generic approach to planning and points out that spatial planners are in constant tension with local governments over direction and measures for development.

Curien (2014) asks why, despite prominent policy slogans to the contrary, principles of environmental sustainability are not realized in urban planning in China. He comes to similar conclusions as Bray:

the construction of new Chinese cities starts with a generic, hyper-quantitative, and productivist
planning method, reflected as a pyramid structure over the whole country, and is embodied by
the accelerated construction of a hyper-functionalist urban machine
(Curien 2014, p. 30).

Both Bray (in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013) and Curien (2014) depict planning practitioners as caught in a constellation in which they cannot influence either working methods or objectives, even though they might be critical of current procedures and approaches. In an overview article of the socio-economic-political contexts, the ideological embeddedness, and the political purpose of spatial planning in China, Leaf/ Hou (2006) diagnose a 'loss of social purpose in its [Chinese spatial planning's, LM] normative vision' (Leaf/ Hou 2006: 574). This loss of purpose is, according to their analysis, underpinned by the need to create revenue in a marketized planning system and by conflicting interests that planners face.

In the same article, Leaf/ Hou (2006) identify numerous roles and purposes of spatial planning in China: Spatial planning has to support state legitimacy in the face of market

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[9] In contrast to most of the other authors cited here, Leaf (2005) starts from a critique of the silent assumptions in much research on planning: 'In line with the discipline's modernist genealogy, theories of planning are more often than not couched in terms of the interactions between three basic sectors of a liberal, democratic polity --- state, market, and civil society – with the idea that each has its own inherent logic and that planning practice, in one form or another, should seek to reconcile the differences between these. The starting point of my inquiry is that this often-unquestioned assumption about the role of planning creates interpretive blinders in looking at planning in sociopolitical formations that differ from this modern, liberal ideal of governance.' (Leaf 2005: 92)

liberalization (Leaf/ Hou 2006: 566-569). This often means that spatial planners have to combine the regulatory and restrictive character of a spatial plan with a pursuit of growth. The profession has also been commercialized and has become a 'profitable industry' (Leaf/ Hou 2006: 572), which means that striving for business success is also among the planners' work objectives.

The functions and roles of spatial planning are the central focus of much of Wu Fulong's work, most notably his 2015 book. Based on much empirical detail, he argues that both strategic and regulatory (statutory and non-statutory) plans, as well as even eco-city planning, are instrumentalized for expansive urban growth and to generate local government income. In this, spatial planning is a tool of local government to circumvent the central government's restrictions on growth or an argument to obtain resources and permits. With this narrative, Wu (2015) criticizes the profession of spatial planning for failing to provide independent and critical expertise on spatial development. In his account, spatial planning also does not fulfill the coordinative function it could have but instead serves local government's aspirations for expansion and growth of local government.

Feng (2016) conducted interviews with spatial planners about the roles and role expectations that planners fulfill vis-à-vis local governments. She portrays planning as torn between old ideals of serving local governments and newer role expectations of providing independent technical expertise and representing stakeholder interests. Professional autonomy is limited by state regulation. In her analysis, Feng (2016) is highly critical of those constellations in which planners find themselves unable to insert their professional knowledge as a corrective to policy formulation.

In my fieldwork, I found confirmation for each of these critiques, which address the setup of the planning system, the concepts and logics planners work with, and the roles that spatial planning takes on the policy process. Nevertheless, this array of criticisms also demonstrates the complexity of spatial planning: There are manifold requirements for spatial planning compounded by a complex constellation of interests on the ground. It appears near impossible to do justice to each voice in a given spatial planning project. Even if a planning team were to succeed with this task, new and valid criticisms could be brought up.

Among the cited works, only Feng (2016), Leaf (in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005), and Leaf/ Hou (2006) acknowledge the complexity of objectives in spatial planning. I develop this position further and provide an account of the complex constellation of objectives and societal values. For this, I use the conceptual frame of '*orders of worth.*' In contrast to most authors cited above, I do not measure planning and plans against externally defined standards of what spatial planning should be; instead, I depict the objectives and the *measures of worth* that people involved in a concrete planning project pursue. Many of these *orders of worth* resonate with the accounts in the literature, for example demonstrating that local economic growth is indeed an important objective. However, the business side of planning and a sub-

stantive concern for protecting the environment and local heritage are empirically not covered in the literature. I will show that these various objectives and *orders of worth* can contradict each other. Both the system of spatial planning and planners in their work therefore need to accommodate such complexity and tensions.

My research has been conducted mostly from spatial planners' perspective – how do they interact with the state, how is their work structured? With this, I offer new empirical lines of sight (Pachirat in: Schatz (ed.) 2009) into the field of spatial planning in China. My account of a planning process demonstrates that spatial planning takes place in an interaction between professional planners, administration, and politicians. I show that spatial planning both facilitates policy-making and regulates or restricts it. There are aspects and areas in which planning is applying higher-level regulation; then, again, there are aspects in which the local level decides, often consulted by professional planners. I also demonstrate that in the work of a professional planner, not only the skill of translating technical standards into a spatial layout matters, but also capabilities of pitching and sales, as well as socio-economic analysis and strategic consultancy.

1.2.2   Literature on the local state

Spatial planning is the responsibility of bodies of government. A spatial plan has legal consequences, and in the course of plan formulation, policy decisions need to be taken. Therefore, the literature on how local governments, especially in rural areas, take their decisions in light of higher-level policy is a crucial point of reference for this dissertation. Recent years have seen a lively academic discussion on how policy is made at the local level and how the relationships between local (county and below) and central (province and center) government levels are organized. However, due to its exclusive focus on structures of power and political strategy, this research fails to integrate a policy's intentions into the explanatory framework. Moreover, the contributions to this debate have largely disregarded the supportive organizational setup behind politics, i.e., bureaucracy or administration.

The blindness to the intentions of policies results from a prioritization of the architecture of power and control. The literature primarily deploys an institutionalist framing and conceptualizes political officials, explicitly or implicitly, as actors with bounded rationality striving for their interest, be it material gain, promotion, or benefits for their networks (Hillmann 2014) or for their strategic group (Heberer/ Schubert 2012; Schubert/ Ahlers 2011: 24-26).

The literature mapping the local state, i.e., county, township, and village government, is mainly interested in assessing whether the local state is to be characterized as developmental, entrepreneurial, or predatory (Hillmann 2014: 2-4). Among the classical studies in the field, Blecher/ Shue (1996) argue for the developmentalist position, based on a study of Shulu county government in Hebei province. The government there has striven to enable local enterprises to flourish (in contrast to counties in southeastern China, which may follow a

more entrepreneurial approach). Whiting (2001), from an economics perspective, looks at incentives and practices for industrial policy in three Eastern Chinese counties. She argues that the need to generate government revenue and the incentive structure for cadres induce local governments to foster and protect local industry to the detriment of the central state. Schubert/ Heberer (2015) argue that 'developmentalism,' as a concept that combines entrepreneurialism, clientelism, and corporatism, still aptly describes local government actions, even though the institutional setting has changed. From a more ethnographic perspective, Hillmann (2014) analyzes informal networks of patronage and paints a picture of local government that is both predatory and developmental at once (similarly Ang 2012a).

Urban studies (Wu/ Xu/ Yeh 2007; Gipouloux (ed.) 2015; Ye (ed.) 2018) tells the story of an entrepreneurial state engaging in land and real estate development and city branding. Here, two complementary dynamics are described: local governments competing against each other for economic growth, investment, and status. Inside the locality, collusion between local governments and market actors or market participation by governments. Both phenomena generate growth, wealth, but also severe side effects: corruption and clientelism, disparities, infringements on the rights and interests of the local population as well as exaggerated and redundant developments. The underlying reasons for these tendencies are seen in national political reforms, mainly in fiscal decentralization, which forces local governments to create revenue. Thus, local policy-making has been characterized as one of 'growth coalitions' (McGee, et al. 2007: 194), where business and local government colluded to generate local growth for mutual advantage; alternatively, as ''entrepreneurial' city' (Wu/ Xu/ Yeh 2007: 309), where local elites endeavored to market the location by city branding, by the collection of status symbols such as central business districts and high-rise buildings, but also by closely collaborating with local industry and real estate (and often enough owning the latter).

In these studies, the different types of government behavior are explained by a combination of tight local government finances due to fiscal decentralization, a striving for career and power in light of the incentives structured around the cadre evaluation system, and a competition between localities. Hillmann (2014) adds that the benefits sought might not be personal but for the respective person's network.

An additional strand of explanations for local government behavior focuses more on the relationships between central and local levels of government. In this context, a personnel management tool of the Communist Party, the cadre evaluation mechanisms, is described to play an essential role in orchestrating the actions of bodies of government:

> [T]he evaluation mechanism is more than just a technical incentive aimed at rational subordinates who are focused on future promotion and financial rewards. Evaluations are primarily intended to 'unify the thinking' of local cadres and, most importantly, the leading personnel, in terms of policy and hierarchy: individual success is connected with the creative and effective implementation of upper level guidelines and the internalization of a mode of communication that

links each administrative level by means of competitive 'impression management.' (Schubert/ Heberer 2015: 12-13)

Landry's (2011) depiction of the cadre evaluation system is framed as an answer to how the authoritarian state continues functioning given its high-level fiscal and economic decentralization. The system of cadre evaluation, in which success is measured based on a set of indicators regarding a variety of issue areas, and which determines over promotion or sometimes sanctioning of officials, prompts officials to balance local economic development with maintaining political stability. Schubert/ Ahlers (2011) look at relationships between local levels of government. Like Landry (2011), they ask why the Communist Party continues to be in power, and, more concretely, how the central state ensures policy implementation at the local level. Based on their case study of the policy of Constructing a New Socialist Countryside, they argue that political legitimacy is produced through effective policy implementation. Using an actor model of bounded rationality in which actors pursue the benefits of their respective strategic group, Schubert/ Ahlers (2011) identify three core processes that ensure effective implementation: Project selection through an application process one level above the administrative level which will implement the policy; earmarked funding for projects; and a policy evaluation process which has a high impact on the career chances of cadres.

Institutionalist research on local governments likewise asks about the interplay between local policy innovation and centripetal forces in an authoritarian state. Most notably, the edited volume by Teets/ Hurst (eds. 2015) looks at mechanisms of diffusion and local defiance against central policies as channels of policy change. The authors of this volume conceptualize decision-making not as a rational search for the optimal solution, but as a political process with varying outcomes. For example, Mei/ Pearson look at policy defiance as a rational behavior of local officials in light of the incentive structure and find that 'local officials tend to implement those tasks with high priority, high visibility and easy measurability' (Mei/ Pearson in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015: 30). Cai (in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015) looks at land exchanges between rural and urban areas and frames them in a language of rational-choice institutionalism and games: Central government sets rules for land use and tries to enforce them. At the same time, local governments find channels to navigate and to blunt those rules, and even formalize these channels. Local innovation is encouraged by the mechanism of policy experimentation, in which central government is a veto-player who allows local governments certain discretion but may abort experiments at any time. From the contributions, the editors of the volume develop a typology of policy diffusion between local governments and find that this experimentation leads to policy innovation:

[N]orms of decentralized policy-making and conflicting incentives for local officials have encouraged local-level policy experimentation across China's cities and villages to solve governance challenges (Teets/ Hurst in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015: 20).

This literature tells a story of policy innovation generated by local governments testing the boundaries of their discretion and the central state stepping in only when experiments seem to harm its core interest. In contrast, the literature on 'Fragmented Authoritarianism' looks at the conduits of authority which ensure compliance between levels of government (Lieberthal/ Oksenberg 1988; Lieberthal/ Lampton (eds.) 1992; Mertha 2005, 2009; Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017).[10] This literature starts with a depiction of the vertical and horizontal (条 and 块) lines of power, through which local bodies of government are held together. It disaggregates 'local government' into ministries or bureaus and their subordinate offices, each of which is subject to the authority of both its local government and the respective higher-level administration. The research then shows that, especially in projects that span the spheres of influence of several branches of administration or local governments, there are 'ruptures' or 'cleavages,' i.e., gaps and inconsistencies in the system. These ruptures have to be mitigated by negotiations and bargaining between organizational entities (Grünberg in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Lieberthal 2004). Research in this line of literature shows how decision making, for example in the context of infrastructure projects, is often indeterminate due to the necessity to bridge multiple actors, and that a political compromise often overrules the technically optimal solution (Gorm Hansen in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Habich 2016). The overall system is described as one in which integrating and decentralizing forces are in constant tension with only fragile equilibria (Mertha/ Brødsgaard in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017). In contrast to the literature referenced above, the Communist Party does not play a role in this research; instead of more personalized political control, the focus lies on structures and organizational setup. The literature on Fragmented Authoritarianism disaggregates local government into its organizational units and thereby integrates administrative bodies into the picture. However, these organizational units are interesting to Fragmented Authoritarianism mainly for their varying political positions and material interests. There is no account of the work and the roles which administration fulfills, nor of the internal structures of administrative bodies, nor of how administration connects to policy-making.

The strands of research presented here describe the entrepreneurial and developmentalist tendencies inside the local state as well as institutions connecting local officials with central government and the gaps between them. They explain many of the dynamics of local policy decision making and implementation of higher-level policies in spatial planning in rural Sichuan; moreover, my data supports these depictions of the system.

However, the picture of persons working in local government invariably, whether explicitly or implicitly, is that of individuals striving to gain power or wealth for themselves or for the group they belong to. Such pursuit is then channeled by formal and informal organizational or institutional setups, more or less successfully, in the directions that the central state sees fit. Thus, the basic conceptual perspective of such research seems to rule out

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[10] I work with this literature in more detail in chapter 5.

the possibility that policies and strategies may be meant as they are written and formulated to guide local development.[11]

My dissertation aims to address this gap: While I acknowledge that personal interest and network play a significant role in policy considerations, I will take the contents of spatial plans at their face value and ask which ideas and societal objectives these proposals and concepts are rooted in. My research, thereby, identifies and describes five different *orders of worth* which inform policy-making and demonstrates how they are referred to in policy discussions.

For this purpose, and this argument will be made in more detail in chapter 5, it is necessary to look beyond the political layer at the top of each body of government. Instead, I talk to those persons who formulate the policies, contribute technical knowledge, and compile the data and documents. In spatial planning, these persons are local government administrative staff and spatial planners working for planning companies and planning institutes. In the existing literature, there is by and large no differentiation between the different actors within one body of government, let alone within one office (exceptions: Ang 2010; Li 2016; Ang 2017). I demonstrate that administrative staff acts according to different logics and is on different career paths than politicians; their tasks in policy-making and policy implementation differ markedly. This account shows that the differentiation between politics and administration holds true also for the Chinese one-party state. By looking at the variety of actors within bodies of government, this dissertation also contributes, on the empirical side, a mapping of the structures and processes within the planning administration.

1.2.3 Relevance of *Sociology of Conventions* to China studies

The bodies of literature in China studies that I reviewed for this research did not have a language or a conceptualization for idealistic, society-oriented objectives in policy-making. Spatial planning, however, is heavily influenced by the ideal imaginations and patterns of evaluation held by those who are involved in the formulation of the plan. The political structure, political priorities, personal strategic or material interests, a complex regulatory architecture, and a professional routine also influence a spatial plan. Nevertheless, none of these aspects sufficiently explains why the persons involved in a planning process pick exactly these problems and why they choose exactly those approaches to address these problems.

In order to identify and describe a variety of ideal imaginations in spatial planning, I have therefore turned to *Sociology of Conventions* (Boltanski/ Thévenot 1991/2006), which I adapted to my research methodology and to local administration in China with the use of the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012). I utilize this framework as a model for explaining political and administrative decision-making, which can be

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[11] Many of the publications cited briefly allude to this possibility in acknowledging that their interlocutors were also genuinely interested in bringing development to the locality, while, at the same time, keeping their own interest in mind, e.g., Hillmann (2014); Lora-Wainwright (2015); Curien (2014).

complex even under the conditions of an authoritarian state. The theory works as a useful lens to look at discussions about political decisions without reducing different positions to interest. Using this model, I am able to explain differences of opinion with the complexity of objectives and attributions of worthiness at play.

I thereby demonstrate that a belief in the relevance of professional knowledge and skill ('planning as a profession') is an important influence of policy-making. Such expertise is usually integrated into the policy process in the form of contracts between clients (local governments) and consultants/ service providers ('planning as a business'). Planning is relevant to the state because it facilitates control, standardization, and effective distribution of public services over the territory ('planning as regulation and public provision'), thus enabling the state to fulfill its functions. As to the regulatory and strategic contents of plans, 'development and growth' and 'ecology and civilization' subsume many of the imaginations about the future of the respective locality.

Other theories from social sciences would have provided a structure for identifying and describing multiple value orientations, too. However, the framework of *orders of worth* with its analytical focus on argumentation and evaluation provides an especially practical and applicable perspective. In policy-making in China, the sources in ideology and knowledge that inform policy-making are often difficult to trace. This framework enables me to identify the ideals and objectives in the situation instead of either philosophical thought, belief, or ideology. Thus, my conceptualization of *orders of worth* provides me with a pragmatic and well-applicable framework to identify and describe a variety of attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations, as they present themselves within the scope of my data. For China studies, this theoretical framework offers one way of explaining social, political, or cultural phenomena with factors outside the political realm.

1.3   Research design

I have criticized the literature on spatial planning in China for more or less implicitly applying a preconceived idea of the objectives and objects of spatial planning. My criticism of the literature on the local state in China revolves around its focus on pursuing personal or group-related interest at the expense of an engagement with the substantive contents of policy and strategy. Spatial planning involves decision making in light of complex constellations of objectives and ideas; in addition, three groups of actors, politicians, administrative staff, and professional planners, come together in the process of plan-making. I argue that the perspective of multiple, sometimes contradictory ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness matter in local policy-making and that a complex constellation of objectives informs spatial planning for small towns in Sichuan.

Therefore, the research question of this dissertation is which ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness inform spatial planning in rural Sichuan. This dissertation does two things: It 1) provides a close description of the processes and the organizational setup

of spatial planning; and it 2) analytically identifies and characterizes five *orders of worth*. In two empirical chapters, I describe how spatial plans for small towns in Sichuan are made in the interaction between spatial planners, politicians, and administration. This exploration of the object of research alternates with analytical interludes in which I look at the material from the perspective of *orders of worth*. My analysis draws on data collected in eight months of ethnographic research at a planning company in Chengdu through the lens of an adaptation of Boltanski/ Thévenot's (1991/2006) *Orders of Justification.*

This theory formulates a set of different *polities/ common worlds*,[12] each consisting of 1) a basic analogy through which reality can be described, 2) an ideal to which society should develop, and 3) values, goals, and standards for individual behavior. In a given situation, these *polities/ common worlds* may or may not point into similar directions and to similar actions; each *polity/ common world* offers its own way of reducing complexity. Persons have the choice to simply adhere to the customary order in a situation or reflexively select another order to interpret the situation. The perspective from another *order of worth* allows a critical assessment of how oneself or other persons are acting in any given situation; it may produce a critique of what is going on. Reflexivity understood in this way posits that persons do not blindly follow established pathways; it also excludes the possibility of any objectively 'right' or 'wrong' interpretation or action.

Central methodological tenets of the theory are, first, that the researcher's position is equally oriented towards *polities/ common worlds* as are the positions of any interlocutor. Thus the researcher's opinion, assessment, or evaluation of any given situation is no more true or worthy than other persons' views. Second, Boltanski/ Thévenot (1991/2006) insist on a naïve reading of the data: The analytical focus is on the argumentative legitimation of any position. A legitimation can only be effective if it refers to commonly accepted values. Any statement can therefore be taken at face value instead of looking for ulterior motives.

Boltanski/ Thévenot (1991/2006) have formulated 'On Justification' as a theory of critique, aiming to support analysis of exceptional constellations in which critique is formulated. However, I only use the basic structure of this theory and identify the *orders of worth* in my field of research from my data. As posited by Boltanski/ Thévenot (1991/2006), every person in my field of research has an idea about these *orders of worth* and accepts their general validity. From my interlocutors' formulations of their respective position, I have been able to identify and describe the five *orders of worth* which stand at the core of this dissertation. This dissertation is titled *multiple orders of worth*: I look at spatial planning as a negotiation and navigation of a variety of objectives and *measures of worth* which may contradict each other:

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[12] B&Th differentiate conceptually between *polity* and *common world*, with the former being more abstract and derived from philosophical works; the latter is the more concrete description base on present-day data. This conceptual differentiation does not bring any added value to my own analytical approach, therefore I follow Thévenot/ Moody/ Lafaye (2000) and use the denomination '*order of worth*' as a term that encompasses *polities* and *common worlds*.

- Planning as a craft: Within the planning profession, not only technical knowledge but also analytical skill and effective consultation of policy-making are valued highly.

- Planning as regulation and public provision: Spatial planning is a task of the state with the objective of making the territory readable and of effectively distributing infrastructures and public services.

- Planning as a business: The fact that spatial planning is commissioned to external agencies provides efficiency and capacity to the state as well as a certain independence to professional planners.

- Planning for development and growth: Spatial planning is to contribute to local development and economic growth, bringing about conspicuous wealth for the locality.

- Planning for ecology and civilization: By regulating construction and through its aesthetic capacities, spatial planning contributes to the protection of the environment and preservation of heritage, thereby making localities liveable.

I have chosen to label those systems of objectives, values, rationalities, and thinking patterns as *orders of worth* since *worth* denotes a measure of good and not-so-good.[13] The term *order* expresses very well three aspects of what I want to see in the concept. First, the term includes the notion of 'ordering,' of ranking phenomena according to an ascribed worth. 'Ordering' implies explaining the world, reducing complexity, and giving one consistent account of a situation. Second, as in 'in order' or lawfulness, there is the normative element that describes how the world *should* be: an order always includes rules for attaining worthiness; thus, *orders of worth* include values and objectives for individuals, groups, and society. Third, in contrast to terms like 'logic' or 'rationality' (Rydin 2003; Flyvbjerg 1998), *order of worth* does not exclusively put the rational thinking into the foreground but acknowledges a sense of what is right or wrong, without making it a determining unconscious force.

During my fieldwork, I found planning practice – its set-up, its processes, the engagement of regulation – to require empirical exploration still. For this reason, this dissertation switches between elaborations of the empirical objects of research, each with their separate conceptual framing and analytical interludes. In the latter, I revisit the same material through the lens of *orders of worth.* As to the objects of research, since a spatial plan is formulated in collaboration and exchange between local government and professional planners, it is necessary to consider both sides in order to identify the *orders of worth* relevant for planning. I look at both sides in turn. First, on the side of government and administration, I depict regulation, the administrative structure, the processes, and the different groups of persons in this system. Second, I describe the set-up in which spatial planners work on the side of the planning profession. Both sets of data are necessary to understand what spatial planning is about and which ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness are expressed in a plan.

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[13] Here, 'worth' would be translated into German as 'Wertigkeit' (and '*orders of worth*' as 'Wertigkeitsordnungen'); it is important to note that I am not drawing directly on the concept of values ('Werte') as it has been developed in action theory.

1.4   Structure of this dissertation

This dissertation's main body starts with a closer look at the state of knowledge as it presents itself in China studies research connected to spatial policy-making in rural contexts. This background chapter also provides the reader with an overview of the general setting in which this research takes place; therefore, it revisits the literatures on small towns, the local state, urban-rural connections in China, and spatial planning. In contrast to the literature reviews presented above, the background chapter focusses not on arguments, but on the empirical contents in the literature.

Chapter 3 develops the theoretical framework, starting from an exploration of alternative theoretical lenses in order to justify my choice of theory. I then present Boltanski/ Thévenot's (1991/2006) framework in detail, critically discussing the theory's applicability to my research, before reframing it for my purposes. Chapter 4 on methods first gives an overview of my fieldwork and the body of data. I then discuss my own positionality and present the procedure of data analysis.

This dissertation does two things: in two empirical chapters (chapters 5 and 7), I map the planning system in rural Sichuan. Alternating with these empirical chapters are analytical interludes (chapters 6 and 8), in which I revisit the same section of data as in the preceding empirical chapter, now analyzing the material through the lens of *orders of worth*. Here, I empirically substantiate the *orders of worth*, first for the administrative set-up of spatial planning and second, from the planning profession's perspective. Each analytical interlude has a strictly theoretically derived and rigidly parallel structure, moving through the *orders of worth* in the sequence of:

- Spatial planning as a craft
- Spatial planning as regulation and public provision
- Spatial planning as a business
- Spatial planning for development and growth
- Spatial planning for ecology and civilization

Each of these sections, in itself, is structured by the descriptive categories developed in chapter 3. Each section thus first presents the general ideal imagination (*common good*) of the respective *order of worth*, then how good and bad are measured in this order (*measure of worth*) and which *tools and mechanisms* are employed to bring about a good result. This is followed by a description of how the status of persons is assessed (*state of worth*) and an inventory of what sorts of situations or constellations are deemed to be bad (*fall from grace*).

In these analytical interludes, I draw upon both accounts from the respective empirical chapter and on new data. Thus, the analytical interludes are not to be read as interim conclusions of the previous chapters but as *independent analyses building upon* the information given in preceding chapters.

To guide my account of the planning system and the planning profession, the two empirical chapters (chapters 5 and 7) between the interludes each have their own theoretical framing. Through these lenses, they map the areas to be analyzed in the following interlude. The first empirical chapter presents the administrative structures in which planning takes place: the process of making the general plan for Wanderlust township, as seen from the perspective of administration and government, the legal framework, the administrative hierarchies, the work that is done in the planning bureau and the interconnections to other issue areas and levels of policy-making. This empirical chapter is based on the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* (FAF) as conceptual framing. The analytical interlude that follows this empirical chapter fills the five *orders of worth* from the local state's point of view.

The second empirical chapter presents the contexts in which planners do their jobs, framed by two theories on the roles of spatial planners (Feng 2016) and architects' roles (Xie, Tian 2010). It first discusses my use of the term 'profession' for spatial planning, before moving through the field from macro to micro: from the commercialization of spatial planning through the constellations in which spatial planners work and the bodies of knowledge they engage. Then, various occupational profiles of spatial planners are presented before I reformulate the roles which spatial planners take. This is followed by another analytical interlude on *orders of worth*, which focuses on spatial planners' experience.

2 Background: Small towns, urbanization, and spatial planning in China

Spatial planning in China is a branch of the administrative system, and it is one of the policy areas of formulating the lines of development for any given territory. While formerly, only cities would formulate spatial plans, with the implementation of the new planning law in 2008 (NPC 2007), rural areas, too, have to use spatial plans as the legal basis for any construction activity. A hierarchy of spatial plans from the national level down to the local community safeguards the consistency of the plans of any single government territory.

The extension of spatial planning to rural areas has gained additional traction with the efforts to lower the boundaries between rural and urban areas, which are still manifest. These boundaries materialize not only in marked disparities of wealth and government provision but also in different systems of land-ownership, mode of government, and standards of social infrastructure, as well as robust controls on rural-urban migration. The New Urbanization Plan of the year 2014 (NDRC 2014) formulates an encompassing policy program to soften the boundaries in the so-called two-tier structure (二元结构).

Sichuan province, and within it Chengdu municipality, is the location of some of the most densely populated rural areas in China. Wanderlust township is one of those areas. The soil is fertile in these areas of Sichuan province. However, the dense population, as well as inefficient patterns of construction and land use leave the rural population comparatively poor. In order to identify approaches and best practices to address this constellation of issues, Chengdu municipality has become a model region for rural-urban integration (城乡一体化) already in the year 2007 (Tu/ Zuo 2011). Since that time, Chengdu municipality has implemented experimental policy approaches and model developments to bring development to the rural areas and to lower the boundary between urban and rural areas.

The national New Urbanization Plan has built on experiences such as these. Now, the policy objectives formulated in this strategy form one of the most important backdrops to spatial planners' work.

This chapter lays out what we know about the contexts in which spatial planning at New Town Company and in Wanderlust township took place. To this end, I first characterize small towns, which constitute the spatial context for which the plans in this study were made, as straddling the boundary between urban and rural spheres. From there, I explain how the governments of small towns, positioned at the lower end of the administrative hierarchy, sound out spaces for discretionary policy-making. Towns are positioned at the intersection between urban and rural spheres. Both the structural barriers between urban and rural areas and populations substantially impact their position and development outlook. The same is true for current urbanization policy, which addresses the boundary between urban and rural and constitutes an important – albeit implicit – policy context for spatial planning in rural areas. I then present the state of knowledge on the system and history of

spatial planning in China. This chapter first and foremost provides information on central policy and discursive contexts in which my research is situated. The literature reviews, in which I map the state of the scientific narrative and my contribution to it, can be found in chapter 1.2.

2.1 Small towns in China

In this dissertation, I specifically look at spatial planning in and for small towns. In many respects, small towns have a bit of both sides of the rural-urban dichotomy in China (Wu/ Fang 2009; Ji 2012; Li 2013). Both in everyday conversation and in research, towns are usually treated as part of the rural sphere; however, residents of even the smallest towns have always counted as non-agricultural population. This position at the interface between urban and rural presented a challenge to the planners I worked with in my research: They had only limited analytical concepts and imaginations of small towns to base their work on. They also expressly aimed to give small towns a character different from both city and village. Spatial planning is a tool to define a locality's future, based on its status quo, its potentials, opportunities, as well as limitations. In this section, I demonstrate that the definition of 'town' in Chinese is all but clear. Conceptually for planners and in the discussion on regional development in China, the manifold development pathways present a central challenge. To get a sense of the ideal imaginations about small towns my counterparts were working with, it necessary to take a closer look at the knowledge and discourses about small towns in China.

Fei Xiaotong (Fei 1986; Gransow 1992: 163-176; Fei in: Guldin (ed.) 1992) can be regarded as the founder of research into towns in China, establishing two critical insights: 1) towns and their (rural) surroundings are inextricably linked, economically, socially, in terms of infrastructure and public services. The economic basis of towns is the trade with the rural population, providing them with public services and transport, health care, and administrative services. At the same time, people from the surrounding areas find additional income opportunities and linkages to wider networks here. Thus, small cities and towns, on the one hand, and rural areas, on the other hand, cannot be developed isolatedly from each other. 2) There are many different regional patterns of economic networks and economic relationships between the countryside, towns, and cities at higher levels of the system. The shape of the specific configuration depends, among other factors, on regional traditions and histories and on the skills and social networks present. Those patterns have an immense influence on individual towns' concrete functions and roles (this is also supported by Guldin (ed.) 1997). Additionally, Fei always argued for a national spatial strategy of development that concentrated on establishing and supporting a comprehensive network of towns and small cities instead of the development strategies in many other areas in the world that focused upon big agglomerations.

A town is defined not by the size of its population, but by administrative decision. Local governments' seats historically have the status of towns; also, localities with a history as

trade posts or seats of administration are often designated as towns, as are local economic centers. Town's humble administrative status is reflected in their physical condition: close to the bottom of the administrative system, they are left with small land quotas and little capital for investment. Accordingly, infrastructure is often weak. Quality of education and health care in towns is regarded as lagging far behind that of cities. Moreover, employment opportunities for well-educated people are usually concentrated around the political centers, i.e., in the large cities.

Overview of terminology on towns		
Term	**translation**	**Comment**
Administrative terminology		
建制镇	Statutory town	Town in a rural area without administrative functions, administered by township government
乡镇	Townships	General term for townships of both urban (镇) and rural (乡) status
镇域	Area of the central town of a township	Term used in planning to designate the urban area around the government seat of a township
县城 or 县镇	County seat	Central town and seat of government in a county
县级市	Municipality at county level	County declared city
Terminology in the literature and in every-day use		
小城镇	Small cities and towns	Most common term, compound of 城市 (city) and 镇 (town)
镇	Compound for town, usually combined, e.g., 集镇、城镇、镇域	In contrast to 城市, both compounds of which are connotated specifically with city; also the term for township with urban status
集镇	Town	Small rural, non-agricultural settlements, usually used for towns which are not designated as statutory towns.

Table 1: Terminology for 'town'
Source: author's compilation

Nevertheless, the literature on planning and spatial development very frequently uses the terms 小城镇 (town) and 中小城镇 (small and medium-sized cities and towns). Wu/ Liu

(2014: 51) use the term 'small and medium-sized cities' (中小城市) to designate settlements with a population between 0.2 Mio and 0.5 Mio as well as smaller seats of municipal or county governments. They use the term 'town' only for settlements designated by the state as urban and have a population below 0.2 Mio.

Starting from the observation that there is no common definition or conceptualization of the term 小城镇 (town), Fang (1985) devotes an entire article explore its meaning: He shows that towns are variously defined as either being the lowest level of the urban system or as rural centers, thus belonging either to the urban or rural sphere (Fang 1985: 209) and goes on to summarize the discussions about the status and role of towns in China's modernization, development, and urbanization. At the time, only a few years into the process of Reform and Opening, Fang shows there to have been a multitude of ideas about the spatial form of development.

A comparative reading of three handbooks on spatial planning for small towns (for 小城镇) also demonstrates that there is no clear definition of the term, even less a numerical one (Melcher 2017): [14] The three handbooks by Li (2014), by Luo/Zhang/Bo (Luo/ Zhang/ Bo 2012), as well as by Tang et al. (2012) define towns on the one hand in functional terms, as the connection between countryside and urban areas; they are the top level of the rural system and the bottom level of the urban system (村之头、诚之毛, Tang, et al. 2012: 26; Li 2014: 1). According to the authors, the position at the top of the rural sphere materializes in the fact that they are the political, social, and cultural centers of rural areas. They bring urban services like communication and trade infrastructure and industrial jobs within reachable distance for rural residents. In this regard, towns are usually characterized as comprising the full set of urban functions despite their small size (Li 2014: 3-4; Luo/ Zhang/ Bo 2012: 11; Tang, et al. 2012: 24, 27). On the other hand, the authors also cite the already cited definition by administrative rank, including county seats (县城), the seats of township governments (xiangzhen 乡镇), other statutory towns (jianzhizhen 建制镇), and market towns (jizhen 集镇).

The three books emphasize that towns are closely interconnected with their regions and diverse in their histories and specializations. Various categorizations of towns are offered: Tang, et al. (2012) base their entire presentation and analysis on a differentiation between various organizational models of economic growth: the foreign investment based industrialization in the Zhuhai area, the development of locally-based small industries in the Sunan region, and the absence of a clear model in the Bohai region. The same authors also provide a whole range of other options of categorization of towns, most notably: by physical geographical location, by their functional specialization (e.g., comprehensive towns, social services, transport nodes, economic and industrial centers, etc.) or by their position in the re-

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[14] Much of this passage is taken from an analysis of handbooks on small towns I have previously published in the journal China Perspectives, cf. Melcher (2017, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7170).

gional context, i.e., whether they are satellites to large cities, parts of town clusters and urbanized areas or centers of agricultural areas. Li (2014: 4ff) sees the towns' status within the regional context as defining their 'character' (xingzhi 性质). He however emphasizes that character is not necessarily a given but has to be analyzed, determined, and realized through planning.

Luo/ Zhang/ Bo (2012: 11f) demonstrate the diversity of economic structures by providing a detailed economic typology of towns. The categories of primary income sources start with providing administrative functions for surrounding areas, through specialization in agricultural industry or trade, up to historical and cultural towns. Apart from illustrating that there is a much less clear conceptualization of core characteristics, this also shows how manifold the category of 'town' is. As a common baseline, towns can be thought of as interdependent with and bound to their regional surroundings (e.g., Fei 1986; Gao/ Xing/ Wang 2004; Tang 2009). They supply services to these surroundings and live economically both from these services for the countryside as well as from their connections to neighboring cities.

For a long time, efforts to formulate development concepts for towns have remained shallow (Xu/ Zhang 2004). Especially the attention of spatial planners concentrated on central urban areas since growth, construction, and investments have been most dynamic there and they had the most political attention. The common storyline narrates that during the Maoist era, towns were rather drab places. The reason for this was that their previous main functions as trading and administrative centers were performed by other government bodies (Kirkby/ Bradbury/ Shen 2000; Siu in: Faure (ed.) 2002; Gao/ Xing/ Wang 2004). During the 1980s, in the era of rural industrialization, towns were seen as taking off and pulling the economy along and bringing about a transformation of rural lifestyles (Guldin (ed.) 1992). In contrast, in the 1990s and 2000s, economic strategy relied on rapidly modernizing and growing cities. The spatial development strategy of the 2000s, which put the emphasis on metropolitan growth, in combination with their low administrative status, has left small towns in China in a tight spot: Resources necessary for policy-making, such as expertise, manpower, or finances, are scarce. Only in recent years has attention shifted back, first to rural development and to the role small urban centers can play for rural development (World Bank 2013; Hillmann in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Hong 2014; Wu/ Liu 2014).

A quick search of Chinese language scientific databases for the terms '小城镇' (small cities and towns) and '中小城镇' (medium and small cities and towns) uncovers a vivid stream of publications, dealing with the questions of what towns are. Such publications for example ask which role do towns play economically and in terms of provision of public services; and what role they should be assigned in China's urbanization (Yang 2007; Wang, et al. 2010; Han/ Xia 2013; Hong 2014). In most articles, the common message is that towns have a great potential to extend development and economic growth to rural areas. They could easily take population pressure and environmental pressure off the big agglomerations

if they received only more support from higher government levels. At the same time, these publications diagnose the problems of small towns in a similar way: Towns lack resources, mainly in terms of finances, but also of infrastructure. Planning, management, and administration show deficits because local governments do not have the resources to employ qualified staff and because approaches to management and development concepts for this kind of settlements are lacking. There are calls for theorizing management and development of towns and small cities (e.g., Ning/ Li 2014).

This lack of a clear definition of the category 'town,' the discussion about the role that towns have for spatial development, and the ongoing search for diagnoses and remedies for small towns' problems have formed a central background for my research. My interlocutors knew on a practical level that the planning concepts and spatial arrangements neither of big cities like Chengdu nor those used for the surrounding villages would be productive for Wanderlust town. However, there was much discussion about which concepts, scales, and spatial forms would be appropriate for such a town. I will not directly address the concepts of small towns with which the planners operate. Nevertheless, since I ask about ideals, imaginations, and *orders of worth*, the framing of the object of planning, the town, its characteristics, and its development options, will come up time and again.

2.2   Levels of government and local politics

The relationships between government levels in China are usually characterized by a tension between top-down control and policy discretion of lower levels. In this interaction, lower levels of government are described as motivated by the need to secure resources and economic growth and political leadership's career aspirations. The Chinese state below the central national government consists of four levels of government: Provinces and directly administered cities (省 and 直辖市); prefectures and municipalities (地区 and 市); counties or cities at county level (县 or 县级市); and townships or towns at township level (乡 or 镇).[15] At each of these levels of government, a full governmental body operates with distinct ministries or offices. Below the township level, villages (村) and urban communities (社区) form an additional government level that is more oriented towards self-organization. The relationships between the respective levels of government form a cascade of direct control (Donaldson in: Donaldson (ed.) 2016), with the lower levels are responsible for implementing (or formulating more concretely) the policies of the levels higher up in the hierarchy. Implementation and consequences of this cascade of direct control are described in more detail in my account of the planning administration in chapter 5.

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[15] For each of these levels and the levels below, autonomous variants of the respective administrative constitution also exist. These are applicable for areas with a (historically) high percentage of population which has been labelled as ethnic minorities. Since this is not applicable to the present research, these variants are not listed here.

In addition, administrative entities can be 'directly controlled' by the higher level. This signifies a slight elevation of formal status vis-á-vis other entities of the same level.

Over the last forty years, this structure has undergone various reforms. Most notable among those is the fiscal decentralization of the year 1994, motivated by the need to alleviate a fiscal crisis at the national level (Wu 2015: 80; Lieberthal 2004: 153f; Abramson 2006: 198). For this purpose, the distribution of fiscal revenues was reformed, giving each territorial entity much more direct control over their income. Local governments were also afforded the responsibility of providing infrastructure and social services.

The Chinese state is modeled mainly on the socialist one-party state. The structure of the Chinese Communist Party runs mostly parallel to the architecture of the state. Each state organization contains a Party office; for each local government, there is a Party branch. The local Party secretary ranks higher than the respective head of government, who is also the head of the administration. Thus, each government is subject to control by the Communist Party. However, in some smaller localities, the positions of Party secretary and head of government may be in the same person's hands.

Research into lower government levels, especially in rural areas, argues that at the local level – county and below – population gets into direct contact with government bodies and legitimacy is created. It is here where concrete policy-making and implementation take place (e.g., Heberer/ Schubert 2012: 230f; Schubert 2014: 595). One central concern of this literature is the dynamics between the central and local governments (classical publications: Blecher/ Shue 1996; Oi 1999; Whiting 2001): To what degree do local governments exert discretion, i.e., make their own policy decisions? To what degree do they follow the lines prescribed by the national government and the central Party organizations? These contradicting dynamics are both deemed necessary: Only discretion makes it possible to formulate policy adapted to local needs and to the resources that can be mobilized. At the same time, discipline vis-à-vis central prescriptions holds the country together and is seen to act as a safeguard against corruption and misuse of power (case studies on this question are covered in the volume edited by Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015).

Local governments thus have some choice in how they implement national policy. The anthology edited by Teets and Hurst (2015) argues that the transmissions of policies can be understood in terms of policy diffusion rather than coercion or mechanical implementation of central government directives. Local governments have discretion in how they interpret higher-level policy to formulate measures of implementation then. They also choose among the many requirements the ones to focus on. Thereby, the local level can control its own policy agendas. Moreover, there is considerable leeway even to defy central government's directives. Such choices are, of course, not only informed by what is perceived as the interest of the locality and the local population but also by the self-interest of officials and their networks (Hillmann 2014).

Among the core mechanisms promoting policy discipline, the incentive and evaluation system for cadres (Landry 2011; Guo 2020) promotes dedication and commitment to eco-

nomic growth and to central government policy requirements. Their superiors grade offi-cials' work over a wide range of policy issues; careers depend on such evaluations. Thus, there is a strong motivation to stick to the larger political lines and to implement precisely those policies which currently have the highest priorities. At the same time, economic growth and development are rewarded in these evaluations and, local policy experimenta-tion is encouraged within designated lines. The policy innovation generated in the course of such local experimentation is frequently seen as one of the principal guarantees of govern-ment stability and legitimacy (e.g., Heilmann in: Heilmann/ Perry (eds.) 2011).[16]

The fact that governments at the county level and below need to produce their own revenues also sparks dynamics of policy innovation and local discretionary decision making (Xu 2011; Kung/ Xu/ Zhou in: Kennedy/ Stiglitz (eds.) 2013; Lin/ Chen in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015: 97). Thus, many actions and decisions of local governments are motivated by the need to generate local revenues. In the 1980s and 1990s, such revenue was generated by establish-ing and protecting local (collective) industries or enterprises. Since the early 2000s, a signif-icant share of these revenues comes from the sale of land-use rights and from real estate projects run by government-owned enterprises (Kung/ Xu/ Zhou in: Kennedy/ Stiglitz (eds.) 2013; Lora-Wainwright in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015). Hillmann (2014: 120-150) furthermore describes how local governments resort to procuring project funding. This need to generate revenue is linked to the incentive and evaluation system mentioned above because the local government needs the means for projects to achieve policy objectives or for investments that lead to further economic growth (on the economic thinking and role of local governments: Ang 2012b). Meyer-Clement (2016) also demonstrates that the degree of policy discretion a local government has depends on the broader political context in the region; she argues that this degree of policy discretion has a marked influence on development pathways and policy outcomes.

My research has taken place mainly at the county- and township levels. Discretion and control in local policy-making mattered. However, they played out differently than the re-search cited above recounts: For my interlocutors from the planning profession, there was a sharp line between standards and regulations that have to be implemented and areas (terri-torial or topical) in which local decision making is possible.[17] I furthermore add to the liter-ature a systematic differentiation between politicians, administrative staff of various branches of administration, and external professionals, thereby disaggregating the 'local government.' I demonstrate that in the case of spatial planning, policies and decisions often

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[16] The connection between the success of policy and personal evaluation has been shown to have led adminis-trative areas into a fierce competition between each other over performance indicators (e.g., Wang/ Kee/ Gao in: Wang/ Kee/ Gao 2014: 7). In the literature on spatial planning, the outcomes are described as 'blind' (盲目) in-vestments, construction, or land conversion, which aim at artificially raising economic indicators (e.g., Zheng 2013).

[17] This is presented in detail in chapter 5.

result from prolonged, regulated processes with external support. My depiction of such processes demonstrates one pathway in which local government comes to its decisions.

2.3   Urban-rural separation

Many aspects of China's reality today are shaped by the fact that land and population are divided into the two categories of urban and rural, which are governed by very different systems. Land-use rights for urban and rural land still differ, as do mechanisms of social security. Provision with social infrastructures such as schools and hospitals is vastly better in large cities than in the countryside; access depends on the registered place of residence. There still exist substantial barriers to permanent migration from rural to urban sites of residence.

This separation between the urban and the rural has been widely researched since it is formative for many social, spatial, and economic phenomena in present-day China: migrants from rural areas to the city form a social substratum of inexpensive labor with little formalized rights; it is on land under rural land-ownership within cities or in their direct vicinity, that these migrants find residence; villages, especially in remote areas, sometimes are only populated by elderly people and children. The history of this separation and its effects on urbanization and economic growth are described by Chan/ Wei (2019) and by contributions in Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) (2014). Oakes (2019) demonstrates the ideological relevance of this separation until today.

At the prefecture and municipal level and below, administrative entities of one level are differentiated between rural and urban types: Prefecture (地区) is a rural administrative entity and municipality (市) is its urban equivalent; county (县) is rural, city at county level (县级市) is urban; and so on. During the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a wave of conversions of administrative entities from a rural status to an urban status; for example, barely any rural counties (县) exist anymore in Chengdu municipality. With the conversion to an urban area, administrative entities achieved, on the material side, more leeway in their industrial policy and the conversion of land from rural to urban land-use rights. Symbolically, the urban has a higher status than the rural; this is also true for administrative entities (Donaldson in: Donaldson (ed.) 2016: 116). The possibility for conversion of status was given to any administrative entity which fulfilled a number of statistical indicators, such as the ratio of population working in non-agricultural occupations, the percentage of GDP generated in the third sector (service industries), or the availability of tap water (Gao/ Xing/ Wang 2004: 15-17).

In my fieldwork area, Chengdu has the status of an urban municipality (市), Reverence county has the status of a city at county level (县级市), and Wanderlust is a township (镇). However, that they have urban status does not preclude that large parts of Reverence county and Wanderlust township as a whole are not mostly agricultural and rural in character. In the planning process, Wanderlust township was treated as a distinctly poor and rural area.

Each of these administrative areas comprises an urban core, i.e., Chengdu city, Reverence city, and Wanderlust central town. These urban cores are surrounded by rural areas that also belong to the administrative area, yet with a more independent local government than the sub-areas of the area's urban core. Thus, Reverence county is an administrative entity on Chengdu municipality, just as is, for example, Jinniu district, one of the core urban districts of Chengdu city. However, in spatial planning, Chengdu municipal government directly makes the spatial plans for Jinniu district, while Reverence county formulates its own general plan. The municipal government examines this plan and approves it. The same holds for Wanderlust township within Reverence county and again for the formulation of the masterplan for Wanderlust township: The neighborhood offices and urban communities (街道办事处 and 社区) in the urban core were not involved in plan-making. However, when in a subsequent step of the Wanderlust project plans for rural settlements were made, village governments had a say.

Notwithstanding this apparently greater political autonomy of rural administrative areas, the designation as 'rural' in Sichuan is generally connected to a lower social status; on a personal level, this often implies much more limited chances in life (Chan 2010: 69; Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) 2014; Chan/ Wei 2019). A persons' registration is usually at their parents' place of origin. It is only there that they have guaranteed access to health services and schooling. Education and medical services are better in the big cities, with education in Beijing being considered much better than even education in Chengdu, let alone in a relatively rural county like Reverence county.

Changing one's locality of registration to a higher-ranking center in China is subject to barriers to migration. These may include a certain level of income or other social status markers, a biographic connection to the locality, ownership of real estate, or other requirements set by the respective local government. The requirements for registration are the more onerous, the more popular a place is for migration. Most popular are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, and here the barriers for change of registration are the greatest.

This separation between urban and rural spheres is currently object of reform and structural changes. These reforms aim to improve the quality of public provision and of life in smaller cities and rural areas and thereby reduce the pressure of migration to large urban centers. These policies form the central context in which the Wanderlust planning project took place.

2.4   The New Urbanization Plan

There are two commonly used terms for urbanization in Chinese language: 城市化 (*chengshihua*) connotates big cities. The recently politically more favored 城镇化 (*chengzhenhua*) has the term 'cities and towns' as its stem and thus points to a more spatially dispersed urbanization. These terms cover the growth of the urban population and the physical growth of the land taken up by cities; they also cover the extension of urban infrastructure,

services, and social security systems to the rural sphere. Since 2014, the National New-type Urbanization Plan (国家新型城镇化规划 (2014-2020 年), NDRC 2014, from here on short: New Urbanization Plan) places the objective of urbanization among the four central areas of development efforts: Industrialization, digitalization, urbanization, and modernization of agriculture (Du 2018: 91f).

Urbanization policy and discourse are central as a context for spatial planning, especially for towns and rural areas. Urbanization is one of the policy terms that bring together the concepts, discussions, and measures to address the relationship between rural and urban spheres. The term serves as the heading for policies as diverse as the reform of the social security system, infrastructure construction, and reform of the land-ownership system in rural areas.[18] Very closely connected are efforts to develop and modernize rural space. Among them are, first of all, the integration of urban and rural administrative and socio-economic systems (城乡一体化, Yuan 2018), but also programs for the modernization, industrialization, or development of agriculture and rural areas. Thus, the idea of urbanization in China implies notions of development (发展) and modernization (现代化) of lifestyles and regions (e.g., Hong 2014; Zhou/ Bao/ Qi 2018).

An old debate has shaped the field: whether to focus impulses and support for development on the big metropolises, on the countryside, or on the network of smaller cities and towns.[19] Starting from Fei Xiaotong (Fei 1986; more recently, e.g., Hong 2014; Wu/ Liu 2014), there has been an argument for focusing on a network of towns and small cities. The reasons given are that small cities and towns have a high capacity to bring the rural population into wage jobs, and they provide trade and services to the countryside. In this way, they may ensure a more spatially balanced distribution of wealth. Similarly, the three textbooks on spatial planning for small towns cited above call for strengthening especially those towns with a favorable basis for future development (Melcher 2017; Li 2014: preface and pp. 43-51, 255f, 277; Tang, et al. 2012: 20f, 26-36; Luo/ Zhang/ Bo 2012: chapters 2 and 5). Industry, infrastructure, public services, and economic opportunities in each county are to be concentrated in three or four central towns, whose population is to grow by absorbing workers from the surrounding countryside. The arguments for this are that currently, there are too many towns in China, and most of them are too small. Through focusing development on central towns, the cover with social facilities and infrastructure is to be extended and robust growth poles are to be created. This is to reduce migration pressure on the large agglomerations.

The arguments for spatial concentration of development to metropolises and well-connected coast areas, in contrast, refer to efficiency and economies of agglomeration. Such argumentation brings forward the need for technological progress and modernization, which

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[18] Overviews of the policy areas and issues involved in urbanization can be found in the introductions to Gipouloux (2015) and Ye (2018).

[19] The following paragraph is based on Melcher 2017 (https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7170).

can only be satisfied in big cities to later diffuse to more peripheral areas. Arguments also refer to the economics of trickle-down (e.g., Mao 2010; China Development Research Foundation (ed.) 2013; Lu/ Wan 2014).

The debate between agglomeration versus dispersed urban development is reflected in the strategies and real dynamics of urbanization, i.e., spatial dynamics of population growth and industrial development in China (Chan 2010; Lu in: Lu (ed.) 2012; Ye in: Ye (ed.) 2018). Until the end of the 1980s, economic development was driven mainly by dispersed township and village enterprises (TVEs), but then Special Economic Zones (SEZs) connected to big cities took over. SEZs were established owing to the drive to attract foreign direct investment. Simultaneously, regulation and control on TVEs were tightened because they were observed to be very inefficient in terms of resource use and pollution control. The reasons for this shift in policy also included intense competition and fierce protectionism between provinces, even between counties. Correspondingly, whereas the central government committed to focusing industrial development and migration to towns and controlling the growth of cities in the *Small Town Consensus* of 1980, by the tenth Five Year Plan in 2005, big cities stood in the spotlight. The tenth Five Year Plan of the year 2005 also formulated the strategy of developing city clusters, which is still relevant today (Lu in: Lu (ed.) 2012). Around the same time, the strategy of 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside' was conceived and endorsed (Schubert/ Ahlers 2011). Measures for urban and rural territories were thereby separated into distinct policies. In contrast, the New Urbanization Plan implemented since 2015 aims to integrate them into one system.

The New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) comprises not only questions of spatial form and distribution, transport and other networks, or land use, but also migration policies, the extension of social security services to the rural population, public services in remote areas, urban management, and urban lifestyle. One of the focus points is social policy and economic security both for migrants (from rural areas to big cities) and in the countryside. This focus on the social is new; previous policies on spatial development always had focused on questions of zoning, infrastructure, and economic development, not on social policy.

From the perspective of spatial planning, the New Urbanization Plan's objective of building a nationwide network of central, medium-sized cities is of interest. With this objective, the New Urbanization Plan takes a middle route between the *Small Town Consensus* of the 1980s and the trickle-down economics of the 1990s and 2000s. Relevant is also the strategy towards improving quality of life and governance in cities laid out under the heading of 'Improving Cities' Capacity for Sustainable Development' (提高城市可持续发展能力).

Moreover, the New Urbanization Plan constitutes a shift in the conceptualization of urbanization in Chinese policy (Zhou/ Bao/ Qi 2018). In the 2000s, urbanization was measured in terms of size of cities, of urban territory, of urban population, and in hard economic indicators (such as GDP or the proportions of agriculture, industry, and services). Urbanization

was discussed as the construction of cities, and thus a question of land management, construction, and thus spatial planning. The new policy introduces an understanding of urbanization as the integration of urban and rural administrative systems. It includes policy areas such as education, provision of public services, environmental protection, and employment to measure city size and wealth (Chen/ Sui/ Guo 2019). Chen, et al. (2019: 638-640) emphasize that thus, the New Urbanization Plan and its actualization on the 19th People's Congress in 2018 put people in the center of the policy (以人为本), address inequalities in the distribution of resources, of status of development and of wealth. According to Chen, et al. (2019), it addresses not only disparities between the urban and rural spheres but also between regions and between social groups and concerns itself with finding a sustainable path of development.

Chengdu municipality has been a forerunner in integrated urban and rural development policies, which have informed the New Urbanization Plan (Ye/ LeGates 2013). In 2008, the city became a model area for integrated urban and rural development (城乡一体化). Even then, Chengdu municipality embarked on developing a network of smaller centers covering the administrative area (Zhang 2016) and promoted the spatial concentration of industry, rural population, and construction land (Tu/ Zuo 2011: 95). Already in the year 2016, the rural Hukou was abolished in Chengdu municipality. Together with Chongqing, the region was among the first to experiment with mechanisms that allowed farmers to sell or swap their land.

English-language research connected to urbanization in China is extensive, covering topics like migration and the lives of migrants in big cities (e.g., Kipnis in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Lu in: Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) 2014; Brown/ Wang in: Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) 2014; Zou 2014); transitions in rural areas and village elections (e.g., Schubert in: Heberer/ Schubert (eds.) 2009); dynamics connected to land conversion and land markets in different areas (e.g., Lora-Wainwright, Cai both in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015; Zhu in: Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) 2014; Hsing 2010) and to growth of rural settlements and towns (e.g., Zhu, et al. in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Guldin 2004); as well as local governance (Meyer-Clement 2016).

The New Urbanization Plan posits a dispersed spatial pattern of urbanization. In its conceptualization, growth and economic development of towns and smaller cities relieve pressure from the primary urban agglomerations. In this context, small towns like Wanderlust town or Reverence county seat expand their built-up area and expect to receive investments in infrastructure and industries. Many of the planning projects recounted in this dissertation would not have taken place without an urbanization policy that pushes coordinated and structured development and growth of rural hinterland. Thus, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the translation of macro-scale urbanization policy into a concrete strategy for a region's concrete location.

Although spatial planning is not the central policy area targeted by the New Urbanization Plan, the strategy constitutes a core backdrop for spatial planning, especially in small

towns and rural areas. The Urbanization Plan was never explicitly mentioned by my inter-locutors. Nevertheless, my data shows how its core stipulations came up and were implemented in plan-making: By strengthening rural centers, infrastructures and public services were to be located within prescribed distances of most spots in the rural territory; economic development and local industries were a core concern of the township government; and quality of life in Wanderlust town was discussed intensively among planners. Finally, the integration of rural and urban spheres can be seen in the fact that ample space for schools, hospitals and other social services was reserved in the zoning plan of Wanderlust town.

2.5   Spatial planning in China

2.5.1   Planning and spatial planning

There are various terms for what is called 'planning' in English, and the Chinese state engages in planning in several different ways (table 2). Planning, in general, is deeply inscribed into the practices of the socialist state (Leaf/ Hou 2006; Wu 2015: 38-41). Economic planning (经济计划), respectively the consecutive Five Year Plans (五年计划, FYP), are until today the central tool of policy steering: In times of the planned economy (计划经济), which was gradually but never fully dissolved starting from the end of the 1970s, FYP allocated quotas of goods both for consumption and production as well as output quotas to each economic entity of the national economy. Today, FYPs set the political program for the upcoming five years and define targets, such as the GDP of the administrative area, social services provision, or poverty reduction. FYPs are formulated by the Development and Reform Commission (发展改革委员会，short 发改委) of the respective government levels and span the entirety of policy areas.

The fact that planning is so pervasive in policy-making in China is closely coupled to the fact that policy and propaganda are typically centered on objectives to be reached in the future. This spotlight on strategic objectives has been applied both during the planned economy and in the era of Reform and Opening. During Reform and Opening, with some of the objectives were reaching a society of moderate wealth (小康社会), the reduction of regional inequalities through the Great West Strategy, and more recently, President Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream,' drafting an imaginary of the future society and state.

Thus, the hierarchical allocation of quotas by government is practiced until today in China. Apart from the FYP, a prominent example is land use planning (executed by the Office for Land and Resources, 国土资源部), which is also of core relevance to spatial planning: Quotas of land for construction, industrial use as well as quotas of land to be reserved for

agricultural production are assigned from the national level downwards through the administrative hierarchy in order to control the spatial expansion of cities and towns.[20]

Terms for 'planning'		
规划	Guihua	Planning, as in spatial planning
计划	Jihua	Planning, as in economic planning, population planning or project planning
设计	Sheji	Planning, as in design and construction
[国土] 用地规划	Yongdi guihua	Land use planning, as prescribed by the land administration
城镇规划 / 城市规划	Chengzhen guihua / chengshi guihua	Literally: city and town planning/ city planning – the terminology for spatial planning

Table 2: Terms and issue areas of planning in the Chinese state
Source: author's compilation

Spatial planning in China is thus only one of several areas in which planning is practiced. The status and range of decision-making of spatial planning are subordinate to both Five Year Plans and land use planning (cf. Leaf/ Hou 2006: 554f). While a Five Year Plan is the product of negotiations and deliberations between various ministries and administrative bodies, spatial planning is firmly limited to the policy purview of the ministry/office responsible for spatial planning. However, this ministry or office often also has the responsibility for construction and sometimes of land use planning. The land-use quotas for construction land and agricultural land prescribed by land use planning as well are binding for spatial planning.

Much of the English-language literature on spatial planning in China critically reflects on the fact that spatial planning serves local GDP growth and modernization. Abramson (2006) provides a first mapping of the institutional legacies and the changes in approaches and objectives in spatial planning; he observes excessive focus on economic growth but also sees the beginnings of changing development goals. Leaf (in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005) shows that the separation, commonly used in planning theory, between civil society, private business, and the state does not hold for China, since the boundaries between state and society as well as the boundaries between business and state are less clear. He also finds that the dominant discourse in planning in China is one of tradition and modernity/modernization (similarly Bray in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013: 81f, 91f).

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[20] Land use planning stands in a close relationship to urban planning: both use spatial mapping and zoning techniques. However, while spatial planning supports aspirations to expansion of built-up area, land use planning aims at reducing the loss of agricultural land to urban growth and to land speculation. This constitutes, on the one hand, a tug-of-war between higher level governments which restrict the construction land available in any location and local government striving for additional land quotas. On the other hand, since land quotas are always distributed one level down, there is also a tendency of the central city being allotted more construction land at the expense of the surrounding smaller settlements.

In a detailed presentation of the history and the current system of spatial planning, Wu Fulong (2015) makes the argument about spatial planning acting in support of economic development objectives of the government: In his account, most measures and plans serve almost exclusively the objective of GDP growth, either through construction and investment in itself, or through the promotion of the locality for business and residents. New approaches, such as the construction of eco-cities, are shown to serve the objective of generating growth as well. In this way, he argues, spatial planning serves to support local governments' aspirations for growth and reputation. His diagnosis that spatial planning's prime purpose is 'not to reduce negative externalities of land uses in a market economy or to balance conflicting interests' (Wu 2015: 39) can be seen to be valid up to today.

At the time of fieldwork, spatial planning administratively was located as one of many tasks of the large Ministry of Housing and Urban and Rural Development (MOHURD, 住房和城乡建设部). The legal framework of spatial planning restricts it to the regulation and guidance of construction, whereas in many policy documents, spatial planning is assigned strategic importance. The New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) clearly expresses that spatial planning is to contribute to the coordination and guidance of the variety of policy areas involved and the planning law (NPC 2007) sets high standards for the objectives of spatial planning, including economic growth and the protection of the environment. However, spatial planning's technical and legal means are limited to regulating construction and urban land-use functions.

2.5.2   History of spatial planning in China

Over the years, spatial planning has gained in status and scope of application. Instrumental for this was certainly its usefulness in the hustle for growth and monetary gain. Since the 1989 planning law, there had to be a spatial plan in order to realize urban growth: Not only was some regulation of land use a necessary prerequisite for urban construction; also, an existing development concept and spatial plan served as a useful argument to obtain additional land quotas.

Spatial planning in modern China has its roots by and large in the discipline of architecture and in representative projects aimed at legitimating the state (Zhao 2015: 275f). During Socialist times, spatial planning did not cover many of the functions that contemporary planning theory assigns it (the following is based on Wu 2015: ch. 2, Leaf/Hou 2006, Zhao 2015: 275-280): The system did not allow for substantial private construction activities; therefore spatial plans did not have a regulatory function. Since spatial planning was subservient to economic planning, it also did not fulfill a strategic function. Nor did it plan the distribution of public services, since urban land was at the time divided into self-contained parcels, Danwei (单位, production units) and residential unity (居住区). These spatial entities were responsible for the provision of public services.

Moreover, production units and state administrative bodies provided housing and social services for the workers and their families; these areas were not accessible to the urban government. The planning of regional networks of infrastructure, such as railways, streets, and electricity, resided with economic planning and with the ministries responsible for the networks' operation. Thus, the task of spatial planning at the time was to design urban landscapes, representative projects like Tian'anmen-Square in Beijing, or new industrial complexes. Accordingly, the discipline was for a long time closely related to architecture. It was much smaller and much less distinguished that the discipline of spatial planning in China is today.

The Urban Planning law (城市规划法) of 1989, for the first time, defined a formal planning system with different kinds of plans (urban system plan 城镇体系规划, masterplan 总体规划, and detailed regulatory construction plan 控制性详细规划) and afforded the spatial plan regulatory power. This means that spatial plans from now on were not only blueprints for construction but also had binding power to regulate urban construction. Construction in violation of the plan's prescriptions, such as construction sites, land-use functions, density, and construction height, was not permitted. The law and its revised version of 2008 include a hierarchical system of authorization of spatial plans by the administrative authorities one level above. Thus, a higher authority monitors the regulation of construction.

Urban development in China changed decisively with fiscal decentralization, the introduction of a leasing market for urban land, and the abolishment of company housing in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. With their income from taxes greatly diminished, local governments now had to generate revenues. The newly introduced lease-market for construction land, high demand for residential and office spaces, and the need to invest in urban construction offered a ready income source. Often enough, investors and construction companies themselves were publicly owned enterprises, so that governments could earn from leasing out land, from construction activities, as well as from the sale of apartments. During this time, cities grew rapidly and often in an uncontrolled fashion. The existing system of spatial planning at the time was unable to execute development control (Wu 2015: 56f). Therefore, in 2004, land use planning and the land quota system enforced by the Ministry of Land and Resources has been introduced. Since then, the conversion of agricultural land into construction land in each locality has been limited by assigned quotas so as to reduce the loss of arable land. Thus, the Ministry of Land and Resources was supposed to reduce the space of urban expansion.

The 1989 planning law also prescribed a hierarchical system for authorization of spatial planning. One of the effects of this system was that the speed of planning could not keep up with the fast changes in the urban landscape: By the time a plan had been approved and then passed into law by local authorities, construction and development had already made it obsolete (Wu 2015: 104, at the example of Guangdong in the year 2000). The need for more flexible planning instruments in combination with the demand for branding and marketing

in order to raise cities profile brought about the development of conceptual or strategic plans (often referred to as 概念规划; Wu 2015: 103-115). These plans are not part of the statutory plans prescribed by the planning law. Therefore, they can be put into practice much faster and are much more flexible in their contents. They usually would include a concept for axes and directions for development and growth, sometimes also for protection and preservation; they would formulate priorities for economic development and highlight characteristics to be utilized in place branding. Today, such concepts and strategies constitute an integral part of any spatial plan.

The role of spatial planning for urban development and urban policy-making – or in other words, the role of spatial planning in urban competition and in profit-making from urban change – thereby had grown considerably by the mid-2000s. The literature on spatial planning in China reflects this agenda of development and modernization (e.g., Wang Yan 2018, Fu 2018).

Another increase in the relevance of spatial planning came with the new planning law in 2008, this time entitled Urban and Rural Planning Law (城乡规划法). Now, the compulsory application of spatial planning was extended to rural areas. As many of the accounts of plans for rural settlements testify (esp. Bray in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; Bray in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013), this was a challenge for the profession, which before had not engaged small towns or villages. At the time of my research, this new application of spatial planning was still being rolled out: Many of the villages in Wanderlust township had spatial planning done for the first time.

With that, spatial planning in China had developed areas of expertise distinct from construction planning and thus from architecture. Nevertheless, it was treated as a subfield of architecture for a long time. Only in 2011 was spatial planning established as an academic discipline of its own right, independent from architecture (Huang 2012: 94).

Thus, the system and the discipline of spatial planning have undergone far-reaching changes and expansions over the last 20 years and continue to develop. Only in 2018, the national ministries for construction and spatial planning (MOHURD) and for land use and resources (MLR) have been merged. There are also efforts to include additional regulation to protect the environment and other spatially relevant areas of public administration in spatial planning. This happens under the heading of 'integration of many plans into one' (多规合一, Sang/ Dong 2018). The efforts thus go into the direction of letting spatial planning cover all spatially relevant areas of policy-making and thus increasing its coordinative role.

2.5.3   Spatial planning and small towns

Before the new Urban and Rural Planning Law (城乡规划法) came into force in 2008, very little planning happened in areas designated as rural or even predominantly rural. As Wu (2015: 58) explains: At the time, '[t]owns were treated as points rather than as built-up areas in the urban system plan.' Nevertheless, in the context of the long-standing debate on

the role of small cities and towns, Xu/ Zhang (2004) demonstrate already for the 1990s that there was a multitude of research on spatial planning for small towns. Such research spanned the fields of 1) development strategy, looking at the role small towns should play in China's spatial and rural development; of 2) spatial planning and construction, exploring approaches and guidelines and existing problems in planning practice and administration; as well as of 3) new approaches to determine adequate development strategies for individual small towns (Xu/ Zhang 2004).

Chengdu municipality is one of China's regions with the most substantive experience in rural spatial planning (Tu/ Zuo 2011; Ye/ LeGates 2013). One occasion was the reconstruction after a massive earthquake had destroyed parts of Sichuan province and Chengdu municipality in 2008. In a coordinated development effort, provinces and municipalities in China partnered with local governments in Sichuan to support reconstruction. Part of reconstruction was a concerted effort in planning for rural areas and small towns (Wilczak 2017; Abramson/ Qi 2011). Chengdu municipality also had, at the time, just become a national experimental area for the integration of urban and rural systems (Tu/ Zuo 2011). Therefore, the area of my fieldwork can be regarded as one with the most well-developed rural/urban-rural planning systems in China.

There is a lively discussion on town planning, administration, and management underway in Chinese journals and academic publications.[21] A common point of departure is the notion that towns are essential pillars of urbanization and a critique of planning in towns of often not being substantive enough and lacking approaches adequate to the characteristics of towns. Contributions to the debate introduce and discuss approaches and methods: How to plan in order to support local development (Shi 2004; Geng 2011; Fu 2018)? How to shape local development and construction so that they are environmentally friendly (Wang 2011)? In this context, the changing role of towns in the context of the New Urbanization Plan as well as the integration of urban and rural planning (城乡一体化) are discussed widely (Qian/ Gong/ Li 2011; Hong 2014; Wu 2013; Wang, Xufei 2018; Chen 2019). More specific questions concern, for example, the principles to be applied in infrastructure construction and public service provision (Zhang 2009; Zhang/ Cai 2014). A frequent question is how to work with towns' cultural diversity and use it to stimulate the tourism sector (Liu 2011; Pang/ Wang/ Wang 2014). There are also many general discussions of planning methodology and approaches that pinpoint specific planning problems for small towns (Xie, Yuanshui 2010; Zhang 2011; Li 2013; Zheng 2013). Moreover, many publications call for stricter administrative implementation of spatial plans, especially in towns and rural areas. They emphasize that local administrations are often understaffed and lack coordination of different branches of the administration (Wang/ Wang 2014; Kuang 2014; Wang, Yan 2018; Fu 2018). However, despite all these calls for improvement of planning administration and management, I could not find a conceptualization or description of the structures and workings of neither the

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[21] Central journals are 小城镇建设, 城市建设理论研究, and China City Planning Review/城市规划.

administration nor the planning profession's structure in the literature. For this reason, chapter 5 will provide a detailed mapping of the administration of spatial planning, while chapter 7 maps the economics and social roles of professional planning.

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that towns and villages are not treated as dots on a plan anymore, but that their built-up areas receive the attention of spatial planners, too. I dissect in detail the processes of planning for a township in Sichuan. The literature's prominent topics also resonate with my empirical findings: Environmental protection and the preservation of local heritage were important issue areas in planning. However, these concerns were relatively new and approaches were still exploratory. The same is true, however, for a conceptualization of development and growth of small towns. To the current understanding of local administration and the planning system, I add an account of policy-making within the scope of one branch of administration, detailing the mechanisms of coordination and top-down-control. I also further the understanding of the planning profession by providing data on the roles and business logic that professional planners incorporate as they consult local governments.

3   Multiple *Orders of worth*: Theoretical Framework

In autumn 2016, New Town Planning Company compiled a plan for the development of the tourism industry and the refurbishment of some areas of the central town of Tiger township. For the hearing at the county planning committee, Luo Zhicheng had prepared a Powerpoint presentation. The beginning of the presentation shows a mountain top surrounded by clouds at sunrise. The next slide shows a birds-view rendering of the central town as the planner imagines it at the development project's conclusion. The town is located next to a river. We see tree-covered mountainsides to each side of the valley, some agricultural settlements to one side of the valley, and at the edge of the picture, white clouds and a flock of white birds flying over the scenery. In the middle of this green and blue landscape, the town is rendered in light greys and browns, with a few specs of color in between: Trees, very few cars, and people. The main streets and parking lots are discernible, as is each building, a promenade along the riverside, and a pedestrian square towards the back of the town. The overall impression is of a bustling, clean town, where business and life happen in the middle of a serene scenery and excellent environmental conditions.

There are more such renderings at the beginning of the presentation, each one more detailed. We see that there is a parking lot for tourists at one end of the town, and at the other end, there is a park for recreation; in between, there are residential and commercial buildings along small streets. These renderings have been produced digitally by Luo Zhicheng and illustrate the concepts for the refurbishment of the town later in the presentation.

About two-thirds into the presentation, the tourism business concept for the central town is presented. This takes the form of a few collages of pictures: The opening slide presents a mix of modern entertainment and architecture with the selling of artisanal products; then there is one slide on outdoor-sports, and one with a variety of service facilities: a spa, a restaurant, a shop for outdoor equipment, a bike rental; last, there comes a night-time townscape combined with a poem, illustrating well-designed accommodation. Each of these slides is accompanied by some slides giving more concrete ideas about how and where to implement such facilities in the town. Such collages are an often-used stylistic tool at the company. They are called 'conceptual designs' (概念设计) and consist of pictures which have been selected to illustrate the general thinking or idea, without having any concrete connection to the specific locality.[22]

These renderings represent some of the ideas and visions in spatial planning that this dissertation is about. Luo Zhicheng has illustrated a place which is prosperous thanks to tourism. The natural environment radiates into the town; it is used as a resource for the

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[22] Of course, the presentation was also replete with analyses of the regional context, of the economic risks and opportunities, with tables and maps, as well as with technical detail about how to design the street network and the distribution of functional specialization across the space of the town. All this was subject to critical discussion first at the planning company, and then at the planning committee at the county government.

development of tourism while at the same time creating an amenable living environment. The town is predominantly pedestrian; thus, it is quiet and the air is good. Such ideas for development and such ideal imaginations of social relationships are mobilized and discussed in spatial planning. This dissertation aims to identify and describe them in the terminology of attributions of worthiness, i.e., *orders of worth.*

For such a focus of research, spatial planning with its orientation towards the future and with its need to make decisions in the face of complex problems is a very fitting object: There are many equally valid ways to render the future townscape and ideas for the development of the local economy. When looking at such planning material and listening to the discussions at the company or at local governments, what interested me most was the thinking behind the proposals and critiques, the thinking that informs what the different persons perceive as a good, not-so-good, or better option. To make matters more complicated, people have different priorities or agendas and different ideals; therefore, they come to very different conclusions as to which would be a good concept to apply to a locality. Since such conclusions and concepts are rooted in differing attributions of worthiness and ideals, an external researcher (i.e., me) can hardly decide which point of view is better or more adequate to the situation. Therefore, I chose an analytical framework that allows me to describe a variety of *orders of worth*, i.e., orientations to *common good*s, side by side.

As a conceptual tool to identify and describe such differing attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations, the concept of *orders of worth* is used, based on the theory of *Sociology of Conventions,* laid out by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in their monograph 'On Justification' (1991/2006, from here on short 'B&Th').[23] In this framework, each person knows a variety of *polities/ common worlds*, which in any given circumstance may support one evaluation – but they may also be in conflict about the evaluation and assessment of a course of action or an assessment of a situation. *Polities/ common worlds* are shared ideal pictures of how the world ought to be structured, and thus each order represents a set of shared values and norms that are legitimate in themselves. Each *order of worth* provides a way to explain and interpret the world and assigns worth and status.

Crucially, *polities/ common worlds* are not bound to specific social groups, nor is any person limited to employing one *polity/ common world.* On the contrary, B&Th describe six *polities/ common worlds*, for example, the civic order or the order of fame. Persons routinely follow the orders in accordance with the situation at hand, or they reflexively switch and negotiate between orders in case of uncertainty or conflict. *Polities/ common worlds* serve as

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[23] This theoretical framework has many names: Économie des conventions, Economies of Worth, French Pragmatism, and others (Knoll (2013: 368f)). One of the reasons for this is that it does not crystalize on the person of one researcher but rather is carried by a network of researchers with different interests and specializations. I follow Knoll 2013 in choosing the term 'Sociology of Conventions' (SC).

B&Th differentiate conceptually between *polity* and *common world*, with the former being more abstract and derived from philosophical works; the latter is the more concrete description base on present-day data. This conceptual differentiation does not bring any added value to my own analytical approach, therefore I follow Thévenot/ Moody/ Lafaye (2000) and use the denomination '*order of worth*' as a term that encompasses *polities* and *common worlds.*

a guidance for people's actions and decisions and as a template to evaluate situations and as an argumentative recourse in disputes.

Ideas, objectives, and ideal imaginations are contained in these *polities/ common worlds*: At the core of each *polity/ common world*, there is one *common good*, which is an idea about how society should be. Within the purview of a specific *polity/ common world*, actions and statements are then assessed based on their contribution to realizing this ideal. In doing so, the worth of objects and arrangements as well as persons' *state of worth* are measured according to how close they come to the ideal description contained in the *common good*. Thus, value statements or the formulations of objectives for action usually refer to specific *polities/ common worlds* for justification.

I do not apply the full theory as formulated by B&Th, but use the meta-theoretical structure they provide, filling it with newly identified and described *orders of worth*, which are relevant in the field of spatial planning for small towns in Sichuan. Due to reasons such as scale and cultural context, an unmodified application of B&Th's theory to my material seems inadvisable. Therefore, I turn the methodology implied by B&Th on its head: Utilizing some conceptual tools and insights from the *Institutional Logics Perspective* by Patricia Thornton, William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury (2012, from here on short 'TOL') enables me to apply the structure, but not the content of the theory at a meso-scale and to identify a set of *orders of worth* from my empirical field instead of applying those *orders* already identified by research utilizing *Sociology of Conventions*. This will result in the identification and description of five *orders of worth* that persons involved in spatial planning for small towns in Sichuan engage with. The description of the orders will be structured by five categories derived from B&Th's analysis.

This chapter starts with a literature review showing possible alternative theoretical frameworks and thereby makes a case for the relevance of my choice of theory. I then introduce and discuss B&Th's *Sociology of Conventions*. In the third part of the chapter, I operationalize the framework for my own research: Which aspects and concepts of *Sociology of Conventions* will I work with, in which places and how do I tweak the framework? Here, I also define central concepts and sketch out my roadmap for applying the theoretical framework to my data.

3.1   Elucidation of analytical interest

This dissertation looks at how spatial plans for small towns in Sichuan are made; it is especially interested in objectives and imaginations about how these places can or should be. The objects of analysis are different aspects of planning processes, such as the materials compiled and the meetings and hearings in the making of a spatial plan. My interlocutors were spatial planners who either work in private companies or at universities and formulate spatial plans for local governments; or they work in government planning agencies. Among

my interlocutors were also many people working in public administration in planning ministries and bureaus as well as local politicians. The roles, priorities, and responsibilities that the various persons brought to the planning process differed. Differences of opinion over contents and specifics of the plan were the rule rather than an exception. My analysis aims to distill attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations, i.e., *orders of worth,* from these observations and conversations.

Spatial planning is a profession and a field of research in its own right, while at the same time being a strand of policy-making and of administration. Therefore, several theoretical angles offer themselves as toolboxes for this endeavor. Planning theory helps to find a working definition of spatial planning and what it is about. Criticism of modernist states has spatial planning as one of its core targets because spatial planning serves to make the territory legible and to order it. This body of literature offers more of a bird's eye-view on planning as a modernist endeavor. Since spatial planning is one branch of state administration, anthropology of bureaucracy offers a useful inroad into approaches to describing the logic of how agents of the state work. In this respect, research on bureaucracy and on how states work helps understand how the actors we encounter in this research perceive their responsibilities and how they fulfill their tasks.[24] All these strands of literature have informed my choice of theory and the formulation of my research interest. Since *Sociology of Conventions,* which is used for analysis and for the presentation of data in this dissertation stems from a field without substantial connections to neither China studies nor spatial planning nor anthropology of the state and of bureaucracy, this section will revisit the fields of literature mentioned above in order to formulate what I need from a theory. I also do this to justify my choice of *orders of worth* as the theoretical concept that guides my analysis.

3.1.1   Planning theory: What is spatial planning about?

The making of spatial plans is a procedure of setting priorities in terms of which problems will be considered and to which extent. It is also a procedure of formulating – or figuratively sketching – a possible future for the locality. Thus, in a classic of Western planning theory, Rittel and Webber (1973) argued that spatial planning has to confront 'wicked problems:' Already the formulation of a problem is contestable. Each wicked problem is unique. Thus it cannot have a definitive, correct, or scientific solution; there is not even a circumscribed number of possible solutions. Every attempt to address the problem changes it, and any solution will harm some of the stakes and interests present in the locality. Plan-making is always a decision against some legitimate concerns and needs as much as it is a decision for certain construction projects. Therefore, the way a problem is framed and defined as well

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[24] The choice of these fields of literature is based upon extensive reading that I have done mostly in the period preceding my fieldwork. I have selected these three literatures because these were the most insightful for me and each of them has substantially helped me formulate my research interest and my requirements for a theory.

as the envisaged range of solutions depend significantly on ideology, goals for society, and the actors involved.

In my project, the *orders of worth* which are at play in the planning process have a decisive influence over which issues come up in the planning process, which different positions actors take over contentious aspects, and which factors are pointed out as relevant to the understanding and solution of a problem. Therefore, an analysis of the planning process can tell us a lot about moral priorities in a social context.

The idea that spatial planning can provide deep insights into ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness within a society or a field is supported by Abram and Weszkalnys' (in: Abram/ Weszkalnys (eds.) 2013) understanding of spatial planning as a promise about the future:

> *The authors in this volume share an understanding of planning as an assemblage of activities, instruments, ideologies, models and regulations aimed at ordering society through a set of social and spatial techniques. But they also highlight a characteristic tension produced by planning as an inherently optimistic and future-oriented activity. The future promised in plans seems always slightly out of reach, the ideal outcome always slightly elusive, and the plan retrospectively always flawed.*
> *(Abram/ Weszkalnys in: Abram/ Weszkalnys (eds.) 2013: 13)*

If the 'the plan retrospectively always [seems, LM] flawed' (Abram/ Weszkalnys in: Abram/ Weszkalnys (eds.) 2013: 13), then a critical assessment of the contents and concepts of a spatial plan does not promise to yield much analytical insight. B&Th also repeatedly emphasize that an external researcher should not be content with only providing a critical assessment based on a different *polity/ common world*, since persons in the field do have the capacity to switch between orders and assess a constellation from an alternative angle. Consequently, my aim is not to assess the contents of spatial plans, but instead to map out the different *measures of worth* that play a role in formulating the plan – as flawed as it might seem retrospectively.

The quoted passage also mentions that planning is about the future. This emphasizes the character of promises that spatial plans have: They provide a blueprint about the future. While the volume edited by Abram/ Weszkalnys looks at the practices with which planners work in the pursuit of the futures contained in the 'elusive promises' of planning (Abram/ Weszkalnys in: Abram/ Weszkalnys (eds.) 2013, title of the publication), I am interested in how these promises and imaginations are formulated. Because for a statement, a map, or a graphical rendering to be a compelling promise, it has to be rooted in commonly accepted notions about what is, and what would be better. The empirical material reviewed so far in this dissertation, spatial plans and vignettes from fieldwork, supports the claim that spatial plans are promises in this sense: they are presented and rendered in a way that expresses attraction and promise. The fact that these promises are elusive or out of reach does not detract from the stories they tell us about the ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness of the social context in which they have been produced.

Thus, spatial planning is a future-oriented activity that has to deal with complex problems. It logically follows that there exist multiple alternative framings of objectives and methods for addressing these issues. Western planning theory knows a wide variety of paradigms, from high modernism to the communicative turn. These paradigms can be differentiated by what they see as contents, objectives, and underlying values of planning practice. A planning paradigm provides guidelines for planning practice following the respective approach's priorities and central values (Healey/ Hillier in: Hillier/ Healey (eds.) 2008: x-xi). Thus, it defines what a spatial plan should achieve and against which dimensions it should be evaluated; based on this, it offers planners a toolbox to achieve these specific objectives.

However, multiple framings of problems and objectives in planning may also clash within one specific project. Such conflicts are addressed by research on planning that looks at how different rationalities and lines of argument interact in spatial planning and its implementation. In a case study on Aalborg in Denmark, Flyvbjerg (1998) derives a model for such a clash of rationalities. In his analysis, there is, on the one hand, an absolute and enlightened rationality, which points to the technically and objectively optimal solutions of a complex problem. *Realrationalität*, on the other hand, consists of the rationalities of power plays and administrative processes; under *realrationalität*, actors will utilize what Flyvbjerg calls 'rationalizations' to make their preferred outcome seem to be the objectively optimal one.[25] In a study on environmental planning in Great Britain, Rydin (2003: 96-114) demonstrates that different rationalities, bound to different groups of actors, compete and interact in defining, framing, and solving problems. She finds that procedural rationality has decisive influence on planning, which is also shaped by three substantive rationalities: the scientific, economic, and communicative ones. Both studies demonstrate that planning includes negotiation and sometimes struggle between different points of view, which – in Rydin's (2003) line of argument – are equally valid (or in Flyvbjerg's 1998 model, are equally meaningless, since they are tools in the conflicts between competing *realrationalitäten*).

Spatial planning is also specific to a context. From a cultural studies perspective, Sanyal (in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005) frames planning as a worldview about the relationships between state, economy, and society and, at the same time, as subject to international trends. The contributions by Friedman and Booth (both in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005) underscore the point that planning approaches, objectives, and the tasks assigned to it are rooted in the legal history of each state.

It might be argued that in the Chinese context, where local governments are not organized in a democratic and pluralistic fashion, spatial plans exhibit less of the characteristics

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[25] Flyvbjerg's conceptualization of one absolute, objective rationality in contrast to a rationality of particular interest and power of course does not fit at all to the program that I have set for my own research: if there were an absolute rationality, wicked problems would not exist; and as Moody and Thévenot (2000) argue in their application of the *orders of worth*, 'rationalizations,' i.e., arguments supporting a particular interest, would be meaningless if they were not based in popular values. Therefore, Flyvbjerg's model of two antagonistic rationalities diminishes the multiple lines of arguments and multiple conflicting objectives in spatial planning and its implementation to empty rhetoric.

that I listed: That plans in China are less about dealing with the complexities about the problems at hand since they are produced on the order of the respective government; that the promises they contain are less targeted at the general population than at the local Party secretary; or that they do not contain any substantive promises at all but simply render the ideas of the Party secretary graphically. However, as will be laid out in detail in the chapter on the administration of spatial planning, final plans are reviewed by external experts and higher levels of government; persons involved in the planning process will be held responsible if the spatial plans are not up to state of the art or not in line with policy. Local government officials are dependent on positive evaluations from superiors for their future careers, and all government levels have high stakes in maintaining public legitimacy. Spatial plans often are used to support these objectives. As such, they can be expected to be in line with what is perceived as common public values and objectives (for an extended theoretical argumentation of this line of thought, cf. Moody/ Thévenot in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000).

It could also be argued that under an authoritarian government, conflicting rationalities or objectives in the planning process might be silenced. However, as shown by the literature of Fragmented Authoritarianism (cf. chapter 5.2), policy-making and project planning in China are usually accompanied by intensive negotiation between different government levels, which bring conflicting agendas to the negotiation table. Moreover, the compulsory participation of different groups of actors (politicians, administrators, and professional planners) introduces various views to the planning process. Therefore, and as my data supports, spatial planning processes in China can be expected to involve a number of conflicting rationalities or *orders of worth.*

3.1.2   Critiques of modernist states

Thus, spatial planning is not only a technique to address complex problems and a way of formulating promises about the future – but it is also an integral part of the state and of public administration. Scott (1998) describes spatial planning as a mission of the modern state to consolidate knowledge about and controllability of state territory; of producing readable spaces, cadastral registers of who lives where, and maps of the territory. Bray (in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; and in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013) uses the example of planning the New Socialist Countryside in China to show that this is indeed a strong motivation. In their relationship to modernization projects, spatial plans are promises about the future, given by the state. However, as Mitchell (2002) demonstrates in his analysis of modern state interventions in Egypt, despite the best of intentions, these schemes often neglected crucial details and the complexities involved: He tells about unanticipated side effects that have a more significant impact than the intended effect of state-of-the-art construction projects; about regulatory endeavors deemed necessary for a modern state but which in reality mostly served for an upwards redistribution of property; and so on. Mitchell (2002) demonstrates that expert knowledge necessarily underestimates large-scale projects' side effects and that well-meant

blueprints are barely ever sufficiently grounded in fact. He points out that contingencies and the situation after implementation have to be considered when judging government interventions.

Such gaps between blueprints, implementation, and actual impacts of interventions can be found in many accounts of spatial development in China. These accounts underscore Mitchell's (2002) point hat the grand visions for modern and liveable spaces often produce dislocations or simply serve as facades for schemes of profit generation (e.g., the case studies of Zhu (in: Wang/ Kee/ Gao (eds.) 2014) and Lora-Wainwright (in: Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015) about relocation schemes in the outskirts of cities; or Habich (2016) on planning and implementation of hydro-engineering projects). Much of the English-language literature connects well to Scott's (1998) critique of modernist planning and development schemes (for China, especially Abramson/ Qi 2011; Bray in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; Bray in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Leaf in: Sanyal (ed.) 2005; Curien 2014): Such schemes, in this line of argument, are too techno-rational and theoretical in their conceptualization, they fail to account for the messiness of concrete situations and are therefore bound to fail.

These accounts forcefully point out how spatial plans and large-scale projects often fail due to the 'wickedness' of the problems they encounter. The authors also highlight one of the motivations for such projects, which in more positive terms might be described as a striving for a modern state, effective administration of the population and territory, and development. They barely account, however, for tensions and conflicts in the formulation of objectives and blueprints. However, as I have argued at the beginning of this section, it is hard to conceive especially of spatial planning without accommodating conflicting goals or understandings of the situation.

3.1.3   Anthropology of the state and of bureaucracy

Anthropology of the state or of bureaucracy talks about people, activities, and the obstacles that make up the everyday practice of policy implementation. For example, Lipsky (2010) looks at individual state employees at the street level, teachers, social workers, or administrators. They represent the state in everyday contact with citizens; their responsibility is the implementation of policy programs. In Lipsky's (2010) account, these persons enter state service highly idealistic and motivated, wanting to make life better for their clients, but soon encounter severe constraints: There is never enough funding and manpower, and there never can be. Lipsky (2010), therefore, posits that who and what is often perceived as uncooperative bureaucrats and an anonymous and slow administration are in fact a structure that had been designed according to someone's best knowledge with the available means and professionals who had to learn to cope with never being able to perform up to their own ideals.

In an analysis of cooperation between partners from different backgrounds, here in the planning of international development projects, Rottenburg (in: Czarniawska-Joerges/ Sevón

(eds.) 2005) argues that even the understanding of reality may and sometimes has to be negotiated. He shows that parties in a project need to agree on (1) the framing of the problem; (2) the information relevant to describe the problem and to find a solution; and (3) the goals and means of a solution; only then can a technical solution to the problem be found. This is neither being done in a linear order, nor necessarily explicitly – but without these steps, projects could not be successfully carried out. Rottenburg (in: Czarniawska-Joerges/ Sevón (eds.) 2005) emphasizes that persons participating in such development projects often endorse the specific descriptions of reality only for the present context; they usually are aware of the wicked character of the problems to be solved and are able to step out of the logic in which the project is operating.[26]

Concerning the norms and ideals of bureaucracy, de Sardan (de Sardan in: De Herdt/ de Sardan (eds.) 2015) and De Herdt (De Herdt in: De Herdt/ de Sardan (eds.) 2015) argue that only looking at explicit rules is not enough. They make the case that actions that do not follow explicit rules and norms are not necessarily illegitimate. De Herdt and de Sardan start from the observation that formal rules are often not adequate to the real-live context where they are supposed to be applied or do not cover practical contingencies. Therefore, the authors suggest different ways of theorizing the practices of dealing with formal rules: Either as a game, which plays with the formal rules and is in itself governed by informal rules (de Sardan in: De Herdt/ de Sardan (eds.) 2015); or as hybridization between the Weberian ideal type of the respective state and the actual practices (De Herdt in: De Herdt/ de Sardan (eds.) 2015). Like Migdal/ Schlichte (in: Schlichte (ed.) 2005), these two authors argue that in doing research about the state, looking at rules and formal institutions can never be enough, since these have to be interpreted and practiced in real life and that there will be gaps between the written rule and practice.[27]

More specifically to spatial planning, Weszkalnys (2010) describes the perspectives and assessments of the renewal of Berlin Alexanderplatz by different groups of actors involved in planning and implementation as well as regular users of the space. Similarly, Turner (2003) traces the organizational pathways and routines of planning for the case of a contested redevelopment of a district in a Canadian town. Both show how difficult it is for alternative interests and perspectives to find full representation in the administrative logics of spatial planning, even if planners and decision-makers mean well.

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[26] It needs to be acknowledged that Rottenburg (in: Czarniawska-Joerges/ Sevón (eds.) 2005) obtained these results from localized projects of international development aid, a context in which an understanding of the diversity of worldviews is indispensable – planners working in a more homogenous setting may not be as aware of such variation.

[27] The frameworks these authors suggest would be perfect for my own research – but for one problem: The research for the edited volumes of Schlichte (2005) and de Sardan/de Herdt (2015) has predominantly taken place in postcolonial contexts. When these authors write about the formal rules and explicit norms, they take the shortcut of setting a Weberian-style bureaucracy and a liberal democratic state as the formal model. This is probably legitimate in contexts which have historically been heavily influenced by colonialism and international donors. The history of the Chinese state, however, is very different, and distilling an ideal-type from the regulations and institutions of the Chinese state would be a dissertation in its own right. It is for this reason that I dismissed the idea of empirically pitching the formal rules and the idea of the state against the actual practices in spatial planning in Sichuan.

Thereby, anthropology of bureaucracy mostly looks at practicalities and actual procedures, showing that everything is much more complicated than in models of how administration works or in theories about policy implementation. This mismatch between complex practice and abstract description of the system has led me to spend many pages tracing the planning system and planning administration in the empirical chapter on the administrative system. However, while the authors acknowledge that the actors base their decisions and activities in their respective value systems, this literature's focus lies on norms of behavior, on practices and procedures, not on ideas about the future. At the same time, the insights and findings of this line of research make asking for the objectives and imaginations actual practices are based on the next logical step.

3.1.4   Requirements for a theory about complex constellations of objectives in spatial planning

I understand spatial planning as happening between conflicting objectives set by higher government levels and the everyday realities of people working at various government bodies. Scott (1998) described that bringing territory and population under control might be seen as a legitimate objective of state action, as may modernization and development. However, officials and professional planners will certainly also see other needs and issues which have to be addressed in a plan. Their values and social context will legitimate these ideas. Unlike Flyvbjerg (1998), I do not assume that there is one kind of 'correct' or 'real' logic against which I could measure the planning decisions. Unlike Rydin (2003), I do not think that the people working on a spatial plan are so deeply immersed in their own respective logics that they do not see that competing logics are equally valid. Thus, like Rottenburg (in: Czarniawska-Joerges/ Sevón (eds.) 2005), Mitchell (2002), de Sardan, and de Herdt (both in: De Herdt/ de Sardan (eds.) 2015), I imagine the people involved in spatial planning to be caught between conflicting demands and ideas. Unlike those authors, however, my focus does not lie with structures, norms, or communicative barriers; instead, I am first and foremost interested in values and rationalities between which those people are caught. While acknowledging that people involved in spatial planning are caught between different, possibly conflicting 'goods' for which they strive, I aim to describe these different goods and the rationalities and actions.

One central requirement for the choice of a theory was an explicit negation of the possibility that there is one objectively best form of organizing the state and formulating policies. The theoretical framework of this dissertation has to address how persons work with complex constellations of the material world and the moralities and imaginations on which they base their decisions. The spotlight of interpretation has to shine on the ideas and ideals about the world, not on power and material benefit in policy-making.

At the same time, the framework needs to fit or be flexible enough to be made to fit the Chinese context. For this reason, it must be free from implicit assumptions, for example, about the values of pluralism or democracy, or about how a state works and where the

boundaries between a state and society are. I found an answer in Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991/2006) writing, which stems from French sociology and is utterly unconcerned with questions surrounding the state, public administration, or policy-making. Throughout *On Justification*, the authors emphasize that there is no overriding truth beyond *orders of worth*: Each position, objective, or critique is grounded in one of the *orders* and it is as valid as any other position, objective, or critique.

3.2   *Sociology of Conventions*: Overview

> *The problems raised by relations among worlds cannot be dismissed by associating the various worlds and the worths they manifest with different persons, cultures, or milieus, the way classical sociology treats relations among values and groups. To attach persons to worlds would mean pinning them down in a single form of worth, and this would run counter to the principles of justice on which the polity model is based. One of the chief guiding threads of our undertaking consists, to the contrary, in the observation that human beings, unlike objects, can manifest themselves in different worlds. (B&Th 216)*

This theory offers a toolbox to analyze how complex problems are addressed: By asking which issues become contentious in a concrete constellation, which points of view are brought forward, and which aspects are pointed out as crucial, it becomes possible to identify and describe *orders of worth*. The quotation above describes one characteristic of the model that is of great importance to my own project: Persons switch between orders and they are aware of complex constellations and conflicting objectives and requirements. They agree that each of these objectives is in itself legitimate, but do not necessarily agree about which objective is the most important one. This conceptualization guides analytical perspective towards differences in valuation rather than to personal interest or social background.

The authors describe six *polities* and corresponding *common worlds*, between which persons switch*:* The inspired polity, the domestic polity, the polity of fame, the civic polity, and the industrial polity. I do not apply these *polities* or *common worlds* to my empirical data. Instead, I utilize the basic structure of B&Th's framework and its description of the social world and its analytical concepts to identify and describe five meso-level *orders of worth* that are of relevance for spatial planning of small towns in Sichuan.[28]

In this part of the chapter, I present an overview of B&Th's framework in its own right. Only in the following sections will I engage in detail the question of whether and how this framework – developed from European philosophy and business contexts – can be applied to spatial planning, which constitutes a branch of the administration in China.

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[28] B&Th differentiate conceptually between *polity* and *common world*, with the former being more abstract and derived from philosophical works; the latter is the more concrete description base on present-day data. This conceptual differentiation does not bring any added value to my own analytical approach, therefore I follow Thévenot/ Moody/ Lafaye (2000) and use the denomination '*order of worth'* as a term that encompasses *polities* and *common worlds*.

3.2.1   Core concepts

The guiding question of 'On Justification' is how critique works and how consensus is reached in situations of dissent or unclarity about rules and values. In the monograph, originally published in 1991 and in English (and German) translation in 2006, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991/2006, short: B&Th) lay out a model of the different *polities* or *common worlds* in which justification and evaluation can be based as well as of how actors engage with and employ these *polities* or *worlds*. The book starts with a preface about methodology and the motivations for the model; the next five parts are each composed of one theoretical chapter followed by an empirical analysis fleshing out the *polities/ common worlds*. Thus, the framework unfolds incrementally over the course of the book. It stretches from an anchor in historical analyses of philosophical texts, to a model of how people interact with *common worlds,* and to a description of the boundaries of the model. B&Th analytically describe six society-wide *polities* or *common worlds*, each derived from prominent works of philosophy and empirically fleshed out through an analysis of business-handbooks: the civic order (Rousseau), the market order (Adam Smith), the industrial order (Saint-Simon), the domestic order (Bossuet), inspiration (Augustine), and fame (Hobbes). The book ends with the boundaries and possible extensions of the model.

The theory describes several *polities* and analogous *common worlds,* each of which contains an idea about how the social world should be, and thus a specific measure of good and bad as well as a logic of action. The foundation of each of these orders is a *common good* (Beamish/ Biggart in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017; Moody/ Thévenot in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000; Lafaye/ Thévenot in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017) or a *higher common principle* (B&Th 66): arguments point to one of these *common goods,* and *common goods* in themselves are essential and cannot be justified. There is agreement about the general legitimacy of the *common good* as a measure of good, of their general value as a principle of action (e.g., a spatial plan should be based on the expertise of the planning profession; it is good if local business thrives).

Each of the *polities* or *common worlds* contains an ideal depiction of how the world and how relationships work; it contains a measure for the worth of persons, objects, and arrangements and thus assigns status. The *polities* or *common worlds* also describe how to act and what one should do to increase one's own status. Each *polity* or *common world* recognizes different *beings* (which may be persons, objects, or arrangements) as relevant. In their analysis, B&Th use thick descriptions to characterize each *polity* or *common world*; however, these thick descriptions are structured by recurring sets of categories, such as: Higher common principle, state of worthiness, human dignity, form of evidence, investment formula, mode of expression of judgement, or state of deficiency. The thick descriptions are structured by marginalia, which name the category at the center of the respective passage.

Disagreement can come up about which common good and *common world* are most relevant in the present situation; or about whether a specific course of action is conducive

to the respective *common good.* This formulation of the *common good* resonates well with the definition of values in moral anthropology (Robbins in: Fassin (ed.) 2012): they rank objects, people, or actions into hierarchies of good and less good, and they organize action into realizing the goal that the respective value sets. Thus, each *common good* is an essential last reason incommensurable with the other *common goods* (Beamish/ Biggart in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017: 193). Action and justification have to reference *common goods* (B&Th 37f).

As unit of analysis, B&Th propose to look at *situations* instead of actors or structures (chapter 3.4.1). A *situation* consists of persons, objects, and arrangements. It can be 'pure' in the sense that it is clearly subject to one specific order, or there can be a combination of orders at play within it. The more orders come together in one situation, the more complex and unreadable the situation becomes for the persons involved: The rules for acting are not clear anymore, nor are the objectives for action or the standards of assessing status and worth. Object of analysis are arguments that persons make in statements of criticism or justification: To be effective, an argument has to connect to a *common good.*

B&Th describe operations in how persons refer to orders or engage them critically: most prominently, there is *testing*, which determines the worth and status of persons within one order; *unveiling*, which is a highlighting of objects which do not belong to the prevalent order and leads to an accentuation that the world is more complex than one order; *clashes*, which are conflicts about which order is dominant in the given situation; as well as several operations of laying differences between orders aside.

The researcher's or external expert's evaluation is as bound up within the set of *polities/ common worlds* as everybody else's. It is thus no more accurate or falser than the assessments by actors in the field. Researchers may be employing a different *order* than the other persons in the situation, i.e., another filter through which to decide which elements are important in the given situation, and what constitutes a good outcome or a bad one. However, the researcher's assessment of the *worthiness* of a situation cannot be any more valid or more correct than that of the people acting in the situation. This last postulate points to the complexity of the real world, which cannot be understood exhaustively by actors or by a researcher. It leads B&Th to call for a naïve reading of the data: take evaluative statements at face value, do not look for the personal interest-agenda behind it (Diaz-Bone in: Diaz-Bone (ed.) 2011: 33).

3.2.2   Boundaries of the framework

B&Th have repeatedly made the case that what they developed is not another grand comprehensive social theory ('Gesellschaftstheorie'), but an analytical framework for specific situations, to be applied for a specific end (Bogusz 2010: 88). The authors themselves formulated clear-cut boundaries for their framework: *Polities/ common worlds* which do not recognize the common humanity of all people, such as Eugenics, do exist in the real world, but they are not legitimate within the model of *Sociology of Conventions*, since they preclude

the possibility that persons invest and thereby change their *state of worth*. They also state that situations in which there is violence or the threat of violence cannot be analyzed within the framework, since such situations preclude open exchanges of arguments. Thus, they postulate perfectly democratic settings.

Another boundary of the model are operations which evade the need for justification: Private arrangements, in which the parties to the arrangements only look to their benefits and disregard society at large; positions rooted in love for another being, which do not hold up to argumentation but are nevertheless sincere; or the use of power to bring an argument to a conclusion.[29] B&Th also recognize that there is an *order* in which personal benefit and self-love trump the recognition of social order and *common worlds.* For this, they refer to Nietzsche's nihilism, which in their analysis is like a *polity/ common world* in its own right, with the exception that at its core, there is no *common good* but everybody's love for one's own life.

B&Th explicitly recognize that use of power and violence exist. However, they maintain that instead of assuming that arguments and disagreements are always ended on the basis of nihilism, social science should look at concrete constellations and determine the mode settlement: Has the better argument or a compromise ended the disagreement or a threat of violence or of use of power? Do all parties in the conflict sincerely refer to *common goods* in their argumentation, or is there somebody who is just striving for their own advantage? The tendency of much research to a priori assume a nihilist or private arrangement-mode of conflict solution is one of B&Th's core criticisms against social science and a significant motivation for putting forward the model of *Sociology of Conventions.*

Almost all of the boundaries to the model which B&Th discuss are relevant to my analysis. China is an authoritarian one-Party state, and spatial planning is an important area of state activity. Decisions will be taken by the politically powerful and not by mutual agreement. There certainly are questions that cannot be asked and arguments that should not be made concerning policy and the state. However, I am not as interested in final decisions as I am in the arguments that have been exchanged in the course of formulating a spatial plan. As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, in discussions about plans, usually all actors shared the objective of producing a good plan. Nevertheless, the measure of what a 'good' plan is may have varied and the motivations behind making a good plan may have been different.

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[29] Friedland (2013: 42) observes that the order of the family is curiously devoid of love and protection and mainly filled by responsibility and deference. He thus demonstrates a gap in the theory with regard to affects and emotional bonds which shape relationships between people, especially within families, among friends, or in intimate relationships. Boltanski accounts for this in the earlier work *Love and Justice as competences* (1990/2012); cf. also Susen (2014): There are different regimes of action, of which justification is only one (the one in which actions take place in public space and one has to be prepared to justify oneself), another one is love. In the regime of action of love, empathy and feeling for the person standing in front of oneself guide action, not the necessity of justification in the public domain. Therefore, emotions and love as the underlying logics of action are excluded from the aspects of the framework that I am working with. Since I am looking at the state and at professional interactions, however, I would argue that this particular blind spot is not as central to my application of *sociology of conventions* as are the aspects discussed above.

3.2.3 Scientific context

'On Justification' (Boltanski/ Thévenot 1991/2006) is counted among the major works of the school of French Pragmatism or, in another denomination, the *Sociology of Conventions.* This school of thought has been established in distinction from the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, emphasizing that their social environment does not determine people's thinking and evaluations, that rules, norms, and structures are always incomplete, and that there always exists a great variety of logics and conventions on which to base one's actions (Diaz-Bone in: Diaz-Bone (ed.) 2011: 11-24). Much of the empirical material and research that informed 'On Justification' stems from the field of business. This is owed to the interdisciplinary collaboration between Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. While Boltanski studied sociology with Bourdieu, Thévenot's background is in business and organization studies. Traces of both fields of study are perceptible in the theory: There is explicit criticism of Bourdieu and of critical social theory, and this clearly stems from the field of sociology; at the same time, the theory does not recognize structure and agency, as sociology would typically do, but persons who have to navigate situations. Accordingly, the theory has been received in both fields (e.g., Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017 in business and organization studies; Susen/ Turner (eds.) 2014 in sociology; Diaz-Bone (ed.) 2011a in sociology and anthropology).[30]

Sociology of Conventions is a theory of critique; it has been designed to analyze constellations of criticism and argument. What sets the framework apart from other social theories which know multiple alternative modes of coordination or measurement of status, such as Luhmann's system theory or Bourdieu's theory of fields, is that in each of the different dimensions, persons do not strive for their own advantage, for resources, or for power.[31] In B&Th's theory, at the roots of disagreements are questions regarding ascriptions of worthiness in a situation. Persons do strive for status within B&Th's framework – but this striving is not directed at power and benefit, but at a level of generality, i.e., at excellence in those *polities/ common worlds* which matter most to the person. B&Th's framework proposes a

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[30] Reception in English- and German-speaking social sciences has been impacted strongly by the fact that Boltanski's subsequent book 'The New Spirit of Capitalism' (1999 in French, 2003 in German and 2005 in English, together with Eve Chiapello) was published before 'On Justification' (1991 in French, 2006 in English, 2007 in German). In that work, Boltanski and Chiapello show how capitalism has produced a new *order of worth* and coordination, that of project-based work. For this reason, Boltanski's work has been interpreted for a long time as belonging to the body of critical analyses of capitalism.

[31] Both Luhmann's system theory and Bourdieu's theory of fields have the capacity to describe policy decisions in terms of what is most accepted in different areas of discourse, or show how the actors involved hustle for influence, and resources in a variety of dimensions. Looking at the Powerpoint presentation that I described in the beginning of this chapter, these theories could explain how the actors who developed the policy expect to gain status through construction, or through preservation of local culture, or effective protection of the environment. However, neither of the two theories could explain whether the people engaged in planning think that construction, preservation of local culture, or effective protection of the environment are legitimate objectives; whose interests they think that count; or what they want to contribute to society through the plan.

Additionally, in Bourdieu's and Luhmann's theorizing, conflicts between different sets of rules need to be resolved in either-or-decisions or through the search of a smaller common denominator. In a theory about *orders of worth*, such tensions and frictions appeal to people's critical capacity and set free their productive and imaginative potential; cf. Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury (2012); Stark (2017: 387-389).

focused perspective on particular empirical constellations of disagreement and reasoned argumentation. Thus, I do not describe values that are inherent to the persons or actors, but *orders of worth* brought up in argumentation and communication to justify a position.

3.2.4   General fit to my requirements and how I apply the theory

Boltanski and Thévenot intended *Sociology of Conventions* as a tool to analyze instances of criticism or dispute and to describe how actors manage to think out of the box. As the theory's application, the authors envisaged analyzes of instances of criticism, in which the *polities* and *common worlds* they described are referenced in order to group arguments into categories and relate these arguments to larger systems of meaning and valuation. In this way, the *orders of worth* they described would be used to explain the arguments brought forward. Such an application would contribute to the theory by adding more detail and new angles to the descriptions of *polities* and *common worlds* as well as more detail to the understanding of typical criticisms or supports between pairs of orders. The other analytical focus suggested by B&Th is on the solution of disagreement: Which sorts of compromises do actors reach, and what does this say about relationships between the orders in question?

I do not apply the theory in this way but instead, utilize its metatheoretical structure and fill it with new content. In doing so, the fundamental conceptualizations and postulates of B&Th's *Sociology of Conventions*-framework fit well with my analytical requirements for distilling objectives and ideal imaginations of people working in and with local government. As a theory of critique and justification, analyzing the different ideals and attributions of worthiness behind arguments, it guides the researcher's gaze away from the personal or particular interest (that the actors may also pursue) and away from power structures. Instead, it helps focus on the underlying *common goods* that inform and legitimize the various positions and the different logics or grammars of choice that structure *orders of worth*.[32]

Centrally, the framework provides a solid conceptualization of a variety of grammars of evaluation between persons switch reflexively, rooted in thorough modeling of how the social world is assumed to work. At the same time, I fully endorse the naïve reading of data that B&Th require as well as the analytical and heuristic concepts they employ. I therefore will use the structure of the framework while filling it with *orders of worth* and their descriptions, which I derived from the data. *Sociology of Conventions* thus allows me to trace the values and ideals that enter the processes of devising plans to cope with the complex problems that the locality faces and that comprise attractive promises for the locality's future.

B&Th formulated *Sociology of Conventions* as a theory of social activism and political critique, looking explicitly at constellations of social criticism. This is not how I am using it:

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[32] A focus on power structures and institutions would of course be equally valid and interesting. On the one hand, however, research on local governments in China has already described many of the dynamics of power and particular interest that I encountered in the field, and there is much more to add to the state of the art if I turn the gaze around to values and *common goods*. On the other hand, this is what I want this research to do – I want to put ideas and positive motivations center stage instead of pushing them to the margins of the story I tell.

I am not analyzing political critique, but the processes in which policy decisions are being made. Moreover, B&Th's analysis uses purely European and predominantly French sources. Therefore, in the context of my project, a validation of the framework for the Chinese context would be necessary if I were to apply the *common worlds* as B&Th have described them.

With conceptual support from the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012), I therefore turn the application of B&Th's theory on its head (chapter 3.4): Instead of explaining arguments and operations in terms of orders that have been identified in advance, I look at arguments and discussions in order to identify and describe orders which are relevant in this specific empirical field. Thus, I do not describe relationships and conflicts between the *common worlds* identified and analyzed by B&Th. Instead, I utilize the basic structure of the framework and its analytical categories in order to identify and describe five *orders of worth* in spatial planning in Sichuan: 'planning as a craft,' 'planning as regulation and public provision,' 'planning as a business,' 'planning for development and growth,' and 'planning for ecology and civilization.'

3.3   Applicability of *Sociology of Conventions* to spatial planning in China

Let us return briefly to the beginning of this chapter. I described scenic illustrations and the conceptual renderings of a tourism business concept in the Powerpoint presentation of a spatial plan for Tiger township. There, I introduced the general research interest of this dissertation: which ideas and attributions of worthiness, i.e., *orders of worth*, inform the choices involved in drawing up these particular visions for the future of the town? The answers to this question, I have argued, need to work with the complexities and technical indeterminacies involved in spatial planning, i.e., with the fact that solutions to planning problems have to grow out of values and imaginations about the future because there cannot be a perfect solution to these problems. Therefore, my research about spatial planning focuses on how persons involved with the Chinese local state imagine the future of the respective localities.

B&Th offer a framework for describing alternative ideal imaginations and evaluations of worthiness, which are structured in analogous ways and are not ranked in a hierarchy. Based on B&Th, I identified *orders of worth* that characterize my empirical field inductively. Thus, I have not followed the empirical application that B&Th originally envisaged but only utilized their theory's metatheoretical skeleton. I follow the architecture of multiple, sometimes conflicting *orders of worth* whose depiction is structured by descriptive categories. The necessary reformulations to the framework are based on the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012), which I will introduce in more detail below.

Using an iterative process and alternating between inductive and deductive analysis, I have identified and described the five *orders of worth* of:

- Spatial planning as a craft,
- Spatial planning as regulation and public provision,
- Spatial planning as a business,
- Spatial planning for development and growth, and
- Spatial planning for ecology and civilization.

These *orders of worth* will be presented in thick descriptions in the two analytical interludes of this dissertation, structured around categories of description which were derived from B&Th and TOL. In the intermittent empirical chapters, I will pay much attention to the institutional environment in which spatial planning operates.

In the following sections, I will consider general questions of applicability of *Sociology of Conventions* to spatial planning in China. I also introduce the *Institutional Logics Perspective* and explain how I adapt B&Th's framework on this basis.

3.3.1 Does spatial planning in China qualify for analysis through the lens of *Sociology of Conventions*?

Even though the constellation of *polities/ common worlds* and their contents as B&Th propose them may not apply to a Chinese cultural context, the basic structure of the theory remains plausible:

> *Every differentiated society may be qualified as 'complex,' in the sense that its members have to possess the competence needed to identify the nature of a situation and to navigate situations arising from different worlds. (B&Th 217)*

Chinese society, with the social ruptures and political changes it has experienced in the last century, with its more recent history of rapid industrialization and urbanization, which also brought about changes in lifestyles, can undoubtedly be described as differentiated[33] and as highly complex.

According to B&Th, in a complex world, people have learned to switch between different *polities/ common worlds*, each of which distributes social status according to its own criteria, and each of which proposes a different ideal imagination of the world. Persons can switch between these orders to evaluate situations, arrangements, or actions – thereby, persons are endowed with a critical capacity. This is an apt description of the regular meetings at the planning company, in which spatial plans were assessed: [34] Different measures of the

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[33] B&Th (217) do not provide any reference or definition for the term 'differentiated' – therefore I use it in the way systems theory defines and applies it.

[34] When talking about applicability of the theory to spatial planning, I frequently refer to my data and the observations I made during fieldwork. It is highly unconventional to make arguments based on empirical data in a theory chapter. However, given that there is no obvious connection between the theory and the empirical field which I apply it to, and given that the theory in its original formulation is deeply rooted in the French context, arguments based in my own data seem to be the most straightforward and convincing way of making the case that theory and data fit together, after all.

worth and degree of perfection were applied to each plan. However, as different senior planners gave their assessments of the plan and discussed the project team's work, it was always clear that an equilibrium had to be found between business, policy, and professional objectives in the planning world. These and many other empirical constellations have shown that the persons I encountered during my fieldwork knew about the complexity of planning problems and that they had learned to switch between different registers of evaluation.

Therefore, the notion of multiple *orders of worth* between which people can switch and which inform the objectives of action and evaluations is a useful framework for analyzing planning. This dissertation also adopts the architecture of *polities/ common worlds* as well as the ways in which persons relate to them. I do not, however, take over the denominations of the six *polities/ common worlds* which B&Th describe, nor their contents. Downscaling the model to the meso-scale, I empirically identify and describe the *orders of worth* for the field of spatial planning in China.

The application of the theory's structure without its contents implies that analysis will not build upon the existing descriptions of *orders of worth* provided by B&Th. Every second chapter of *On Justification*, after all, contains empirical descriptions of the polities, the *common worlds*, and then overviews of the critiques that might be brought forward from one world to another and how compromises between worlds may look like. For these latter aspects, B&Th take the effort of looking at each possible pair of *common worlds* twice, once asking for possible conflicts, and once asking for compromises and mutual support. Applications of the theory whose empirical fields are located in Western Europe or Northern America directly utilize these descriptions of *orders of worth* and add only detail or specification for the respective empirical field (e.g., contributions in Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017). In this regard, the theory relieves researchers from the need to empirically chart every dimension of the different *orders of worth* mean for their research object and for their interlocutors in the field. The approach in this dissertation, however, is such a charting of relevant *orders of worth*. The analytical focus is on arguments and especially on differences in opinion, since in the lines of reasoning, references to *orders of worth* can be expected.

Even in 'On Justification,' B&Th (71) state that their list of *polities* and *common worlds* is not exhaustive. In subsequent publications, both Boltanski and Thévenot separately identify additional *common worlds*: the world of project work (Boltanski/ Chiapello 2007) and the world of environmental protection (Lafaye/ Thévenot in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017). If the list of *polities/ common worlds* provided by B&Th is not exhaustive and if the identification of additional orders within the framework is acceptable, then, by extension, we can assume that other orders are smaller in scale than the society-wide *polities/ common worlds* described by B&Th. This legitimates my approach of inductively identifying *orders of worth* in the empirical field where I am working.

B&Th's empirical source for filling the *polities* and *common worlds* with content are works of European philosophy and business guidebooks. Thus, the empirical basis for the

orders of worth is culturally highly specific and cannot legitimately be applied to empirical material gathered in China. In their comparison of French and US discourses about why nature and environment deserve protection, Thévenot/ Moody/ Lafaye (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000) reformulate the contents of *orders of worth* for the US context. It is safe to assume that the differences between the empirical basis for B&Th's *polities* and *common worlds* to the social and cultural context of an administration in China are more extensive than to a democratic discourse in the US. This requires a meticulous examination of the degree to which the framework can be legitimately applied to of spatial planning in China.

3.3.2 Blind spots: Power and status

Institutions and power

In a comparison between *Sociology of Conventions* and the *Institutional Logics Perspective,* Friedland states that the social world described by the latter 'is a world of purposes and the powers they found before it is a world of powers and the purposes that legitimate them' (Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 39). B&Th, Friedland argues, downplay the 'register of powers' (Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 40) that are inherent in mechanisms of valuation.[35] In contrast, literature on the Chinese state and on spatial planning in China usually takes the institutions of the Chinese state and the dynamics of power and interest either as its focus or as an explaining variable (chapter 1.2). Therefore, there is a conceptual gap between spatial planning, which is characterized by steep hierarchies and political considerations, and a theory that has no concepts for structures of power. In this dissertation, this gap is bridged by the two empirical chapters.

Friedland (in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013; also Wagner 2011: 273f) argues that B&Th cannot show how orders and rules distribute power in accordance with status or worth. The analytical gaze of the theory focusses on situations, which are arrangements of persons, objects, and procedures; the institutions (i.e., norms and rules) and the wider social configuration which have arranged the situation escape the analysis. Thereby, it is impossible to show how status or the norms inscribed in *orders of worth* are imbibed with power and which effects this has.

> *Their polities do not admit the exercise of power, let alone violence. [...] For them, in this exercise, power is neither structural, nor systemic, never inherent in mechanisms and operations that do not pass through justification and decision*
> *(Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 43).*

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[35] I address the blindness of the theory to distribution of power and resources and to the impact of institutional arrangements on decision-making in detail, not because I work with it, but because this is where my approach differs considerably from the state of the debate on spatial planning and on local policy-making in China. From the perspective of these discourses, my angle in analysis may seem highly counter-intuitive – this is why I feel the need to demonstrate that I have given sufficient consideration to mechanisms of political power and distribution of benefits.

Thus, the theory does not cover the effects of power and institutions. Spatial planning is a state activity, one in which the resource 'space' is distributed among groups with different interests. The distribution of decision-making power between different social groups would be problematic in any context; in the non-democratic context I am looking at, there is a domineering political hierarchy that tends to overrule other considerations. There is a danger that my use of *Sociology of Conventions* blinds me towards the institutional arrangements of the state that distributes power and roles in spatial planning as well as to the positions of power that persons in the empirical field hold and how they make use of this power.

I will account for these blind spots through the structure of this dissertation: Analytical interludes, which provide analytical accounts of *orders of worth*, alternate with more descriptive empirical chapters, which stay very close to the data. These empirical accounts are informed by separate theories more attuned to power and structures. The empirical chapter on the administrative structure of spatial planning, therefore, is based on the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework.* The empirical chapter on the profession of spatial planning is informed by Feng Xin's (2016) work on roles of spatial planners in China and by Xie Tian's (2010) work on professional roles, subjectivities and the identity crisis of architects in China.

Excursus: Personal status

Even though my analytical focus does not lie on the distribution and relationships of power and status, I cannot ignore the authority and influence that arise from a person's status within orders; even less can I discount how authority shapes statements of arguments and evaluations.

The concept that B&Th use to describe differences in status of persons is *state of worth* (B&Th 76-79, 132f). The *state of worth* of a person is measured according to their embodiment of generality, i.e., the closer a person is to the ideal of the respective *polity/ common world*, the higher is their personal status. Persons with a higher *state of worth* contribute more to the *common good*; thus, their being worthy brings benefits to everyone in their surroundings. This is contrasted with a state of deficiency, in which people do not strive to contribute to the *common good*, but instead enjoy private (selfish) happiness.[36] One central quality of the concept of *state of worth* is that every person, in principle, can achieve a *state of worth* through devoting their energy to this order and engaging in the appropriate investment. For each *polity/ common world*, these investments are described in the *investment formula,* for example, engaging in competitive behavior in the market world or the rejection of selfishness in the domestic world (B&Th 80, 171).

There is a contradiction inherent in this description of *state of worth*, which comes to the fore, for example, in the section describing the domestic world (B&Th 164-178): worthy

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[36] Since there are multiple *orders of worth* with different *common goods*, what is selfish behavior and thus a state of deficiency in one order might well be a high *state of worth* in another order. For example, a young graduate might be spending long hours at the office, learning a lot about the tools and handicraft of spatial planning, which endows her with worth in spatial planning; her friends and family, however, might complain about neglect.

persons are either those with a high rank (i.e., persons, usually men, in patriarchal positions), but also persons who exhibit traditional attributes: they are caring, loyal, punctual, they show deference, and in general act properly depending on their relationship to the person they are facing (their spouse, a visitor, or a higher-ranking person). However, the authors do not clarify the relationship between a high rank in the domestic order and the embodiment of behaviors and attitudes valued. In my opinion, there is no immediate relationship: A child or a mother might have all the attributes described, but purely on the basis of their age or their gender, they will not attain a high status in the patriarchal domestic *polity/ common world* as described by B&Th. In the section describing the domestic world, the authors hint at this contradiction inherent in the concept of *state of worth*, but they do not elaborate or acknowledge it.

In my understanding, this tension between rank and worth has to be integrated into the model: rank is conferred by the institutional environment. It provides a person with access to resources to enhance their rank independently from their moral behavior. Worth, in contrast, comes from actively exhibiting the attributes and behaviors valued in a *polity/ order of worth*. Even though it would be nice if success (i.e., high rank) came through the incorporation of values, and even though it sometimes does, this is not necessarily the case. Besides, persons may change their behavior and their morals faster than they lose rank and authority. Conversely, persons may exhibit attitudes that are perfectly in line with the *higher common principle*, but still do not have a high rank due to their young age, lack of experience, or other traits unconnected with the respective *polity/ common world*. Examples from spatial planning in China include corrupt officials, who have a high rank in government, but whose actions run counter to the discourse about a state that provides for the population and protects them; also the younger generations of spatial planners who, because of their only short career, but also because they chose the planning discipline at a time when more planners were educated than the market could take, cannot possibly have a high status in the planning company or speak from a position of authority in discussions.

Orders of worth leave space for persons to take on different roles – in a family, there are parents, children, pets. In a government, there are different officials and their ranks. In the planning company, people stand in different spots in their careers, and they specialize in different planning tasks or areas of expertise. Even though these roles are connected more to the institutional setting than to the *order of worth*, they are bound up inseparably with the respective *order of worth* (Friedland 2012), since from each role, somewhat different behavior is expected: The mother can reach a *state of worth* by caring for the family, the kids by being filial, and the father by providing for the family and taking decisions in its best interest, to cite the rather conservative domestic *common world* described by B&Th as an example. Similarly, planning to a certain extent is understood as a craft that has to be learned practically among professional planners. Therefore, a very different attitude is expected from someone who just entered the profession compared to an older and renowned expert.

How to resolve this tension between rank and worth? In my application of the model, I will confine the concept of *state of worth* to those persons whose actions and behavior manifest the *higher common principle* of the respective *order of worth* and contribute to the respective *common good* – irrespective of their formal rank or position. Thus, a person is *worthy* if they fill their role well. Rank, in contrast, is conferred by institutions or even personal connections and thus is external to the analysis. Power or authority, which I understand as the prerogative to make decisions and make statements without having to justify them, can be rooted in both (or either-or) rank and *state of worth*. In order to somewhat externalize the influences of power and authority from the analysis, analysis focusses on arguments and justifications brought forward instead of the final decisions in planning (chapter 3.4.3)

3.3.3   Applicability: Critique

Sociology of Conventions in B&Th's formulation is a theory about critique. The authors even assume democratic settings in which each person feels safe to argue their opinions, so much so that B&Th neglected to conceptualize power and its effects within their model. The theoretical framework developed in 'On Justification,' and even more so the framework and analysis in Boltanski/ Chiapello's (2007) 'The New Spirit of Capitalism,' are explicitly about how critical capacity comes about. The authors show the different kinds of positions that can be taken, how persons and organizations negotiate these positions, and how they change.[37]

According to the framework, in typical situations, one *order of worth* prevails. Therefore, interpretations, evaluations, distribution of worth, and actions are oriented towards this order. Criticism may then be directed against this situation by reference to another *order of worth,* which offers a different reading and re-interpretation of the situation (B&Th 127-133). I apply this framework to the workings of an authoritarian and very hierarchical state; in the institutional arrangements that I am looking at, it is clear that decisions are being taken by the politically senior persons and that there are boundaries of which opinions can be stated.

Nevertheless, in my empirical work, I found that planning processes are filled with discussions about what in B&Th's terminology is called the *worth* of different contents of plans: What are the arguments for or against a green belt between the old town center and the housing development areas? Should we accept that some people have to be relocated if we improve car access to the town center? There are many similar questions. They all involve deliberation about the importance of certain issues and how to address them. There are thus, in B&Th's terminology, many instances in which clarification is sought about the *orders of worth* at stake and about the relative worth of alternative arrangements in different orders.

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[37] The latter two aspects are modelled much more extensively in Boltanski/Chiapello (1999/2005), which I do not include in the theoretical model I am working with.

Persons involved in the planning process engage in *tests*, *unveilings*, *clashes*, and other critical operations to justify their points of view and convince the person with the power to make a decision.

In order to maintain legitimacy (and this has been shown by several authors, e.g., Gilley/ Holbig 2010; Heberer/ Schubert (eds.) 2009), authorities in China need to take the public, its needs, and views into account. Despite authoritarianism, state action must be justified. Acknowledging a diversity of *orders* helps understand such justifications and legitimations. Vice versa, those justifications and legitimations are grounded in orders that matter for everyday life. Moreover, when taking the individual administrator or politician into focus, I maintain that it is improbable (though not impossible) that they are simply guided by a relativist/nihilist pursuit of money and power. B&Th's conceptualization of *common good* makes it thinkable that cadres also strive for societal goals.

I am not using B&Th's framework so as to point out instances of social or political critique in China. In contrast to what B&Th envision, I am also not looking at situations that are in the present, but at a process that is doubly oriented towards the future: Not only is the finalized plan a formulation or maybe even a promise about the future of the locality. Moreover, I am looking at the processes of formulating plans, which means the plans themselves are still in the future tense. The statements and arguments that I analyze are rarely directed at the situation of plan-making. Usually, the object of discussion is the product of the collaboration within the situation. Therefore, I am not analyzing critique of situations that exist, but instead contributions, suggestions, and differing opinions about the contents that will be included in a spatial plan about the locality's future.[38] In my fieldwork, I found these suggestions and contributions to take a very similar form as the model of critique proposes. *Sociology of Conventions* allows me to depict the public goods and social objectives which those involved in the planning process have in mind when making such decisions about the future.

3.3.4   Applicability: Democratic discussions

B&Th postulate constellations in which persons interact and exchange their views in open, egalitarian, and democratic discussions (B&Th 37) as a precondition for analysis. However, as the focus on political critique, this restriction can be somewhat softened: The settings for discussing spatial plans are designed to enable exchanging views, ideas, and concepts concerning the task at hand. Moreover, the introduction of the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (chapter 3.3.5) allows me to soften the postulate of egalitarian, democratic discussion further.

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[38] It has to be considered that spatial plans themselves are not necessarily treated as a roadmap for local policy-making, but they may be simply a bureaucratic exercise, they may be used only to impress political superiors and higher authorities, or as arguments for specific investment projects. This is the reason why I look more at the planning processes than at the plans themselves.

B&Th qualify their position, stating there are differences between persons' status, so that their opinions, too, are attributed different degrees of authority and weight (B&Th 38).[39] Differences in status and power notwithstanding, persons must have the opportunity to voice their critique without fear for their safety. Therefore, in B&Th's theory, even the threat of violence precludes the application of the model. There are, of course, other threats that would hinder people from voicing their views; in my study, the most important examples are disadvantages or setbacks in one's career and cuts to one's income.

In the spatial planning discussions that I witnessed, there was no threat of physical violence. Nevertheless, conversations and discussions were deeply steeped in hierarchy and relationships of power and dependency, and there is by no means a common ideal of an equal and democratic society. Younger professional planners especially were under pressure at their jobs, they were paid according to their performance on a month-by-month basis and competition was high. There were thus many reasons not to freely speak one's mind.

However, the discussions and meetings that I analyze are not of a political character, in the sense that – despite being all about policy-making – discussions were framed as technical. In these constellations, the planners, as hired experts, have the professional task to contribute ideas, concepts, and suggestions to a spatial plan. They have the authority to do so based on their professional background. The same is true for the political leadership and administrative staff involved in the planning process: even though in their roles, they were bound by various hierarchies and dependencies, within the planning process, they were supposed to contribute and listen to ideas, suggestions, and assessments. Therefore, I argue that, for a spatial plan in the making, the precondition of an open and democratic discussion holds up sufficiently. This would not be true, however, if any planner or administrative staff would voice their views about the setting of the discussion or if they tried to make political arguments about the contents of the plan.

Below, I reformulate the framework with support of the *Institutional Logics Perspective* by Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury (2012). The *Institutional Logics Perspective* has been developed and applied within the field of organizational research. Organizations and, especially, firms and enterprises are often not democratic and do not necessarily aspire to a democratic structure. Therefore, in that framework, democratic and equal relationships do not constitute a precondition, but rather one possible form that *institutional logics* may take (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012: 64f). By introducing this body of literature, the framework developed below will further soften the postulate of open and democratic discussion.

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[39] They portray this factor as standing in a continuous tension with the absolute deal-breaker, the assumption of a common humanity (B&Th 36-38). In their argument, the whole model only works if no group of people is denied worth on ground of their descent or of hereditary traits; their example of such an illegitimate order is Eugenics. I am not sure to what degree this precondition has to be applied rigidly, given the fact that Western European societies are plagued by racism and other group-based discriminations and exclusions. For this reason, and because I think that the precondition holds not significantly more or less in spatial planning and public administration in China than in France or Western Europe, I do not discuss this precondition in detail.

3.3.5 *Institutional logics* as model for downscaling Sociology of Conventions

Confining my application of the theory to the structure of B&T's framework without its contents means that I have to identify the relevant *orders of worth* and fill them with empirical descriptions as far as possible. For this reason, the *orders of worth* I describe can only claim validity within my empirical field; it also means that my presentation of *orders of worth* will not be grounded in philosophy and historical thought as B&Th have done it.

My adaptation of B&Th's framework is guided by the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012, hereafter: TOL for the authors or IL for the theory). Stemming from organizational studies and institutional theory, this framework utilizes the same basic structure of alternative systems of valuation and interpretation that inform the reading of constellations and the choice of action. Very similar to *Sociology of Conventions*, IL

> assumes that rationality in institutional analysis is theorized and measured as a variable of the different institutional orders, a key distinguishing factor from neoinstitutional theory's binary view of rationality. (TOL 66)

IL takes the organization as unit of analysis. *Institutional logics* in this framework are relevant at the organizational level and have to be identified empirically.

Much like B&Th's *polities* or *common worlds*, TOL identify and describe a set of seven society-wide relevant *institutional logics*: family, community, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation. In their distribution and content, these seven *logics* are very similar to the *polities/ common worlds* proposed by B&Th. However, IL conceptualizes *logics* or orders much more flexibly that B&Th do; *logics'* concrete descriptions, they maintain, need to be achieved empirically in each specific case. Empirical work should, in their view, strive to describe *logics* as 'ideal-types' (TOL 52-57), abstracting from more concrete contextual variations. From the many examples TOL cite, it becomes clear that the contents of *logics* will vary between empirical field sites; moreover, each organizational or institutional field will contain its own *logics*. Thus, this theory provides a skeleton for describing institutional orders within a defined field. Besides, at the levels of the organization and the individual, IL offers a wide variety of conceptualizations for the relationship between structure and agency, change of institutions and institutional logics, and agency.

Thus, while IL and SC are very similar in their basic structure, their respective thinking about different levels of analysis is decidedly different. In Boltanski and Thévenot, societal polities and worlds are rooted in history and culture. There is no conceptualization for local or contextual variation of contents of the worlds. In contrast, TOL see *logics* as specific to more bounded institutional contexts; they see organizational or field-level *logics* at work. Concrete contents of *logics* have to be determined in each empirical case; TOL only suggest categories for describing *logics*. And not only do the authors see contextual or local variation,

but they also focus especially on change in *logics* and the role of actors to bring about change. This aspect that not considered in B&Th[40] and would also be at odds with their basing orders and worlds in 19th-century philosophical thought.

In contrast to B&Th, TOL do not set democratic and equal relationships as a precondition, but rather as one possible form that *institutional logics* may take (TOL 64f). Applications of IL are usually about the strategies that organizations or enterprises select, about their strategic priorities and objectives, or about how they generate innovation. They show that pluralism and openness to differing logics and views strengthen an organization's innovative capacity (e.g., Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013). As I show in chapter 5, by requiring the participation of a professional planning company or planning institute in the planning process as well as an extended assessment process before the plan is passed into legislation, the planning process in China is designed so as to hear the views of a number of institutional actors and professional planners. Each of these groups of actors is supposed to bring in their respective expertise to ensure the spatial plan's quality. Thus, even though there are differences in status and power as well as dependencies between the different parties involved in a planning process, and even though there are limits for what can be said in such meetings, everybody involved is supposed to bring in their views and opinions.

I follow TOL in their conceptualization that *orders/logics* can be at play both at the macro- and the meso-level as well as in the conceptualization that *orders/logics* are not necessarily as deeply rooted in history and philosophy as B&Th propose.[41] I also adopt their approach of filling in the contents of *orders/logics* according to categories of description formulated in advance and based on the framework. The same set of categories is applied to the description of each *order of worth*, thus providing a stable structure for depicting the analysis' results. This structure makes it possible for me to inductively identify those *orders of worth* which are most relevant to my empirical field, while the presentation of meanings and contents that I encounter in my data within the frame of *orders of worth* is structured rigidly by the descriptive categories developed based on the theoretical framework.

In addition to the flexibility in scale and scope of *orders of worth* which IL offers, the requirements for a democratic setting is much less strict than it is in B&Th's framework. Additionally, in the *Institutional Logics Perspective, logics* are conceptualized to confer power (Friedland 2012). Thus, the most central issues in my application of the theory would be addressed. Therefore, why did I not choose to work with the *Institutional Logics Perspective* instead of *Sociology of Conventions*?

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[40] Change in the constellation of *orders of worth* is modelled in Lafaye/ Thévenot (2017) and in Boltanski/ Chiapello (2007).

[41] Even though the microfoundations of TOL and B&Th take on very different styles respectively, they both posit that actors or persons learn about *orders of worth* through immersion in their social surroundings; they also posit that actors or persons switch between logics/orders either routinely according to context or reflexively. With these very similar microfoundations, transferring conceptualization of orders/logics from one theory to the other is legitimate.

One major difference between the two theories lies in their focus and objective of research. B&Th ask for the valuations and ideals that guide assessments or for argumentation. In contrast, the *Institutional Logics Perspective* and its empirical applications (e.g., Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013) focus on institutional change and on innovations that arise from the tensions and conflicts between different *logics.* In their framework, *logics* are bound very closely to institutions and organizations – multiplicity comes with institutional or organizational contexts meeting each other. In other words, research in IL is mostly interested in the products and effects of differing *logics* and in dynamics between institutional fields. B&Th and their applications, in contrast, look at critique in constellations that are not a priori characterized by a pluralism of positions. They tend towards a backward-looking glance: What are the roots and last rationales of arguments? Where does critical capacity come from? Also, B&Th insist much more clearly and explicitly on *polities/ common worlds* providing normative descriptions of the social world, while in TOL, *institutional logics* may be understood as carriers of meaning, not of evaluation. Both perspectives have their merits. Nevertheless, for my research interest in the ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness, which inform spatial planning, B&Th offer a better fit.

In a comparative discussion of their theory, TOL themselves name the fact that *orders of justification* are conceptualized mostly as enabling, whereas *institutional logics* often emphasize the restricting function of institutions (TOL 101). This difference becomes especially evident when considering the microfoundations of the theories: The extensive micro-modeling of TOL limits occasions and possible scopes of innovation and recombination of *institutional logics* to the question of which *logics* are accessible and can be activated within the actor's mind. In contrast, B&TH's worlds are accessible to anyone given there is a being referring to the respective world present in the given situation. This accessibility opens a wide range of options for action since there are always alternative interpretations and sets of rules available.

While societal, field-level, or organizational *logics* in TOL structure and restrict thinking, B&Th's *polities* and *worlds* are seen as containing a sizeable moral element: the roles, norms, and objectives for action they suggest are all based in *common goods*, that is, in ideas of how society should work. This framework concedes each person the freedom to relate to any world for critical positioning – the actors are not bound by any unconscious structures whatsoever, but only by social conventions and material circumstances embedded in the orders. In a nutshell, while TOL offer useful tools for downscaling *orders of worth* and for my general application of the concept of *orders of worth*, the style and focus of B&Th's theory correspond much better to my interest in the evaluation of spatial planning concepts and ideas.

3.4   Operationalization: Adapting *Sociology of Conventions* to Policy-making in China

In the previous chapter, I have critically discussed general applicability and blind spots in applying *Sociology of Conventions* to policy-making in China. I have also introduced the *Institutional Logics Perspective* as a similar theory, which helps me downscale the metatheoretical structure of *Sociology of Conventions* to the meso-level. Following this rationale, I conceptualize *orders of worth* ideals, imaginations, and attributions of worthiness, which are shared by the persons in one context, here spatial planning in Sichuan. With the application of TOL, it is not only sufficient but also necessary to identify and empirically describe *orders of worth* based on the data for the present study.

I strongly subscribe to B&Th's concept of 'person.' They explicitly do not use the concept of 'actor,' but refer to the individuals in their research as 'persons,' avoiding to redact from the complexity of a human being. Persons have the capacity to understand and incorporate *common worlds.* They can determine which order prevails in the situation at hand and how to act accordingly. This constitutes a choice: Persons can choose, based on their own free will, to either routinely follow the *order of worth* which is prevalent in a given situation or to take a step back and reflexively examine the situation from the perspective of another *order of worth.* They freely determine which degree of immersion is adequate (B&Th 144-147, 150f, 232-236).

Persons thereby can articulate critique and change the prevalent assessments of worth in any given situation. In Pernkopf-Konhäusner's (2014: 334f, references Dodier 1993, 557) words, persons have a 'sense of justice.' They have the competencies to determine whether there is a clear convention to be followed and act accordingly, make up a new convention, or (and Pernkopf-Konhäusner does not mention this aspect) to turn to an alternative convention for criticism or support. She cites Dodier (1993: 567) to clarify that persons 'themselves qualify, identify, interpret and explain events' – a competence that they share with the researcher.

This conceptualization is central to my operationalization: Persons are competent to recognize and explain *orders of worth.* I depend on their assessments to identify meanings and objectives. I do not assume that they are caught within courses of action or patterns of behavior, but that they choose to either go with the routine or to criticize it or to look for new ways of doing things.

I also follow both B&Th and TOL in formulating categories of description, which will structure the presentations of the *orders of worth.* The first part of this chapter will establish these descriptive categories. In the second part, I explain how a focus on disagreement and argumentation alleviates many concerns about applicability to policy-making in a field characterized by unequal distribution of power.

3.4.1 Categories: *Common good*, *measure of worth*, *tools and mechanisms*, *state of worth*, and *fall from grace*

For the description and characterization of each *order of worth*, I use a fixed set of categories: *Common good*, *measure of worth*, *tools and mechanisms*, *state of worth*, and *fall from grace*. These categories are compiled from B&Th and from TOL, who both use similar categories. The five categories of description will strictly structure the presentations of *orders of worth* in the interludes.

Both B&Th and TOL provide menus of categories according to which *orders of worth* can be described, and other authors bring in additional categories (e.g., Beamish/ Biggart in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017; Oldenhof/ Postma/ Putters 2014). B&Th (159-211) work a lot with the terminology which is characteristic for each *polity/ common world*: They compile lists of nouns, of adjectives, and of verbs, respectively representing the roles of persons recognized and valued within an order, the relevant beings, worthy states, and the relevant relationships between persons and how to gain worth within the respective order. In addition, there are the categories which describe the value system of the respective *polity/ common world* (*higher common principle; common good; state of worthiness; harmonious figures; the fall*) and categories that describe how worth is measured (test; judgment; evidence; relation of worth). These categories are filled with thick descriptions of the modalities of valuation and the phenomena being valued or despised within one *polity/ common world.*

What are more than fifty pages of thick description in B&Th (159-211) is condensed to a table of just one page in TOL (73). The Y-axis lists the categories for describing *institutional logics* that the authors suggest. Apart from the core description of the logic in the form of an analogy, the categories focus on attributions of meaning and value to arrangements and actions as well as justifications for allocation of status and authority. TOL (56) emphasize that categories for the description of *institutional logics* have to be defined for each research project.

In my project, I do not focus so centrally on justifications of one's actions and evaluations as B&Th do. Nevertheless, unless otherwise stated, the categories in the list below are a selection of those used by B&Th; terminology and definitions here are adaptations of how they describe the categories. The selection of categories aims at facilitating the description of ideal imaginations about the social organization of spatial planning, of its objectives, and measures for their realization:

1) The *Common Good*: This is the description of how society should be. This ideal picture is often represented in the renderings in planning-Powerpoint presentations, such as the one I started this chapter with. However, it can also be found in descriptions of the state, the logics of the planning system, or the ideas laid out in planning regulation. The *common good* will usually be the final point around which arguments center.

With this analytical category, I retrace these ideal imaginations, and they are at the cores of each *order of worth.* It is with regard to the *common good* that actions are planned, persons are attributed status, or evaluations proffered. In the *order of worth* 'planning as a craft,' spatial planning is described as a profession to be learned through experience and dedication, but which also requires a sense of the aesthetic and for spatial relationships. As B&Th (141, also Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 33-35) argue, the *common good* or higher common principles are rarely ever explicitly discussed by persons in the field, and thus, they are challenging to grasp analytically.

2) *Measure of Worth*: These are the varying measures of assessment used within the respective *orders of worth.* To a large part, they will be found in both assessment meetings at local governments and meetings among spatial planners. In this category, I include the criteria used for assessing both spatial plans and the situation on the ground.

 This category directly looks at the assessments of the central object of a planning process and collects the different voices about this object. For example, within the order 'planning as a business,' the objective is to have more money. Spatial plans are valued highly by the planning company if it makes a lot of money without investing much effort. In contrast, from the local government's perspective, an economical price for a high-quality plan has a higher assessment. Assessment of worth is more difficult in the order 'planning for ecology and civilization,' since approaches and methods of protecting heritage and environment are not yet well-established (Melcher 2017). This means, discussions about valid *measures of worth* might characterize this *order of worth.*

3) *Tools and Mechanisms*: This category details the sequences of events and the measures that are envisaged within an *order of worth* in order to move towards the realization of the *common good.* It is an adaptation of B&Th's category *Investment Formula*, which describes through which efforts and measures a person can raise her status within one *common world.* In the same ways in which each *order of worth* has a specific *common good* at its core, each *order of worth* also proposes a specific explanation about the chains of cause-and-effect that shape the world. Therefore, this category describes the routes of development towards the *common good* that are sketched out within the respective *order of worth* and which measures would propel these processes.

 For example, if we look at the *order of worth* 'planning for ecology and civilization,' more green space and less human intervention into landscape lead to a more natural environment and an increase in the quality of natural resources (such as water or quality of air). Tools to this end are the imposition of bans to land consumption or restriction of construction in certain areas and parks in urban areas. In the *order of worth* 'spatial planning as regulation and public provision,' the *common good* is that the state provides well for the population and, in return, reaps social stability. Accordingly, the mechanisms are, for example, ensuring sustainable and safe construction, providing reliable infrastructure, and balancing regional disparities. Tools to this end are not only effective

regulation of public and private construction but also investments into infrastructure and spatial development policies.

4) *State of Worth*: Turning from spatial plans to the persons involved in planning, this category describes their respective worthiness in the different *orders of worth*. Above, I formulated a distinction between the power and resources a person has on the one hand, and the status and authority this person commands on the other hand. This category describes the latter traits: how well does the person perform as measured according to one specific *order of worth*? How much does he or she contribute to reaching the respective *common good*? This can be assessed by looking at the respect from other persons and how those other persons talk about the person in question in their absence.

   For example, a corrupt government official will not have a high status in the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision.' Planners often saw officials as ignorant in the craft of planning but would give a lot of respect to those who exhibited professional knowledge of spatial planning. Thus, these officials had a relatively better *state of worth* in the order of 'planning as a craft.'

   Included in this category are considerations about which traits and characteristics are evaluated to assess a person's *state of worth* and what a person must do to improve her *state of worth* in a specific *order of worth*. Such information can be gleaned from explanations and justifications of assessments of persons, as well as from a person's explanations of their actions.

5) *Fall from Grace*: This is the counter-scenario, the description of states of the world or of persons' actions and status that are the opposite of working towards the realization of the *Common good*. Thus, a *fall from grace* is characterized by deficient *states of worth* or *measures of worth*. However, what might be considered unworthy or a *fall from grace* in one *order of worth* might be entirely in line with another order.

   For example, a professional planner might devote much time and energy to conceptualizing a preservation scheme for the historical town center, but thereby spending too much effort and working hours on the plan itself (low worth in 'planning as a business'), neglecting technical aspects (low worth in 'planning as a craft') or harming the town's opportunities concerning transport, trade, and industry (unclear/debatable worth in 'planning for development').

   There are examples for the category of *fall from grace* which span across most if not all *orders of worth* that I am looking at in this project: those include the stories which one of my interviewees told me about unregulated rural construction ('planning as regulation and public provision') along roads, which did not fulfill standards for public hygiene, safety, and design of facades ('planning as a craft'; 'planning for ecology and civilization'); which, in addition, blocked the land at the backside of the row of houses because now, road access was virtually impossible to install ('planning for development and growth'; interview Ms Deng, FN #94).

These categories structure my analysis, and I fill each of these categories for all the *orders of worth.* Asking the empirical material for instances that shed light on descriptive categories helped me describe the *orders of worth* present in the field of spatial planning in Sichuan. Working with this list of categories was also be helpful insofar as it set the focus on the ideal imaginations of the social world for which plans are being made, with a secondary focus on persons' status.

3.4.2   Achieving applicability through analytical focus on arguments

In the planning processes I witnessed, decision making, in contrast to the discussions at the meetings, was not pluralistic or democratic in any way. Decisions would be taken by the (politically) most senior person. As discussed above, B&Th postulate open and democratic discussions – and this is certainly not the case in my empirical field. Conversations and discussions there were steeped in hierarchy and relationships of power and dependency, and there is by no means a common ideal of an equal and democratic society.

To minimize the distortions by unequal distributions of power and status in the discussions I analyze, the analysis focuses on the positions taken and the suggestions made during the planning process instead of the decisions finally taken. In this approach, I follow Moody/ Thévenot (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000). They analyze arguments and rhetorical strategies in public discourses for and against major public infrastructure investments in the US and France. In both the French and the US contexts, different groups of stakeholders engaged in public campaigns against the infrastructure investments, each of them with their particular positions. While these stakeholder groups formed partial alliances and campaigned in some issues together, in some issues against each other, governments and investors would also engage in public campaigns defending their projects. Moody/ Thévenot's (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000) analysis does not look at the outcomes of campaigns and disagreements. Instead, it focusses on the arguments made and the *orders of worth* that informed the different positions. They demonstrate that arguments must be in line with *common goods* and *orders of worth*: Otherwise, they would lack legitimacy and would not be convincing.

Similarly, Stark (in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017: 387f) suggests looking at instances of tension, friction, and disagreement instead of agreement, compromise, and smooth coordination. This differs from B&Th's focus on situations in which equilibria, consensus, and transparency of situation are the rule and disagreement comes up only in exceptions. Both Moody/ Thévenot (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000) and Stark (in: Cloutier/ Gond/ Leca (eds.) 2017) demonstrate that in argumentation, in spelling out problems, as well as in defense of a position, there is much information about the *orders of worth* which inform the persons involved than in the solutions they eventually find.

Moody/ Thévenot (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000: 294f) also reflect on whether such strategic argumentation can be taken at face value even if it supports particular interest or is part of a sophisticated strategy to influence public opinion. They conclude that since the

parties to the dispute appeal to public opinion and make their arguments in the public arena, they have to appeal to *orders of worth* to gain support. They argue that even if stakeholders follow a carefully engineered strategy to garner public support and even if they rhetorically hide the particular interests motivating a campaign, persuasive argumentation still has to reference commonly recognized *orders of worth.*[42]

In contrast to Moody/ Thévenot (in: Lamont/ Thévenot (eds.) 2000), I am not looking at a battle of public relations campaigns for and against contentious infrastructure projects, but at planning discussions. Spatial plans go through several rounds of political and technical assessment and therefore need to make a solid case for their concepts and contents. The persons bringing forward arguments here did not appeal to a wider public, but to the person with the most seniority in the room, usually the highest-ranking official. In some other situations, planners were exchanging arguments between equals to find the best possible solution to a problem. Besides, the meetings that I documented were – in light of my presence – not confidential, the discussions took place with an external observer in the room.

Even though neither negotiation nor decision-making in the planning process fulfilled the postulates of an open and democratic setting for discussion, the arguments that were made can be understood as references to orders of worth and can be taken at face value. As both my presentations of the administration of spatial planning and the planning profession demonstrate, all groups of actors have a motivation to formulate a plan that is up to standard. To reach this objective, the planning process is all about exchange of ideas, about disagreement and feedback. The process has been designed to bring together differing opinions. In these discussions, too, strategic arguments must appeal to a publicly acknowledged good: To be recognized as valid arguments, an argument has to reference a higher principle recognized by the decision-maker as good. As explained, the focus of analysis will not be on the final products of spatial planning but on the arguments and positions brought forward in planning processes. I thus feel confident to apply the naïve, uncritical perspective to my data that B&Th suggest (B&Th 152f).

3.5   Conclusion

This chapter started with the Powerpoint presentation for a development plan in Tiger township. This presentation comprised investment interventions as well as a business concept in order to boost Tiger township's tourism profile, thereby pushing the local economy and, as a result, bringing income and development to the locality. I chose this presentation

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[42] Such arguments which are strategically shaped in a way that appeals to different strands of public opinion is what Flyvbjerg (1998) calls 'rationalizations.' However, while for Flyvbjerg, this framing of particular interest in the form of arguments with public appeal is just a rhetoric strategy and a distraction from the objectively rational solution to the planning problem in question, for Moody/Thévenot (2000), these arguments provide valuable insight in what the different sides to the conflict think are publicly accepted and effective arguments to win people over to their cause. As such, rhetoric arguments and PR strategies are very productive sources of data on *orders of worth.*

as the entry for this chapter because Luo Zhicheng's graphics of the future townscape illustrate so vividly the ideas and hopes for the town's future, which had been developed by the planners in collaboration with local government.

I then presented the considerations that led me to choose B&Th's *Sociology of Conventions* as the theoretical framework for this dissertation: By sketching out a variety of sometimes contradictory *orders of worth*, S*ociology of Conventions* does justice to the fact that spatial planning – like so many other areas of policy-making and public administration – has to negotiate between different constraints, requirements, and first and foremost ideas about the future. My research focus on attribution of worth and ideals is accounted for by the description of how the world should be, i.e., by the *common good,* at the core of each *order of worth.*

However, B&Th postulate democracy and pluralism as the empirical context for the application of the theory; distribution of power and the ways in which *orders of worth* are embedded into institutions are hidden from view within the framework; and the description of *polities/ common worlds* which are included in B&Th's theory is deeply rooted in Western European philosophy. Thus, I downscaled the model to the meso-level (i.e., the field of small-town planning in Chengdu municipality as I experienced it in my research) and abandoned the descriptions of *polities/ common worlds* of B&Th's model. This is justified by referencing the *Institutional Logics Perspective*, which applies a very similar perspective to the study of organizations and innovation. I maintain B&Th's analytical objective of describing *orders of worth;* and their meta-theoretical structure, i.e., the argument that *orders of worth* structure interaction. This includes the conceptualization of what *orders of worth* are and how persons and beings relate to them. I also utilize B&Th's inner architecture of *orders of worth* as well as the conceptualization of persons and situations in order to identify instances of disagreement between *orders of worth.*

To determine which aspects the participants in the planning process think would make such a place a good place to live, I look at the descriptions of the locality's problems and at the discussions between the different actors in the planning process. A focus on argumentation and disagreements – rather than a focus on the decisions taken – provides an effective inroad to identifying *orders of worth* and their characteristics.

In the Powerpoint presentation for Tiger township, the graphical renderings of the town can be considered as expressions about how a worthy future for the township is imagined – they are thereby statements about one or several *common good(s).* In this dissertation, I will describe in detail the following *orders of worth*:

- Spatial planning as a craft,
- Spatial planning as regulation and public provision,
- Spatial planning as a business,
- Spatial planning for development and growth, and
- Spatial planning for ecology and civilization.

The latter two orders of worth can be identified most prominently in Luo Zhicheng's renderings of a prosperous tourism town, located in a mountain valley. In the fact that the local government initiated this plan and that the creation of a more orderly distribution of parking facilities was one of the objects of this plan, 'Spatial 'planning as regulation and public provision' appears. 'Spatial 'planning as a craft' shines up in the artful renderings and the clear zoning between business and recreation, among many other aspects, while 'planning as a business,' in the background, structures the contractor-client relationship between New Town Company and the local government. I present these five *orders of worth* in detail in the two analytical interludes of this dissertation. The description of each *order of worth* will be structured by the descriptive categories of *common good*, *measure of worth*, *tools and mechanisms*, *state of worth*, and *fall from grace*. To account for the frameworks blindness to structures of power and to the structural setting in which spatial planning in Sichuan takes place, one empirical chapter on the administration of spatial planning and one on the planning profession will explore the spatial planning from the lenses of other frameworks. Before I present the five *orders of worth* in more detail and turn to the empirical material, the next chapter discusses my methods of data collection and of filling the theoretical framework.

4   Research design and methods

The instrumental categories of power and interest, ... through which I had sought to parse the social world, did not suffice in this thrice holy, multiply cleaved, cosmic navel [LM: Jerusalem]. What was most vexing were my intellectual colleagues and friends who insisted that any effort to take religious motive and meaning seriously was a reactionary diversion from the materialist battles at hand in the heat of the Reagan years. ... Rather than building from the material and political interests of groups, the social as an agonistic struggle over culturally contentless means, I wanted to understand the logic of their political practice from within the institutional space of religion out of which they were operating in a vocabulary hermeneutically adequate to their po-litico-religious projects, not unlike the way we analyze markets or democratic electoral contests.
(Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 27f)

Retracing how he first came up with the ideas that would be the foundation of the *Institutional Logics Perspective*, Friedland (in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013) remembers the objections he met when he did ethnographic research about politicized religion in Jerusalem in the 1980s/90s. He found it essential to understand political struggles in the terms of the religious institutions that motivated them and gave them meaning, rather than seeing power and money as the sole ends of political contests. These are harsh words he finds for his critiques. I never met such stern opposition to my plans to look into ideal imaginations in China's local policy-making. Nevertheless, many around me were highly skeptical about whether I was not turning a blind eye to the pursuit of power and benefit.

Unlike Friedland, my counterparts in research are not antagonistic groups but different parties collaborating in producing a spatial plan. Also unlike Friedland, I did not start out asking about power and interest – my starting point was a conviction that these two categories cannot fully explain the ideal imaginations and contents in spatial plans. In the previous chapter, I have made this argument based on planning theory. I also argued that spatial planning is an area of policy-making that – with its orientation to the future and addressing complex constellations on the ground – lends itself especially well to an investigation into ideals and attributions of worthiness. Exactly like Friedland, therefore, I find myself in a position where I try to explain aspects of the political in terms of attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations.

I make the case that stated objectives can be taken at face value and are not only instrumental for material gain. Based on my framing of spatial planning, I assume that diverse objectives and valuations are present and are brought into interaction by my interlocutors. As Friedland (in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 28) explains it in the quotation above, I aim to 'understand the logic' of each of those objectives and attributions of worthiness 'from within the institutional space' of spatial planning in China 'in a vocabulary hermeneutically adequate to' the respective *common good*, 'not unlike the way we analyze markets or democratic electoral contests' (quoted fragments from Friedland in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013: 28).

In a nutshell, this dissertation's combination of research object, theory, and research interest is counterintuitive since I look for attributions of worthiness and meaning in an empirical field in which I would be expected to ask for structures of power and influence and for how interests play out within these structures. This chapter serves to explain how I am going about bringing the parts together. For this purpose, I will first present the overall research design of this dissertation, then give an overview of my corpus of data and how I collected it. Here, I also include some thoughts on my positionality. Finally, I connect back to the framework of *orders of worth* by explaining the steps I took in data analysis.

4.1   Research design

Research design is the connection between research interest, theory, and methods of data collection and analysis, which I have put at stake in the introduction to this chapter (de Vaus 2010: 9). My research follows the question of **which ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness inform spatial planning in rural Sichuan?** The research objective is to identify the *orders of worth* that are relevant and to provide descriptions of these *orders of worth*. To explain the research design, let me take the research question apart:

I have defined the object of my statement of research interest, **'spatial planning in rural Sichuan,'** as what planners do; the products of their work are spatial plans. On the empirical side, this means that I still have to explicate the field in which my research takes place. This is done in two empirical chapters, one looking at public administration of spatial planning and policy, the other at the profession of spatial planning. Each of these chapters is structured by a theoretical framework derived from research close to my empirical field: *Fragmented Authoritarianism* (Lieberthal/ Oksenberg 1988) for the empirical chapter on the administration of spatial planning and two theories about the roles which planners or architects take on in their jobs (Feng 2016; Xie, Tian 2010) for the empirical chapter on the planning profession. Therefore, these two chapters are structured based on the respective theories; the empirical data there is deployed to complement or disprove aspects of these theories. However, the main purpose of these chapters is to convey a good overview of the set-up in which spatial planning in rural Sichuan takes place.[43]

On the conceptual side, I supplement the above definition of spatial planning with two characteristics derived from planning literature: spatial planning confronts 'wicked' problems (Rittel/ Webber 1973), which in their essence are not solvable. Therefore, the definition,

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[43] The basic idea for these chapters and the underlying logic stem from the literature on institutional ethnography. Institutional has been developed by Smith (ed., 2006) and in the fields of in gender studies and in ethnographic research in the Canadian health sector mainly, but has also been applied by Turner (2003) to spatial planning. Core of this direction of research is that it uses ethnographic method explicitly to uncover institutional set-ups, how they work, and what they mean for the actors involved: Research usually starts with a situation which does not make sense from the outside, e.g., a Kafkaesque tour through public offices if you want to have your position heard in a planning process (Turner 2003). The researcher investigates how these situations and arrangements are connected to other parts of the institutional set-up; thereby, the research uncovers not only the effects of a bureaucratic system (a hospital, a planning process) but turns back from there to map exactly the bureaucratic system that produces these effects; cf. also Campbell/ Gregor (2002); Devault (2006); Walby (2007).

framing, and treatment of such problems are necessarily subject to value- or ideology-based prioritization. In addition, spatial planning is oriented towards the future and, therefore, always contains formulations about how the locality should be. These qualifications are central because they contribute one substantiation to whether attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations play a role in spatial planning.

To put a handle on the subject clause of my statement of research interest, **'ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness,'** I adapted the concept of ***order of worth*** from *Sociology of Conventions* (chapter 3.2). This framework is especially adequate to my research interest, first, because the conceptualization of a set of alternative *orders of worth*, each of which equally legitimate and valid as the others, gives the acting persons a choice whether to act according to the given situation or to criticize it.[44] Second, in my adaptation of the framework based on the *Institutional Logics Perspective*, *orders of worth* and their contents are identified and characterized in a grounded fashion from the empirical material. This adaptation of the theory requires me to ask 'which ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness are present in the field?' instead of bringing values to the field and testing whether my interlocutors engage with it. Therefore, at the core of my analysis stand identifying *orders of worth* in the empirical material as well as describing their contents and how my interlocutors engage them.

Overall, this identification and description of *orders of worth* follow a theory-building logic of research (de Vaus 2010: 5f). I have identified the *orders of worth* iteratively, in multiple rounds of revisiting my data throughout fieldwork, data analysis, and writing this dissertation. For this, I followed the procedures of grounded theory (Bryant/ Charmaz (eds.) 2007): accompanied by extensive note-taking, I observed which attributions of worthiness presented themselves and then went back to the material to concretize them, shift them, sometimes to dismiss them. Therefore, I engaged the data in multiple rounds. The first round took place while I was still doing my fieldwork, which allowed me to collect feedback and criticism from my interlocutors – this is how I identified the order of 'planning as a business,' and how the particular emphasis on the regulatory framework came about.

The predicate of my research interest states that *orders of worth* **'inform'** spatial planning in Sichuan. In my analysis, I provide detailed descriptions about how spatial planners, administrative staff, and politicians engage the respective *orders of worth* in their reasoning and decision making. I have validated the *orders of worth* that I identified by focusing once on the administrative system (chapter 6) and once through the perspective of professional

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[44] Here, B&Th's epistemological and methodological proposition that the researcher cannot know any more than the interlocutors and that the researcher's evaluations are in no way more correct than those of the counterparts in the research is an important aspect: I cannot predetermine which values do or should matter, but I should ask my interlocutors about what is important and why.

planners (chapter 8). From both perspectives, I was able to describe each order of worth and demonstrate that each *order of worth* is seen as legitimate.[45]

The descriptions of each *order of worth* in the analytical interludes demonstrate how persons involved in spatial planning in rural Sichuan engage these *orders of worth* and how attributions of worthiness play a role. Following the form B&Th's theory takes in 'On Justification,' the interludes have a rigid, theoretically derived structure: each *order of worth* is presented in one subchapter. Each subchapter follows the categories of description is precisely the order in which they are listed above.

Neither describing the empirical field of spatial planning in rural Sichuan, nor identifying and describing a set of *orders of worth* that are engaged in a planning process could have been achieved other than with an ethnographic approach to fieldwork. The prolonged exposition to the field made it possible to reformulate my research questions and to get feedback from my interlocutors.

How can my claim or my research be disproved? First of all, my preliminary assumption that spatial planning is oriented towards the future and addresses complex problems may be disproved, maybe only for the case of spatial planning in China. This would involve showing that spatial planners are in a subservient position, drawing up plans strictly according to the ideas of the political leadership, without introducing factors that complicate those ideas and without advising political leadership about alternative approaches. This storyline is implicit in some existing research about spatial planning in China (most pronounced and explicit Curien 2014), while already Feng (2016) demonstrates that planners also take on the roles of independent and critical experts. Throughout this dissertation, I argue against the former position.

Second, concerning my identification of five *orders of worth* which orient persons in the planning process in how they address complexity, it may be shown that I identified the wrong *orders of worth* or that the descriptions with which I filled them are faulty. I do not claim that the orders I identified are valid beyond my empirical field, i.e., beyond planning for rural spaces in Chengdu municipality in 2016. I leave validation for other regions or other issue areas for future research. Moreover, the set of orders which I identified is by no means complete and there certainly are more *orders of worth* at play in spatial planning in China. With the background of my specific research interest and my specific previous knowledge, the *orders of worth,* which I describe in this dissertation, are the most pronounced in my data. Different perspectives might produce different results, even within the same analytical framework. Thus, the results of this research can be disproved empirically.

Third, how might a case be made against the claim that *orders of worth*, or ideals and value orientations more generally, play a role in spatial planning in rural Sichuan? In this dissertation, I fail to carefully and systematically map the instances in which *orders of worth*

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[45] Formulating a measure to which degree value orientations play a role in spatial planning would have gone far beyond the scope of this dissertation, especially given that I both describe the field empirically and identify *orders of worth* before I go about describing them.

do *not* play a role. These would be instances of pure self-interest, what B&Th label as 'nihilism,' are governing an interaction. *Orders of worth* are oriented towards a *common good*, which by B&Th's definition is a description of how society should be; if this social factor is irrelevant to justification, or if no justification is needed, then the framework does not hold up. These might be instances of corruption or of blatant striving for power for the sake of power itself. The pursuit of a political career does not necessarily fall into this category, since this is in line with how persons should act and strive for status within the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision.'

I consider imaginations about what would be a better future and attributions of worthiness based on common social goods a human constant; therefore, it is hard for me to imagine how it could be demonstrated that spatial planning is devoid of values and ideas of the *common good.* Instead of asking in which situations they do not have an influence, I have focused in this dissertation on the argument that ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness play a role at all. I have done so because – as argued above – my research is counterintuitive from the perspective of existing literature on local policy and spatial planning in China. In my data, I also see enough evidence of personal striving for worthiness, ideas on how rural Sichuan would be better, or the motivation to do a good job, to name just some examples.

4.2   Data collection and corpus of data

In the empirical chapter on the administration of spatial planning (chapter 5), I identify three groups of actors who take a constitutive part in planning processes: political planners, politicians, and administrative staff. While I participated closely in spatial planners' work, I also collected several interviews and conversations with administrative staff. Politicians, however, I mostly observed and saw from the outside. This perspective has shaped my impressions of spatial planning in Sichuan and, thus, this dissertation's results. On the following pages, I describe the modalities of my fieldwork and the data I collected.

After a preliminary visit in autumn 2015, in 2016, I spent eight months in Chengdu municipality. There, I was based at Southwest Jiaotong University. My main entry point to the field was the market-based planning company, which is called New Town Company in this dissertation. The planners at New Town Company were the people I cooperated with most closely, or in anthropological vocabulary: they were my key-informants and gatekeepers.

The understanding I acquired during this time of how planners in China talk and what issues stand at the core of their work is one of my fieldwork's most important results. It developed over a long-term engagement with New Town Company. I accompanied the planners in their work and met with them in the evenings to discuss planning in Germany and China; I prepared some data and plans from Germany for them, did research on their behalf, and in turn, was allowed to be present when they discussed their projects. Through this long-term engagement and through the combination of discussion and observation, I was able to get a sense of the working logics and relationships in the field. In part, this sense has

been recorded in my fieldnotes, but it also far exceeds what could be documented in writing and tape recording.

I spent at least one day a week, most times more, at the company, where I had a desk with one of the departments; I could freely roam the main office space, sit with planners who were brainstorming, discussing how to approach a problem, or drawing up plans. I witnessed many internal evaluation sessions, in which the owners of the company reviewed plans before they were submitted to the administrative assessment process. I became an accessory member in the team working on the general planning process for Wanderlust township, accompanying them in meetings, in their discussions, and their trips to the field. I was also a member of the chat group through which the planning team coordinated their work and shared the documentation and interim results of their work. I saved the documents sent around through this chat and consulted them in the course of analysis. Other planners, too, took me along to their trips for either initial reconnaissance, discussions with local governments, or assessments towards the end of planning processes. Of course, there were also joint lunches and dinners.

I also had contact with planners at other planning institutes in Chengdu, some of whom I would meet regularly for discussion and exchange. Someone else let me accompany a team of planners to a multi-day trip to Mountain city. I also observed meetings of a policy-formulation project about rural development organized by another ministry; this offered me a perspective into the research and discussion that takes place at the very initial stages of policy formulation.

With planners from other planning bodies and with some senior planners from New Town Company, I met regularly to discuss and compare spatial planning approaches and systems in China and Germany. On these occasions, both the planners and I learned a lot about the different logics and core tasks of planning; we discussed the weight attributed to administration, the regulatory detail, the visionary content of spatial plans, and the balance between interests in spatial planning.

I presented my initial mappings of the field and the initial set of *orders of worth* to my counterparts, asking for thoughts and feedback.[46] These feedback loops helped me refine my findings. More importantly, they also proved highly valuable for transparency and trust: While before, I had only been able to describe what questions I was interested in, now my interlocutors got a sense of how I worked with my experiences at their company. Some interlocutors were slightly uneasy when they realized how much more I looked at how they were working instead of at the contents of their work. However, afterward, I also was offered even more opportunities to tag along to field trips and discussions.

Thus, my empirical line of sight (Pachirat in: Schatz (ed.) 2009) was shaped by my close connection to the planners. My observations of government and planning administration

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[46] I had put together these materials both as a fieldwork report to be handed in at my graduate school about half way through my time in Chengdu and as a Powerpoint-presentation that I gave at a conference. The slides in which I presented my findings graphically proofed especially valuable for discussion.

invariably came about because I was allowed to accompany a team of planners to some field trip or other. There, I would sit in the background, take notes, and afterward ask which person had which position in government and what the different positions actually meant. Most of these observations took place with me accompanying planners from New Town Company; only in the very beginning did I go on a reconnaissance trip with another planning institute. In this regard, my data is partial, since my substantive experience about how spatial planning is discussed in planning bureaus and at governments is primarily limited to instances in which New Town Company was involved. Nevertheless, I was taken to various such meetings by many different individual planners and gleaned multiple impressions.

I documented these experiences as best I could in fieldnotes, which stretch from mid-March until the end of November 2016; there is a corpus of seven word-documents with chronological fieldnotes with altogether 246 pages (wordcount: 115073) and three additional documents on which I identified topics which emerged in the field, commented on what I already knew, and formulated the questions which arose from this (21 pages, 8347 words; cf. annex 6: overview of fieldnotes). There were different modes of writing fieldnotes: I always had a paper-notebook with me, in which I would take notes during meetings and discussions. These notes focused very much on the contents of the presentations and discussions. If there were interesting conversations in the course of a day in the field, I would jot down a quick reminder when there was time. In the evenings after the field days or on the following days, I would then sit down and revisit these notes to type up more densely structured fieldnotes. These accounts would also contain my general impressions of the situation, the persons who were present, a general recounting of what had happened, and a more careful documentation of the arguments and positions in the meetings.

At New Town Company, I had a desk. My computer was always running; when there was no conversation I could participate in, I would simply work on my fieldnotes or compile some material for discussions or do other research-related work. At the same time, I witnessed what the people around me were doing. At any time, I could also turn to the others or visit them at their desks and simply watch what they were doing or talk with them about it. For me, this made my days at the company easy, because there was a spot where I could retreat to whenever I felt that I was in the way or that there was nothing special going on. It gave me a position where I was doing very similar things as everybody else: working on my computer and then again discussing with the other planners present. Simultaneously, it made it possible to make extensive notes about conversations and observations immediately after they had happened.

When I met with planners for discussion and exchange, taking notes was largely impossible – only sometimes was I able to jot down a word or two to remind me about what we had talked about. However, often in such discussions and in interviews, we would sketch out our thoughts on paper to illustrate what we were talking about. This came naturally, given that spatial planning works so much with visual representation, either in the form of

maps or Powerpoint presentations. I documented many of these sketches or reproduced them afterward; they are part of the material I worked with.

Altogether, my fieldnotes are not as rich in atmospheric and sensory description as I would have liked in the process of writing this dissertation. However, they provide much detail both on the planning system's set-up and the arguments made in the various discussions about spatial plans that I witnessed. In this regard, they suffice for the purpose of my analysis, which focusses on arguments in order to identify and describe *orders of worth.*

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I went to Wanderlust township and Reverence county on my own to have some direct interaction with the administration and governments that I had observed from the planners' perspective for so long. This visit accorded me a couple of one-on-one conversations with some of the core personnel involved in the planning process or in spatial planning in the county; I also had the chance to simply spend some more time at the offices that were so relevant for the central planning project in my field research. This was only possible because these administrations were already familiar with me as a sidekick of the planning team, and because the planning company had made some calls before to announce me.

During the last months in the field, I did semi-structured interviews, mostly with administrative staff and leadership from administrations that were not as closely involved with New Town Company; I also interviewed some owners of New Town Company. I prepared each interview separately in light of the interviewee's position and current open issues in my fieldwork; nevertheless, the questions follow the same general rationale. Many questions were designed to triangulate and concretize my observations about how the planning system is set up. I always asked what my interview partners thought spatial planning was about at all as well as what, from their particular perspective, were the objectives of doing a spatial plan (cf. annex 4: sample interview guideline). There are recorded conversations with one office leader at the municipal planning bureau and with the administrative leader of the rural development regulation and research project mentioned above; with a vice-head of a county planning bureau; an office leader at another county planning bureau; and with the leader of a land administration office at township level (cf. annex 5: overview of interviews). I did not tape my conversations with administrative and political personnel directly involved in the Wanderlust general plan.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I also recorded some discussion sessions with other spatial planners. These taped discussions proved invaluable for factual detail and as fine-grained documentation of some of the value-oriented arguments I had encountered in the field many times. Fieldwork and interviews were conducted without exception in Chinese language.

I worked a lot with the Powerpoint presentations of some planning projects to develop my argumentation; planning exhibitions in various places, most notably in Chengdu munic-

ipality, provided similar data. An important supplementary source of information were textbooks on spatial planning which I read during the initial months of my fieldwork (Gao/ Xing/ Wang 2004; Wu/ Li 2010; Tang, et al. 2012; Luo/ Zhang/ Bo 2012; Li 2014; cf. also Melcher 2017). Moreover, the planning law and other legal texts were central sources for describing the administrative system of spatial planning. The webpages of relevant bodies of administration or of spatial planning provided much additional detail. Overall, internet searches regularly constituted a means to triangulate my findings or to add specific information to the phenomena I am describing. All these sources are in Chinese language and will be referenced in the text where relevant.

My interlocutors graciously provided me with access deep into the administration and management of spatial planning. To protect my sources, I have changed the names of all places, persons, and institutions. In cases where this would not suffice to make the locality, person, or organization unrecognizable, I have consciously blurred or changed their characteristics. For this reason, the context information, especially on organizations and places, is often less rich in detail than it might be. This has been a conscious decision for the protection of my sources. Also, I do not date the fieldnotes I reference in the material but provide numerical references that locate the specific fieldnote in my data corpus.

4.3   Positionality: Researching up, down, or sideways?

Since my most intensive contact was with spatial planners, this is also the focus of the following reflections on my positionality. In this section, I reflect on my position vis-à-vis the planners, on how I was being positioned by them, and on how my position and contribution changed over the course of my fieldwork.

The planners at New Town Company graciously gave me access to their work, and they agreed to spend time with me not just (but also) out of politeness and generosity. They also hoped to garner insights on spatial planning in other regions of the world from my presence. They expected an exchange on innovative models and approaches through my knowledge of planning. I often connected to interest by introducing myself as somebody who had studied geography, had had some training about spatial planning in Germany, and only via this route found an interest in spatial planning in China. My access to the field, in fact, was based mainly upon my previous knowledge of geography and planning in Germany and most of my interactions with spatial planners took the form of a dialogue about the planning systems and approaches in Germany and China. This exchange, however, was difficult, as the following vignette will illustrate:

The first time I came to New Town Company, on a preliminary visit to Chengdu in 2015, I was to give a presentation on current planning trends in Germany. I had been preparing the presentation for one week; it revolved around questions of sustainable development, about the challenges small towns in Germany face currently, and the paradigms and objectives of small-town development in Germany. My presentation featured lots of pictures and

some conceptual input about what 'lively urban center' or 'sustainable town development' means in German geographic discourse.[47]

The company's presentation room, where I should later sit so often during internal review meetings, was packed with young planners working at the company. They listened politely and asked very detailed questions. Their questions dealt with concrete implementation and regulations as well as with the German discussions of particular planning challenges. I was enthusiastic about these questions since they finally took me away from work on theory and research design that had dominated the last couple of months towards practical considerations of how small-town planning in Sichuan is actually being done.

More than a year later, towards the end of my eight-month fieldwork, the conversation with some mid-level planners at the company returned to that first visit. Now, after I had been at the company for so long, and after we had had many in-depth discussions and exchanges about how planning in Germany and planning in China work, they told me that they barely understood anything of that first presentation. Indeed, when I think back to that presentation, I feel embarrassed, since it dealt with issues, concepts, and discourses in ways so utterly unconnected to the working routines of my counterparts that, in retrospect, I wonder how they managed to ask questions at all. It took a long, mutual learning process (replete with unsuccessful exchanges) to bring both sides, me and the planners I cooperated most closely with, to a basis for meaningful exchange and dialogue.

I profited tremendously from these discussions and exchanges – but why would the planners invest their scarce time and energy in having me around? Spatial planners are technical experts, and I have come, without their asking, and done a research project on how they work. I have been told that it was insightful for them what I have done. At the same time, I know that they found my approach curious or strange and that at times, my partners were a bit uncomfortable with me doing research not about 'spatial planning in China' but about themselves.

The following reflection about my relationships with the planners and about what they expected and got from me is structured by the literature on studying up and positionality within anthropology. The relationships to interlocutors or research subjects in ethnographic fieldwork are especially fraught ones since these are long-term interactions based on mutual trust. In the relationship between the researcher and the people the research engages, friendships evolve – and are meant to evolve, since the insights to be generated often reach deeply into everyday life and thought. This obviously brings with it moral dilemmas for the researcher.

Most of the literature on positionality deals with an additional power imbalance produced by the fact that often anthropologists stem from richer countries and do research in poorer settings. However, the body of literature on 'studying up' (Nader in: Hymes (ed.) 1972;

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[47] The following is a shortened and revised version of a paper that I prepared for the workshop 'Iserlohn 2017", which is an annual meeting of early-career researchers in social science research about China. Topic of this workshop was 'What is the purpose and benefit of our research on China for social sciences and society?"

Gusterson 1997; Anderson-Levy 2010; Rice 2010) deals with issues that arise when the relationship is reversed, when the research is carried out among elites. An additional discourse addresses relationships and interview methods in situations when researcher and interlocutor are of similar background, have similar life-experiences and ways of framing issues (Hannerz 1998; Plesner 2011). All these bodies of literature deal with ethical questions and power-relationships, but also with techniques of interviewing and ways of engaging interlocutors. They reflect on questions of what sort of insights can be generated in which sort of settings and how to deal with the respective relationships of power.

None of these conversations on research directions and positionalities entirely reflects my position during fieldwork: Most of the planners had the same educational status as I had and were similar in age. Some were older and more distinguished; others had just started working after receiving their Bachelor's degree. Nevertheless, I felt the imbalance of profiting so much from them without directly giving something back rather acutely. I was a PhD-researcher from Germany, deciding for myself about the hours I worked and traveling widely and internationally – all these constitute markers of status. Moreover, planners had very little control over what sort of data I 'extracted' since the social-sciences heuristics and epistemology I was working with is vastly different from the more technical modes of thinking employed in spatial planning in China. In these respects, I felt pressures and dilemmas described by the literature addressing research ethics and how to deal with the balance of power tilted towards the researcher. I tried to mitigate these issues by describing my position as *learning from* the planners, emphasizing that they were the experts in the field. I also shared with them the material (one fieldwork report, one conference presentation) I produced during my fieldwork to make more explicit what my thinking and interests were.[48]

My research setting does not match the classical description for ethnographic work, nor was I not studying up. I was often handled as an 'international expert,' the differences in status were not very pronounced, and I did not meet the obstacles described by Gusterson (1997) in getting access to do participant observation. Nevertheless, both Nader (in: Hymes (ed.) 1972) and Gusterson (1997) mention an ethical dilemma with which I empathize strongly: They mention how difficult it is to write critically about what one has experienced in the field. After all, interlocutors will undoubtedly read what one has written (Gusterson 1997) and the critique targets people who are doing their job as best they can (Nader in: Hymes (ed.) 1972: 301f).

These authors describe experiences and sentiments I have had in the field and during writing: I have my own opinions about how many planning professionals analyze the issues they are to solve and how they choose the material to work with. However, it does not feel right to write about such issues, knowing that the planners will read my descriptions about their everyday reality. I also know that my training, my value priorities, and my background

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[48] The unease that reading something that has been written about one's own working style is discussed by Mosse (2006). My interlocutors were, by and large, thankful to be given these materials, and this did generate trust between us – but also this unease was reflected back to me.

are so different from theirs that it is self-evident that there will be differences in evaluation. Of course, the planners themselves are the real experts at what they are doing themselves. All these aspects made it difficult even to voice criticism.

In his reflections about what an anthropology of bureaucracy can or cannot do, Hoag (2011) gives this issue another spin: He explains the difficulty of not giving in to the bureaucracy's own goals and objectives, not to allow 'their [the bureaucracies' own, LM] idealizing self-frames to predetermine our analysis' (Hoag 2011: 84). Indeed, over the course of research, I increasingly internalized the working logics and objectives of the planning system itself: I gave up on my original intent to find voices from other branches of administration, it came more and more natural to me to think about resettlement spaces and refurbishment of inner-town streetscapes without considering the inhabitants, and I came to think about the planners in my company more and more as servicing instead of giving expert advice to local government. In Hoag's (2011) terms, I had difficulties putting myself at a critical distance from the objectives the planning system had set itself; even if I did so, such criticism became more and more difficult to express.

Pachirat (in: Schatz (ed.) 2009) provides a good explanation for this experience: the position from which the researcher enters the field determines the access and experiences she will have, the opinions and world views she will be exposed to most intensively. Thereby, the entry points and the positions taken in the field determine the 'lines of sight' of the researcher; they will determine which positions and perspectives are taken on certain issues, and will thereby shape the political stance the researcher will take in the analysis.

Another way of describing my relationships within the field would be what Hannerz (1998) and Plesner (2011), for example, term *studying sideways*. This concept describes doing research with persons with a similar background and training to one's own, who share concepts, epistemologies, and other ways of thinking. In such constellations, interviews are more of an exchange, and the research results are co-produced to a more considerable degree than usual.

I expected this to be the case during my research since I have studied geography, had previously worked for a research institute for urban development, and had engaged questions of spatial planning in Germany quite intensively. The planners as well expected to receive an outside expert who could give them concrete ideas and impulses. This turned out not to be the case at all. Where my thoughts ran along the trails of social sciences, planners had mostly had a training oriented along architecture and engineering. They found much of what I said too abstract, too philosophical, or simply not relevant. Instead of trying to explicitly and cooperatively reflect on (possibly contradictory) evaluations and objectives, I had to learn to rephrase my questions, to stick to the technicalities and the planning processes, and to interpret. Nevertheless, over time, as I learned to talk and ask more in the terms that planners used in their work and understood the general set-up better, they also gained a sense of my knowledge and my research interest.

In addition, my position was usually not just defined by me, my character traits, and the knowledge and expertise I brought, but I was actively positioned by my counterparts. For example, my interactions with two of the senior planners at my company (both of whom supported me tremendously) differed markedly: Teacher Wei, a very distinguished urban planner, treated me with high respect, taking myself on as an 'expert' and valuing each little input I was able to give. He was delighted to reflect on what planning can do, how to do planning, and took each opportunity to turn a planning project into an occasion to do research. Teacher Yuan, my initial contact at the institute, was quick to point out the differences in social status between us. For this, she used the fact that she was more knowledgeable than me in the planning system, but also the age difference and the fact that I am unmarried. Positionality is as much produced by the counterparts in research as by the researcher herself and is as dependent on the personalities involved as it is dependent on more 'objective' social hierarchies and markers of status (Robertson 2002 is very emphatic about this aspect).

None of these theories on positionality manages to explain my experience fully, but each of them generates explanations for some aspects of what happened. The adequate description of my position is shifting, always specific to the situation, the location, and the persons present (e.g., Mukherjee 2017). The interaction brought about increasing familiarity between my interlocutors and me. Our understanding of each other's interests and ways of problematizing grew, and with this, conversations became more and more meaningful (Herod 1999: 321-324).

How does all of this reflect on the benefits the planners could draw from working together with me? I was sometimes a very welcome outsider to whom one could complain about work at the company, or a status symbol to be taken along to important meetings.[49] Even though I did my best in fulfilling the expectations about giving concrete input and being a 'foreign expert,'[50] researching how certain challenges are tackled by planning in Germany, these conversations were only successful if they took the form of long, recurring dialogues. With some planners, I met regularly, and we decided beforehand on concrete questions. Each of us then thought about how these things would be done in our respective systems, and then we talked about this. For my counterparts, these meetings often produced more questions than answers; they found it as hard as I did to wrap their heads around the enormous systemic and paradigmatic differences between the two systems. In these meetings, insights and understanding were indeed co-produced and both parties learned a lot. This would not have been possible in everyday interactions, where one-off explanations from my side usually met quite some resignation: It was not possible for me to directly and succinctly answer questions like 'how do you plan a natural reserve in Germany?'

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[49] Such occasions, naturally, were marvelous sources of data for me.

[50] This positioning as a ‚foreign expert,' and the high recognition one receives based on a claim of expertise and – frankly – the colour of one's skin, needs to be problematized. An interesting starting point for this certainly is the literature on critical whiteness from African studies. This, however, would go beyond the scope of this section.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, as a preliminary result, I gave a presentation on my thoughts and ideas about how planning could be done differently to the planners and to the institute for planning at my Chinese university. My impression was that this presentation was what my counterparts had hoped for from me in the very beginning, as the starting block for cooperating – but these insights and conceptualizations were only a result of fieldwork. I would not have been able to give anything comparable at that first presentation I started the paper with.

I gave the final presentation two times, and each time it sparked lively discussions and questions. In these instances, I finally felt adequate in the position assigned to me at the beginning: the position of the expert coming from outside. I was able to spark discussions about how planning works, and present an opportunity for planners to reflect on the system they are working in. Whether it was adequate as a way of paying back the patience and tolerance the planners had with me, I do not know.

It took eight months of fieldwork to align my language and concepts with the professional thought in Sichuan's spatial planning. In itself, this alignment is one of the results of my fieldwork. For data analysis, I had to revert to a critical perspective upon the concepts and thoughts I have become so used to. As my contribution to the way planners work, I hope that instead of providing concrete models and case studies, I have been a creative disturbance to their work at a much deeper level. This, after all, is what my self-perception as a Western social scientist is.

4.4   Steps of analysis

To trace the *orders of worth*, arguments by the persons acting or evaluating have to be taken at face value. Both B&Th and TOL reiterated this aspect time and again; it also appears in Friedland's quotation above (in: Lounsbury /Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013). This principle is one of the central tenets of how I treat the data with which I work. To put my approach to analysis very concisely, therefore, one might say that I only reordered arguments and evaluations in my data and grouped them into *orders of worth*. There was no interest in uncovering any hidden meaning.

The central difficulty was the identification of *orders of worth*. Neither B&Th nor TOL justify their choice of society-wide *logics* or *common worlds* or suggest a procedure to identify a set of *logics* or *common worlds* from scratch. While B&Th concentrate on detailing the roots of their *common worlds* in polities, i.e., in historical and philosophical texts, TOL base

their set of *institutional logics* on a foundational essay of Friedland/ Alford (in: Powell/ Dimaggio (eds.) 1991).[51] They propose five 'central institutions of contemporary Western societies' (Friedland/ Alford in: Powell/ Dimaggio (eds.) 1991: 249),[52] without making an argument for why they picked precisely those five institutions. TOL (42-43, 56, 66-73) then recount how through research and theorizing, building upon this essay, they and other authors reformulated the central institutions proposed by Friedland/ Alford (1991) and added new ones.[53]

In both frameworks, identification and description of new *logics/ common worlds* always take place in relation to the existing set provided by the core theory text.[54] Both theories state that no order or logic can be fully explained or justified by the other orders. In other words: there will be an explanatory residual if this *order of worth* is not included in the set. This residual is how new *orders of worth* can be identified. I did not have a valid set of *orders of worth* to set out from; therefore, I could follow the described procedure to identify *orders of worth*. Instead, I roughly followed TOL's iterative approach and my previous experience with grounded theory (e.g., Bryant/ Charmaz (eds.) 2007; Mey/ Mruck (eds.) 2011; Strübing 2008) and Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring/ Gläser-Zikuda 2005). The following is an overview of the different operations of analysis. However, the analytical procedures were iterative and included frequent back and forth between these operations – they are not to be understood as proceeding in sequence or as clearly separated from each other.

4.4.1   Filling the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of multiple *orders of worth* only provided an abstract skeleton or a metatheory. This framework's basic ideas were sketched out in the months between a preliminary visit to the field in summer 2015 and my actual fieldwork (March – November 2016). after screening much of my data and after preliminary analysis, I formulated a draft of the theory chapter, which mapped out the conceptual considerations according to which I would analyze and present the data. This was followed by another systematic round of data analysis with view on *orders of worth*. By alternating between work on the theoretical framework and engagement of empirics, I ensured that the theory was not in conflict with my empirical observations.

I have emptied B&Th's framework from as much empirical content as possible. Refilling it, i.e., identifying *orders of worth,* was an iterative process. Building upon the *common worlds/institutional logics* that B&Th and TOL had identified, I hypothesized a set of orders

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[51] This is exactly the essay which contexts and origins Friedland explains in the paper of 2013 which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

[52] Capitalism, family, bureaucratic state, democracy, Christianity

[53] However, they name their sources for identifying their set of *institutional logics*: 'Our rationale for evaluating and modifying their [Friedland/ Alford's (1991); LM] rudimentary idea is based on a close reading of J. W. Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and M. Weber ([1922] 1978), as well as reference to the principles of typological analysis (Doty and Glick 1994).' (TOL 66)

[54] Examples include TOL 68-73; Boltanski/ Chiapello (2007); Beamish/ Biggart (2017); Lafaye/ Thévenot (2017).

even before starting fieldwork. After half of my fieldwork had passed, I reworked this list of *orders of worth*, as I did when screening my data after fieldwork, then again while writing the chapter on my theoretical framework, and again while doing the analysis and writing analytical interludes. In each round, I further substantiated each *order* with empirics and, as analysis progressed, I started filling the data for each *order of worth* into the categories of description. The final set of *orders of worth* which are described in this dissertation is:

- Spatial planning as a craft
- Spatial planning as regulation and public provision
- Spatial planning as a business
- Spatial planning for development and growth
- Spatial planning for ecology and civilization

This theoretical framework was chosen as a grid for describing the ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness present in spatial planning before fieldwork and based on my analytical interest. The categories of description are also derived not from the empirical material, but from the theory and the research interest. Therefore, the methods of structuring the narrative and the data are to be considered as predominantly etical (i.e., designed by myself, in contrast to derived from the empirical experience). However, I would like to maintain that these attributions of worthiness are present in spatial planning. My interlocutors indeed subscribe to each order of worth and experience a tension between them.

The description of the five *orders of worth* in the interludes utilizes a generalizing language. By definition, *orders of worth* are generalizations: They are filled with general principles and general ideas about the world, held by the persons in the empirical field and employed to formulate justifications. While held to be universally valid, each of these general principles is relativized by other *orders of worth*, which are equally general and valid. Any person may or may not subscribe to a specific *order of worth* in a given situation – thus, while in formulation, *orders of worth* are universally valid, in a concrete situation, only one or a few *orders of worth* are applied to guide evaluation and justification. The generalizing phrasing does by no accounts mean that I take any single one of these *orders of worth* or their sum to be universally applicable principles of describing spatial planning in my empirical field.

4.4.2 Empirical settings from which data and arguments are derived

In the previous chapter, I have argued that instances of argumentation and dissent will be of high analytical value. In such situations, the persons exchanging argumentation spell out the reasons and rationales of their views, which gives me the necessary data for describing *orders of worth.* Several settings frequently appear in my data and proved especially valuable for identifying argumentations and thus *orders of worth*: First and foremost, there are

discussions about the locality and territory for which a spatial plan is made. Discussions then would focus on a particular territory in a regional context, on why the plan is made, and on the constellations on the ground. Among the persons involved, different groups of actors focused on different phenomena and constellations in the area. They had different ideas about the objectives of development for the locality, even given a fixed purpose for planning.

The planning process itself is also a constellation of interest for analysis. Different groups of persons from different professional contexts come together intending to make a spatial plan. Such *situations* are structured by a clear institutionalization of which actors are involved, what the steps of planning are, and formally prescribed technical standards and sets of objectives for a spatial plan (these prescriptions come from higher levels of government). This process is primarily situated within government administration (both institutionally and physically, with meetings taking place in the offices of local government). However, there were also discussions among planners, brainstorming sessions about the concepts and spatial plans for a locality, or internal feedback sessions. These situations almost invariably took place at the planning company, sometimes also at university.

I had more or less regular meetings with some planners for exchange and discussion. We discussed my understanding of spatial planning, compared the German and Chinese planning systems, and exchanged views on plans developed in the planning company. In such meetings, planners would explain their evaluations and views; they would explain their views (and the reasons for their views) on certain planning issues, and sometimes vent their frustration. Such exchanges would often turn to the question of which planning system has which strengths and which weaknesses, or which regulation makes sense and which does not. From these conversations, I was able to glean direct explanations about attributions of worth.

Moreover, the Powerpoint presentations, which were part of each spatial plan were highly valuable data. They were designed to convince local governments and higher-level administrations of the plan's qualities. At the same time, they contained much conceptual material about how the locality was envisaged to be in the future as well as analyses of the strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities of the respective locality.

4.4.3   Method of data analysis

The collection, screening, and analysis of data were accompanied by extensive note-taking. This helped me ensure that both the resulting structure of codings and the overall narrative in this dissertation stayed true to the empirical material and that I stayed alert to phenomena in the material that might contradict my narrative.

The first rounds of coding proceeded openly, concentrating mostly on the institutional set-up of spatial planning, but also on the contents of spatial planning deemed important by my interlocutors. After having gone through a first round of screening and having coded much of the data openly, I finalized the formulation of the theoretical framework and applied

the categories to the coding process. Towards the end of identifying the *orders of worth* which are of most relevance in my data, I started to revisit my data to fill the descriptive categories from the perspectives of planning administration and the planning profession for each of the *orders of worth* in turn. Thus, this part of the data analysis took on some traits of a theory-testing approach.

Data analysis was conducted with the support of software for qualitative data analysis. Objects of coding were not only interview transcripts but also my fieldnotes, pictures, and documents. For the empirical chapters, coding proceeded according to the principles of grounded theory: the codes and categories were not pre-formulated but developed in the course of coding. For the *orders of worth*, I used preliminary codes at the beginning, highlighting sections of the material which might point to *orders of worth* or which contained tensions and discussions worthy of closer scrutiny. Identifying the set of *orders of worth* was a highly iterative process that was finished only very late in the course of data analysis. Only after all material had undergone inductive coding were the descriptive categories of *orders of worth* added to the list of codes. I then revisited the material coded preliminarily as related to attributions of worthiness and sorted it into the structure of *orders of worth* and their respective descriptive categories. This procedure ensured that the deductive filling of descriptive categories would not happen in a way that was insensitive to the meanings contained in the data.

4.5   Conclusion

In analysis, I applied the naïve reading called for by B&Th (152-153) and Friedland (in: Lounsbury/ Boxenbaum (eds.) 2013, quotation at the beginning of this chapter). The results are presented, as B&Th suggest, in the form of thick descriptions, structured by descriptive categories. In order to do justice to the relative blindness of the theoretical framework to power, interests, and institutions, the two empirical chapters do not employ the analytical lens of *orders of worth* but focus each on a separately theoretically framed description of the empirical field. The results of analysis through the framework of *orders of worth* are presented in the interludes. These presentations are rigidly structured by the descriptive categories which I derived from the theory.

I have filled the adapted framework of B&Th's *Sociology of Conventions* through an iterative and very open process of collection and analysis of data. My line of sight in this was guided by my extended interaction with the professional planners at New Town Company, which made it possible for me to gain a sense of the logics and routines in spatial planning. This puts my research apart from other accounts of spatial planning in China: much of my knowledge comes from discussions with planners rather than interviews – the contact was much more long-term and mutual, and the conversations had months to develop and to mature.

My interlocutors were not grand authorities in planning but mostly mid-level planners in a very normal company. Not only did I discuss with them, but I also was present in their everyday work. Thus, while I do certainly not have good coverage of the trending topics in spatial planning, much more mundane issues such as money and time are very prominent in my analysis. I also do cover the frustrations involved in regular project work and in dealing with local governments. Nevertheless, the focus on the local and on the every-day of spatial planning meant that the big structures and strategic lines are external factors to my research and lie at the periphery of my field of vision.

Asking for attributions of worthiness and for positive aspects in spatial planning has made access easy for me and has proven a productive perspective on this empirical field. However, this focus has, to some extent, blinded me to the limitations of time, money, and power in a planning project. It is especially striking how little data I have about backstage dealings and negotiations of interest and personal benefit in planning processes. At least, I have tried my best to stay sensitive to these issues both during data collection and during analysis.

5   The administration of spatial planning

5.1 Intro

This chapter empirically dissects the administrative system of spatial planning in Chengdu municipality, looking at the legal framework, at the respective roles of bureaucracy and politics, and at the hierarchies and coordinative mechanisms involved. As a point of entry, let me turn to one of the meetings between Wanderlust township government and New Town Company.

Party Secretary Liu was always busy when I met him. A large man, always carrying a thermos cup for his green tea, in his late forties or early fifties, he was the Party secretary of Wanderlust township at the time of my fieldwork. Heading the local Communist Party branch made him the township government's political leader.

When the planning team went to Wanderlust township to discuss the drafts of the general plan, Secretary Liu would always take part. Often, as in the mid-term meeting in early summer, he would be late for meetings. On this specific occasion, the meeting started without Secretary Liu (FN #30). The meeting was held in a small conference room just across the corridor from the township land administration office; everybody present, I included, sat at the conference table. The benches for listeners remained empty. Representing the township government were Deputy Mayor Wang, responsible for everything concerning construction and planning in the township; Mr Zhang, head of the land administration office and Mr Chen, the local rural planner. New Town Company, which compiled the township plan, had sent the core team working on the project: Han Ruishan, Chu Weide, Gao Yuanchao; Teacher Wei had not come.

While waiting for Secretary Liu, there was a preliminary discussion with Mr Chen about the cultural square planned for the southern part of town and its connections to the old town center. When the meeting started, the planners from New Town Company presented their tentative layouts for the town and the surrounding rural areas. They explained the concepts they had come up with for the town's overall spatial design and projected visualizations on the wall. The planners had brought picture files as well as the Auto-CAD file of the town's layout.[55] Deputy Mayor Wang was the first to give his views on the drafts, asking specific questions about the spatial plan for the rural surroundings. In the plans for the town proper, he found a spot in the plan that was faulty (a road went straight through an artificial lake on the map) and did not understand which roads were planned as main thoroughfares. Next, the rural planner pointed out that both the park and the shopping areas were conceived as too big for such a small town. The leader of the township land management office then made some remarks about water supply and other resources before the general discussion turned to the shapes and sizes of residential construction plots.

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[55]   Auto-CAD is the software usually used by planners and architects to draw up construction plans. This and ArcGIS are the programs used for spatial planning tasks.

At this point, Secretary Liu entered the meeting room. Upon taking his seat, he did not wait for any explanations or input, but directly delved into his views of the plan: First, he talked about regional economic specializations. Secretary Liu had decided on a different scheme than proposed originally and now explained this decision at length. From there, he went on to elaborate on the road access to the local school – each morning and afternoon, the surrounding roads would be blocked by parents bringing their children or picking them up.

Both these aspects had very little connection to what had been discussed before. Moreover, the spatial planners had prepared a discussion of the township's spatial layout, focusing on the network of roads, the distribution of facilities, and the overall distribution of construction. However, since the Party secretary is the head of government, the planners went to the school after the meeting to get an understanding of the layout and why the roads were blocked.

After Secretary Liu had continued laying out his thoughts for a bit more, Han Ruishan brought up the question of how to integrate the waterways into the town's landscape. She roughly laid out the different options and the arguments for and against leaving the waterways open and constructing green spaces alongside them, which were the results of previous discussions both just before Secretary Liu had entered the room and at the company. Here, she needed an opinion from the head of government to continue drafting the plan. The Party secretary's reaction – simply lead the waterways around the town – opened up a long discussion with Han Ruishan, who was strictly against such a procedure. After a while, Chu Weide and the head of the land administration bureau supplied additional arguments for either side. The discussion only ended when Han Ruishan said she would hand in these drafts without such significant changes to the land administration authority for approval. She would wait for comments and objections (意见) from the land administration bureaucracy before continuing this discussion.

With this, Secretary Liu resumed his comments on the plan, focusing on the provision of parking lots and public toilets. He concluded by stating that the new residential quarters had to be so well equipped and so nice that people want to move there. Finally, after he left, there was lunch and a discussion of the concrete technicalities of an access road to the school. We then were accompanied by the head of the land administration office and one more person from the local administration on a drive around town to look at various places in the town area, especially at the access roads to the school.

Meetings for discussion of or feedback on spatial plans always had this format, whether they were held internally at New Town Company or with the local counterparts in administrative offices: First, there would be a presentation, explaining the plan's rationality and the digital mappings. Then, the persons present would give their feedback and opinions, of which the person who headed the meeting would speak last. After they had given their views, they would summarize the necessary changes to the plans.

This scene demonstrates two widespread points of friction in planning processes: there is an inherent tension between the three groups of actors, the politicians, the administration, and the planners, due to their different backgrounds and objectives. There is often some unclarity about the core objects and goals of spatial planning, as Secretary Liu's focus on economic development and his light treatment of the local waterways demonstrate. I encountered these frictions in other contexts and other planning projects; therefore, I will first give an overview of the groups of actors and of the purposes for making a plan before I delve into the detail of the political and administrative set-up of spatial planning in small-town Sichuan. The following sketches serve to give an overview and guide the reader towards the central issues; the empirical set-up and the points of friction will be explored in more depth in the course of this chapter.

5.1.1   The actors

The most striking contradiction in this scene is the Party secretary's position vis-à-vis the spatial planners, with the local administration between them. In the scene, as in all planning processes I witnessed, we find three groups of actors: Secretary Liu and Deputy Mayor Wang represent politics. People pursuing a political career are shifted from position to position, from region to region and between bodies of administration every few years. In leading and managing positions, they are evaluated based on their results for the locality and their success in implementing higher-level policies. Politicians' future careers depend on these evaluations.

The head of the land administration bureau, in contrast, is a member of the administrative apparatus, as is the rural planner to a certain extent. As will be elaborated in more detail below (chapter 5.2), they are caught between two authorities: the local government and the higher-level body of their administrative branch. Employees of administrative bodies enter their post through regular employment procedures as opposed to the exams that people in the political sector have to take. Unless they switch to the political career path, they are set to stay in one administrative body, in the locality where they took the employment. Their career outlook is to rise to higher ranks within their ministry or bureau, which will always leave them under the authority of a Party member on a political career path. [56]

This distinction between administrative staff and politicians is unusual among scholars of Chinese local government (e.g., Ang 2012a; Brødsgaard 2012).[57] In my research, however,

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[56] Chinese terminology for bodies of state administration differentiates between the levels of government, to which the respective body belongs. While 部门 denotes a national ministry/department and 厅 is the word for a ministry/department at provincial level, I translate both with 'ministry.' Municipal and county-level bodies of administration are both designated as 局, which I translate as 'bureau.' Their counterparts at township level (所) are structurally different and will be called 'office.'

[57] An exception is Zhou (2013, 2014), who differentiates between the Party and administrations and thus investigates the tensions and power struggles between politics and bureaucracy.

I found this distinction between administration and politics highly useful, since the respective actors work with very different skill sets; moreover, their career orientations and the objectives of their work differ considerably.[58]

The third group of actors are the planners from New Town Company. They work for local government on a contract basis, thus serving as external experts and consultants while writing the legal documents for local government. At the same time, these planners are liable for the plan to conform with all existing regulations and standards – so they are in a position of having to enforce law vis-à-vis the local government.

Spatial planners are experts in their field; their policy understanding is focused on the field of spatial planning; spatial planning processes are their default mode of working. In contrast, the Party secretary has to switch between similar policy-making processes in fields as diverse as population planning, tax and finances, and social security. As has been shown above, the Party secretary has barely time to prepare any meeting but has to be present in each of them; and without proper preparation, he or she is the one who has the last say in any matter.

These three groups have very different stakes in the planning process: While the persons in the administration see their role mainly in coordination, the handling of all the tasks in the background, as well as the enforcement of existing standards and regulation, professional planners act as a service provider for local government, supplying their technical knowledge and their experience as well as compiling the planning documents. At the same time, they are chronically overworked and have a strong interest in finishing the job smoothly while ensuring that the plan is within the legal framework. Politicians, then, bear the political responsibility, i.e., the responsibility for the spatial plan being in line with higher-level political priorities; they are also the principals in this triangle of relationships. However, spatial planning is often imposed upon them by external authorities, either because it is a prerogative for a policy they might want to implement or because they are mandated so by higher-level governments. In those cases, spatial planning is a necessary bureaucratic exercise, while in other cases, spatial planning might be used as an easily manageable method to gain political status (Wu 2015: 59-67).

These roles and stakes may conflict, as I have shown in the vignette above: The spatial planners wanted to follow their routine workflow, whereas Secretary Liu brought up new issues that probably stemmed from other fields of his political work. Many of my interlocutors hinted at this conflict by using the phrase 'the leader does not understand planning' (领导不懂规划, references non-verbatim: FN #33, interview Teacher Wei). Both people in the administration and planners working for New Town Company used this phrase to describe

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[58] In the following, I will call these two groups 'politicians' and 'administration,' respectively. Since it was not always clear to me to which of the two groups a person belonged or from which strand of the apparatus a instructions came, I use the terms 'government' and 'officials' in those cases where I do not differentiate between politics and administration.

the difficulties of convincing political leaders of the quality and technical soundness of their work.

This is only a very rough sketch of the different stakes and roles in the spatial planning process. The boundaries between the three groups are also not as clear as I have painted them here. People may switch from the administration to a political career track or from a planning unit to the administration. As I delve deeper into the inner set-up of the planning administration in the course of this chapter, I will present in more detail both the stakes and roles of these three groups as well as the relationships and revolving doors between them.

5.1.2   Spatial planning between regulation and facilitation

At the time of research, spatial planning occupied just a niche in the large Ministry of Housing and Urban and Rural Development (MOHURD, 住房和城乡建设部).[59] The legal framework restricts it to the regulation and guidance of construction, defining the technical and legal means of spatial plans as regulating construction and land-use functions of built space. In contrast, in many strategic documents, spatial planning is assigned strategic importance. The New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) clearly expresses that spatial planning is to contribute to the coordination and guidance of the variety of policy areas involved and the planning law (NPC 2007) sets high standards for the objectives of spatial planning, including economic growth and the protection of the environment. Thus, the primary role of a planning project may be regulatory, but it is also facilitating.

Accordingly, there are different kinds of plans, which combine different degrees of regulation and facilitation. In my research, I focus on general plans (总体规划) for townships, which are regarded as the most encompassing type of plan. Location plans (选址规划) and regulatory plans (literal translation: controlling detailed plans, 控制性详细规划) focus on technical aspects such as conflicts with other existing or planned construction, and various measures regulating buildings. Terminology for spatial plans mostly serving for strategic and policy-formulation purposes is manifold. Wu (2015) translates the official term of 非法定 as non-statutory, i.e., not included in regulation. Such plans may or may not include technical aspects of construction or design.

General plans comprise both technical regulation and development strategy. Regional and economic analyses provide the argumentative function of these plans. Consideration of material from other bureaus and close integration of political leadership in the planning process serve as linkages to the locality's development strategies. General plans also include strategies for investment and development of different parts of the area. They formulate the strategic position of the locality within the regional context. At the same time, however, they prescribe the distribution of settlements and the respective functions within the territory of

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[59] In summer 2018, the administration of spatial planning at the national level was transferred from the ministry for construction, which still exists, to the new super-ministry for natural resources (自然资源部).

the locality; they delineate concrete construction zoning and must adhere to the technical codes and standards for construction. In this sense, there are substantial technical elements to spatial planning, but equally strong elements of formulating policy and strategy.

Throughout my research, spatial planning continued to escape definition. It was equally difficult to pin down the objects and objectives of spatial planning. Leaving aside its dimensions as a profession and as an academic discipline, spatial planning can be described as follows: Spatial planning is about regulating the distribution of land uses and public facilities over the built-up territories of towns and cities. It may focus on industrial development, the preservation of local heritage, or the production of a liveable environment. Often enough, such divergent objectives are combined and distributed over space. Spatial planning is regulated not only by a planning law but also by a voluminous body of different legislation that has to be observed in formulating the plan. A spatial plan is also a legal document used by the administration in issuing land-use permits and a prerequisite for any public investment.

More specifically, parts of spatial plans are legal documents. The maps are legally binding, as are the written planning documents (文本). In addition, a plan comprises the Powerpoint presentations in which the narrative and the argumentation of a spatial plan is built, and the explanatory documents (说明书). The latter two explain the rationales of the spatial plan: They argue why the strategic direction selected for the plan is valid, and they explain how to make decisions based on and within the framework of this plan.

Therefore, there is a tension between a plan's regulatory and restrictive contents and its strategic considerations for expansion and development. Spatial planning is also characterized by a tension between its formally rather humble status and its extensive strategic contents. This is coupled with a certain fuzziness in the relations to other branches of administration. The following chapter revolves around the organization of spatial planning as a government task in order to establish a clearer picture of what this branch of administration is about.

5.1.3   Chapter overview

In this chapter, I look at three aspects of the administration of spatial planning: Regulation, administrative structures, and coordination with other areas of policy-making. The focus lies on the process of plan-compilation by professional planners and local government and the assessment process which plans have to go through to pass into legislation. This presentation's conceptual framework is provided by the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework*, which is introduced in the first section of this chapter. In the second section, to orient the reader throughout the following discussion of empirical material, I provide an overview of the planning process at the example of the general plan for Wanderlust township. In the next step, I look at the regulatory framework for spatial planning: I analyze the national planning law for its framing of spatial planning; then, the hierarchical organization of plans,

in which the higher-level plan guides and restricts local planning, is explained. This is followed by an account of the different usages and backgrounds of technical standards.

In the next section, I present the administration of spatial planning by exploring its location within the different levels of administration and within the various bodies of administration. In this context, I first present spatial planning administration at national and provincial levels before looking at municipal, county, and township levels.[60] I then delve further into the planning process at the township level to provide more empirical detail about how structures and regulation affect planning decisions at the local level. Then, I turn to the people working in administration. I look at their career trajectories, their standards for their work, and the differentiation between political and administrative personnel. Finally, I introduce a further organizational body in plan-making: Public planning institutes are owned by planning ministries or bureaus and operate partly on the market, partly as agencies of planning administration.

The third section of this chapter looks at the mechanisms of coordination with other bureaus. Here, I show that the formally prescribed steps of coordination for planning, i.e., both the collection of data and the assessment meetings at the end of the planning process, do not have a substantive coordinative effect. This task, especially at township level, is fulfilled by the presence of the Party secretary or other leading political personnel throughout the planning process since they have an overview of the agendas of various policy areas in the locality.

5.2 *Fragmented Authoritarianism* on administration and bureaucracy in China

In a study about the bureaucratic and administrative set-up of large-scale energy sector investment projects, Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988) introduced the concept of *Fragmented Authoritarianism*. They found that such projects would not be realized after a one-off decision by the responsible bureaucratic body. After an initiative had been made, the project's concrete form and size were negotiated in countless meetings with other agencies and with subordinate governments. This was an ongoing process. The project might change shape even when construction had already begun, as new bureaucratic actors entered the stage or better arguments were found for certain positions (Lieberthal/ Oksenberg 1988: 26). For this process, the term *bureaucratic bargaining* was coined.[61]

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[60] Since my fieldwork focused on county and township level, I do not have any first-hand data about national and provincial levels. For this reason, the presentation and analysis in that section is rather dry, even if necessary to get a thorough understanding of how the administration of spatial planning works. For those readers who are not interested in the very technical details of the Chinese administrative system, however, the section on national and provincial administration can easily be skipped.

[61] For good overviews of the framework and its development over the last decades, cf. Mertha/ Brødsgaard in: Brødsgaard (ed., 2017); Habich (2016); Lieberthal (1992).

However, bureaucratic bargaining often met dead ends when agencies at the same level of the bureaucratic ranking system, i.e., ministries within one locality, or ministries and the local governments one level down, could not find a compromise. This problem was attributed to the *tiao-kuai*-system (条块, literal translation: lines and pieces) of bureaucracy and government in China: This system consists of 'horizontal' territorial relationships of authority (*kuai*) and 'vertical' lines (*tiao*) within the administrative branches from one level in the territorial hierarchy to the other.[62] In this system, any administrative body at provincial level or below is subject to two hierarchies of control and command: local government and the higher-level ministry or bureau. There usually are also authority relationships with other branches of administration. Any administrative body will be subjected to only one 'leading relationship' (领导关系), in which the higher-ranking bureau is entitled to issue direct orders. The other relationships are so-called 'professional relationships' (业务关系), where the relationship between ministries or bureaus is made up mostly of information and guidelines (Mertha 2005: 797; Lieberthal 2004: 186-188). Whether the horizontal or the vertical line is the leading relationship varies between the branches of administration. For example, in land administration, the vertical relationship has command and control, whereas in planning, local government has the leading role (Wu/ Li 2010: 56). However, planning administration's 'professional relationships' with higher levels of planning administration as well as with land administration entail considerable checks and controls.
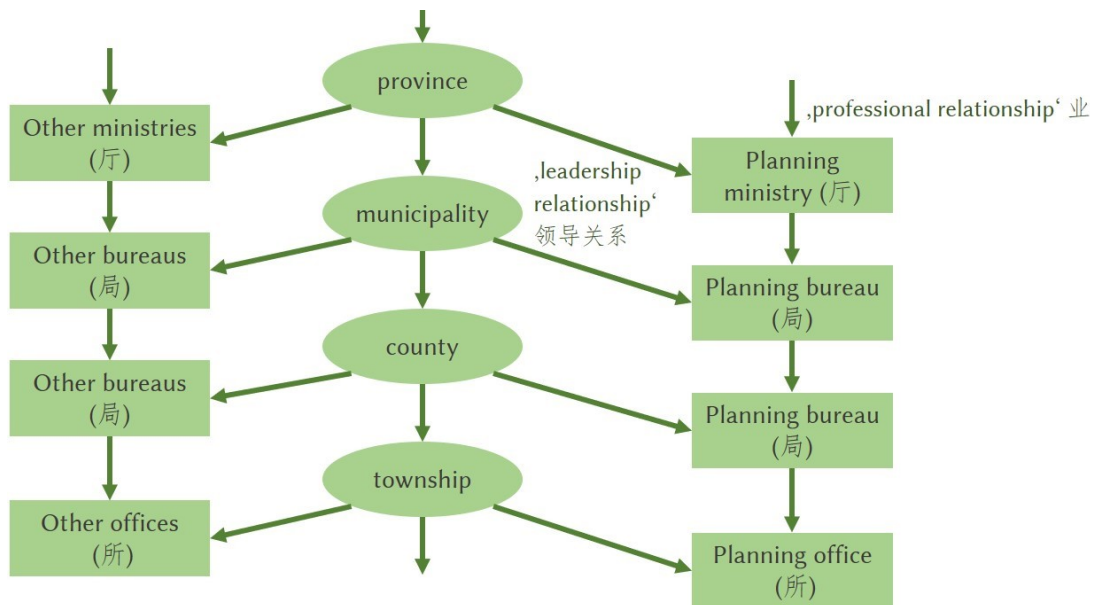
Figure 1: Tiao-kuai-structure of spatial planning
Source: author

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[62] Even though the lines are called 'horizontal' and 'vertical,' this does not mean that the vertical line is top-down while the horizontal line is not. On contrary, both lines of authority do have the power of command and which one is stronger depends on the specific arrangement of professional relationships(业务关系) and leadership relationships (领导关系).

Both the older and newer strands of literature within the FA framework diagnose 'ruptures' or 'cleavages' in the administrative structure, i.e., gaps and inconsistencies in the system, that have to be mitigated by non-formal means (Grünberg in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Lieberthal 2004: 189ff). The overall system is described as one in which integrating forces, i.e., the central state, ideology and the 'addiction to authority' (Grünberg in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017: 31), and decentralizing forces, i.e., weakly coordinated bureaus and local governments, are in constant tension with only fragile equilibria (Mertha/ Brødsgaard in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017). It is argued that one of the core strengths of the framework is that it explains how tendencies to both pluralization and integration complement each other (Grünberg in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017: 31).

The 1990s saw much research within the FA framework, as the edited volume by Lieberthal and Lampton (1992) testifies. This research extended the FA framework beyond the policy area of energy investments, and it formulated additional mechanisms of negotiation and coordination. The interest in administrative and bureaucratic structures of policy-making in China, however, was displaced by an interest in the more political side of policy decision making, in the processes at the very top of the political pyramid and in the strategies of individual cadres (Mertha/ Brødsgaard in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Grünberg in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017).

The engagement with bureaucracy and the administrative system reappeared in recent years and many arguments in this new strand of literature sound evocative of public administration theory. It is argued that to understand policy content, we need to know how the system works in practice, what different positions there are in the hierarchy, and what sorts of knowledge are utilized in decision making (many contributions in Brødsgaard in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017; Brødsgaard 2012; Ang 2017). For example, the contributions in the edited volume by Brødsgaard (ed.) (2017) discuss the question of whether the framework still adequately describes how bureaucracy works in China. In unison, they conclude that the overall framework still provides an accurate description of the frictions and problems that the administrative system confronts. Negotiation, bargaining, ambiguity, and the *tiao-kuai*-structure, are still seen to characterize the system. However, all authors find that within the specific sectors they focus on, the agencies and structures of decision-making have changed so much that the system's concrete descriptions need to be revised.

I have chosen this body of literature since it looks explicitly at how administrative structures form policy, rather than focusing on individual career calculations and political rationalities. Theorizing and research on public administration recognize that bureaucracy has the power to shape, enable or blockade policy and its implementation. Research about planning, in my opinion, must recognize and assess the influence that administrators and technical experts hold over the formulation of plans. In fact, politicians may be dependent on co-opting or convincing administrators and drawing on the expertise and knowledge of profes-

sionals. The FA framework recognizes that the bureaucratic apparatus can have power independently from the power politicians hold. Even though it does not draw a clear-cut line between administration and politics in China, the literature on *Fragmented Authoritarianism* provides a productive lens to assess administrative structures and the processes within and between administrative bodies. For this reason, I chose this strand of literature as the basic orientation of my presentation of the intermingling between politicians, administrators, and external planners in the effort to come up with strategies and regulation for spatial development.

In the administrative processes I looked at, I found surprisingly little negotiation and bargaining. What is more, the planning process lacks substantive communication between departments, since the assessment meetings, in which other branches of administration comment on the plan, take place towards the very end of the planning process. I also push the framework's scope in two aspects: First, except for Li (2016) and Habich (2016), I found no research that reaches below the municipal level. My research, however, centers on the county and township levels. Townships have smaller administrations, much less well-staffed, and have less political scope than county or municipal governments. Township administrations are integrated into one unit, while at the county level and above, each ministry or bureau counts as one organizational unit. This precludes bargaining and negotiation between administrative units at the township level since there is only one. Because townships' administrative capacity is so limited, the county will be involved much more in the planning process than expected at higher levels of government.

Second, among my core interests is the dynamics within one bureau, which is barely covered by the FA framework's literature. Brødsgaard (2012) and Ang (2010, 2012a) have provided a few hints about various employment status and careers in government and bureaucracy. Both Li (2016) and Gorm Hansen (in: Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017) powerfully demonstrate how artificially constructed and superficial the use of technical standards or scientific measurements in bureaucratic decision making can be. In this chapter, the tasks of planning administration are shown to consist of regulation, coordination of planning processes, and implementation of plans and standards. Both in regulation and in planning processes, planning companies or planning institutes are consulted. I also introduce planning institutes as one kind of public service units, partly body of government and partly market entities. I also identify a change in the staffing decisions in planning administration, where increasingly professional planners are being hired. Thus, on the following pages, I contribute insights into the various tasks performed by various offices and posts within a local bureaucracy to the existing understanding about administration in China.

5.3 The process of general planning in Wanderlust township

Whereas most research within the FA framework focuses on connections and interactions between different bodies of government (between different levels, or between branches

of administration), this chapter aims to tell a story of policy-making from the perspective of one area of government responsibility. More specifically, the following analysis is rooted in my experience of the planning process for Wanderlust township, which I was permitted to accompany. The following sketch of the Wanderlust planning project provides an overview of the sequence of steps in making a general plan (interviews Teacher Wei, Chu Weide, Han Ruishan, Deputy Mayor Wang, Ms Deng, figure 2).

When I joined the Wanderlust planning project, the planning company was just making a fresh attempt at planning the township. The previous year, they had already almost completed a general plan for the township. However, at that time, Chengdu municipality had decided on two large infrastructure projects that significantly impacted the township's territory. These projects necessitated major relocations of rural population as well as development restrictions on substantial rural areas. Planning for the township was halted in summer 2015, and in spring 2016, New Town Company made a fresh start on this general plan.

Therefore, the terms of the contract between New Town Company and the township government were already fixed when I joined the project. Data had already been collected and the project team was already quite familiar with their counterparts at the township government. These were the people we already encountered in the introduction to this chapter: Party Secretary Liu, Deputy Mayor Wang, the head of the land administration office, Mr Zhang, and the rural planner, Mr Chen. Within the first three months of my participation, the *compilation phase* of the planning process was concluded:[63] In frequent exchange with the township government, planners analyzed the relevant data, developed first concepts for the spatial forms and for the strategic position of the township. In regular meetings with local government, the central problems had been identified and solutions had been worked out. At the company offices in Chengdu, the planners brainstormed on concepts and solutions. At the township government, they presented their ideas to their counterparts at the township for feedback. On these occasions, there would also be additional field visits to get a feeling for specific places in the township.

When in some weeks after the mid-term meeting described above, both the township government and the spatial planners were content with the general plan, the *assessment phase* of the planning process was initiated. In this phase, the plan is reviewed first by administrative representatives of other county bureaus and by external planning experts familiar with the area and the broader policy context. Then there is a meeting of the affected bureaus' political leadership. Again, the plan is discussed and assessed, this time from a political perspective, not from the administrative and technical point of view. These meetings took place at the county level planning bureau. Now, spatial planners and the Wanderlust government had to justify their decisions vis-à-vis the higher level of government together. After this, the planning and land administration bureaus at municipal level reviewed the

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[63] This conceptual separation of the planning process in different phases is my own.

Government initiative for planning	Compilation	Assessment process	Implementation

Official and formal contract

Collection of data from the administration

Field surveys

Analysis of data and formulation of strategic position

Meetings with local government

Informal commission

Company-internal feedback meetings

Compilation of maps and legal documents

Assessment by:
other bureaus
public opinion
planning committee
higher-level administrations

→ adaptations and adjustments

Passing into local legislation

Implementation by county and township administrations

Limited and guided by regulation and standards, by higher level plans, and land use regulation

Figure 2: Planning process, generalized from Wanderlust township
Source: author

spatial plan and its regulations for legal problems.[64] Only then could the documents be approved and passed into legislation by the township People's Congress.

As sketched out in chapter 5.1.1, the three groups of actors – planners, politicians, and administration – have very different roles and rationales in this planning process: In the meetings, spatial planners both had to offer ideas and strategies while also supplying the technical knowledge and enforcing relevant regulation. Simultaneously, because of their long-term engagement with the locality and the traditional appearance of the town, Teacher Wei was heavily invested in producing a state-of-the-art general plan that would contribute to a revival of the township and preserve the old structures in the town.

Making a general plan was not Party secretary Liu's independent decision. On the contrary, Wanderlust had been mandated to compile a new general plan by higher-level government to accommodate the changes brought about by regional infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, it became clear from Secretary Liu's active engagement with the planning process that he valued this opportunity for policy formulation and strategy making. Moreover, because this plan was being compiled just before the county government made a new land-use plan, he planned to use the general plan as a prospectively persuasive argument in lobbying for additional construction land quotas. As shown in the introductory vignette to this chapter, Secretary Liu undoubtedly was in the position to make decisions in the planning process. However, lacking technical knowledge, at times, he needed to concede to the views of spatial planners, i.e., of persons who were not in government positions.

From administration, Mr Zhang from the township land administration office was involved in the planning process; the county planning administration provided organizational support. Besides, staff of the county and municipal planning bureaus would review the plan for its legal correctness. Of all the actors, they were probably the ones who had the least pressing stakes in the general plan: The people I talked to were mostly interested in enforcing higher-level legislation and in reducing waste and inefficiencies (interviews Ms Deng, Mr Zhao). In this role, they usually were even more interested in technical details than the planners from New Town Company.

In these objectives and interests, the ambiguity of spatial planning is evident: Spatial planners and administration are engaged in enforcing the directives and legislation of higher levels of government, while simultaneously, the planning company assists politicians in devising a viable strategy for economic development. The general plan develops technical solutions for problems posed by higher-level infrastructure projects and for local development. Much more politically and strategically is the utilization of the plan as a tool in lobbying the county-level land administration for additional construction land quotas. Thus, a constellation of different purposes of spatial planning was covered by this one project.

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[64] This was done at municipal level and not at county level because of Wanderlust's general importance to infrastructure projects.

Within the literature on FA, such processes of formulating policy positions and strategies within one government body, here the township government, are not usually looked at. Instead, the final products of such processes will be taken as given formulations of interest, which the parties bring into negotiations between bodies and levels of government. Already the presentation of the process of compiling the general plan for Wanderlust township in this section has shown that both technical expertise, legal limitations, and administrative structures have strong influences on spatial plans. The general plan, which might from the outside appear as political strategy and intent, shows itself to be produced in extensive consultations between planners, administrative staff, and politicians. Only the latter follow a political career path; the other two groups have very different stakes in the planning process.

5.4 Legal framework and use of regulation in spatial planning

Laws and regulation matter in spatial planning: not only are general plans and regulatory construction plans legal documents in their own rights; their form, content, and the process of compiling them are also regulated by respective legislation. At the core of this body of legislation is the general planning law, which speaks to the overall role of spatial planning and lays out the core contents and core structures of planning. There is also a multitude of standards formulated on various levels of government for specific aspects of spatial planning. Moreover, for a spatial plan at any given level of government, the spatial plans of higher government levels are also a legally binding framework.

In order to understand how spatial planning works (in China or anywhere else in the world), it is crucial to consider the relevant legislation as well as the overall constellation of plans and regulation. The regulatory framework structures both the planning profession and the administrative field. Therefore, in this section, I will examine the planning law, the relationships between plans and regulation of different government levels, and the use and role of technical standards. The legal definitions of both the tasks, contents, and administrative location of spatial planning provide one stable anchor point for defining what planning is all about. Especially in the section on technical standards, the roles of the groups of actors will also come into more precise focus: Even though politicians set the agenda, most research and concrete formulation is done by the planning administration and by professional planners.

5.4.1 The Urban and Rural Planning Law

The planning law has been in force since January 2001 and prescribes the outlines of the planning system (NPC 2007). This law lays out the fundamental objectives and powers of spatial planning, the organizing structures for the planning process, and other legal preconditions. It is supported by many additional standards and regulations about technical aspects

of planning, processes to be followed, and issues to be addressed, both from central government and lower levels. This section provides a rough overview of the law's stipulations, focusing on the legal status and relevant functions it ascribes to planning. This overview is by no means exhaustive, and I will return to the planning law several times in this chapter. This section is primarily concerned with how the central planning legislation frames and defines planning.

The purpose and objectives that the law ascribes to spatial planning are ambitious indeed:

为了加强城乡规划管理，协调城乡空间布局，改善人居环境，促进城乡经济社会全面协调可持续发展，制定本法。 (NPC 2007: § 1)

This law was made to strengthen planning and management of cities and villages, to coordinate the urban and rural spatial structure, to improve people's living environment, [and] to facilitate progress in sustainably developing and comprehensively coordinating urban and rural society and economy. [own translation]

The overall structure of the planning law is oriented towards the different activities that make up spatial planning from the point of view of public administration: After the general provisions in paragraphs 1-11, which lay out the purpose, objectives, and rough responsibilities of spatial planning, the second chapter (§ 12-27) lays out the procedures and responsibilities of plan-making (城乡规划的制定). § 3 of the law states simply and straightforwardly that city and townships governments should (应当) set up plans and that any construction activities within towns and cities have to comply with those planning regulations. While central and provincial governments produce settlement system plans (城镇体系规划), which include large-scale infrastructures, each level downwards from there must produce general plans (总体规划).[65] The term used for the responsibility is 'organize the compilation of the plan' (组织编制规划), and it is made clear in§24 that the technical work has to be commissioned (委托) to planning companies with the necessary permits and capabilities. The law describes which infrastructures and public facilities have to be included in which plans and which administrative bodies are responsible for drawing up the controlling detailed construction plans that follow from the general plans. The assessment and review process described in the previous section is regulated in §§ 26 and 27.

The third chapter of the law (§§ 28-45) looks at implementation (实施). This chapter starts with guidelines and priorities for infrastructure construction (§§ 28-33). The repeated admonition in these paragraphs to plan and invest in reasonable proportion to the locality's

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[65] Wu Fulong (2015: 59-66) explains the important differentiation between *statutory plans* (法定规划), which are the plans that governments have to compile and which are legally binding. These include settlement system plans, general plans, and detailed control plans. Other types of plans or of planning content are more strategic exercises; however, the non-statutory plans (非法定规划) that I saw during my fieldwork always included statutory elements.

size and economic situation indicate that these paragraphs are intended to curb the development of purely representative projects. The following paragraphs regulate controlling construction plans (控制性详细规划), the issuance of construction permits, and thus the implementation of the contents of plans.

The planning law confirms what many of the official planners I talked to told me: 'planning comes first' ('规划先行'), i.e., any construction project or spatial intervention in urban areas has to be based on the respective plans (FN #44, #47). Spatial planning, therefore, is set as the bureaucracy that regulates construction activities and strategy.[66] These regulations put spatial planning in a rather powerful position: it has a veto right on any construction activity, be it by the state or by private investors. At the same time, the law provides guidance for the contents and priorities of construction projects. It does so, however, in relatively mild language, with no precise formulations about what would be, for example, 'appropriate' (合理) sizes for new urban districts (§ 30) or what sorts of underground constructions are 'fitting' (相适应) for which 'level of economic and technical development' (§ 33). These soft formulations stand in contrast to the paragraphs on planning's veto rights on land allocation and construction permits.

Chapter four (§ 46-50) regulates the procedures for changing spatial plans, basically stipulating the same monitoring and control process necessary for the making of entirely new plans. Chapter five on supervision and inspection (监督检查, § 51-57) and chapter six on legal responsibilities (法律责任, § 58-69) define which bodies control the implementation of plans. Local government and the higher-level planning bureaucracy share the burden to control the actions of the planning ministry or bureau. For the context of this research, § 62 is of preeminent importance: the planning companies or institutes bear the legal responsibility if plans violate technical standards or relevant legislation. The remaining clauses (§ 64-68) set down the fines and consequences investors and constructors face if they infringe on planning regulation.

The planning law sets up clear hierarchies. Where it comes to implementation and control of regulation, the law emphasizes the vertical (条) authority; horizontal relationships (块) between the local political leadership and the planning bureaucracy guide and control the concrete contents of plans and their implementation. The law sketches an elaborate system of tasks and control procedures. Simultaneously, the ambitions for spatial planning that it formulates go well beyond the administrative realm of spatial planning. However, apart from encouraging governments to employ state-of-the-art technology (§ 10) and from the call that plans should be adequate to local economic and social conditions (§ 4, 5), there is neither guidance about how to achieve these objectives, nor how they could be measured.

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[66] However, it is also made clear that land administration authorities have a similar power. Their first task is to limit the conversion of agricultural land to urban construction land; spatial planning does not have any authority over agricultural land, its power is limited to designated construction land.

5.4.2 A hierarchy of plans: different statutory plans and their contents

One of the core aspects of the planning law is the definition of types of statutory plans and the relationships between them. There is a hierarchical system of spatial plans, each type and each level of plans can make prescriptions to specific depths and for specific contents. Other contents have to be adopted from plans of higher government levels or are being left to lower levels to decide. Plans also vary with regard to which bodies of government or administration supervise their contents (table 3), and who (administration or government) is responsible for compiling the plan. This hierarchy runs parallel to the structures described by the FA framework. Yet, its details and ramifications demonstrate not only top-down command, but also the discretion that local level, and within the local level various bodies of government, have. Departing from the plans around which the planning system revolves, this section serves to demonstrate its structure. It also gives a sense of the position the plan for Wanderlust township has within the system and what that meant for the contents of the plan and the process of producing it.

Types of statutory plans as defined by the 2008 Urban and Rural Planning Law		
Denomination	**Description**	**Compiled by levels of government**
城市体系规划 Urban system plan	Provides a regional overview of urban settlements and regional infrastructures connecting the settlements	National to county
总体规划 General plan	Overview of the city and predominant land-use functions in each housing block	Municipal to township
控制性详细规划 Regulatory detailed construction plan	Regulates features such as height, construction density, distance to roadsides, etc. for smaller areas of the city; In contrast to the Detailed Construction Plan (修建性详细规划), which is a blueprint for construction compiled by the parties engaged in construction.	In large cities: city district government or for especially significant projects, municipal governments; Otherwise: county or township government

Table 3: Types of statutory plans
Source: authors' compilation

According to the planning law (§ 12, 13), central and provincial levels of government produce settlement system plans (城镇体系规划) which lay out the overall spatial structures of the territory and set the frame for planning at lower levels of government.[67] The settlement system plans I have seen not only give an overview of where cities, towns, and urban

[67] Overview of the Sichuan province settlement system plan: CAUPD (2016).

clusters are located and how they are connected by different means of transport. These plans also look at and prescribe orientations of economic development: where will which branches of industry be located, where will there be urban clusters, and what are the trajectories of their economic strategies? Similarly, those plans set the rough outlines of zones of land-use intensity: there are zones of intensive urban and industrial development, and zones of agriculture; areas of landscape protection, and zones with even stricter regulations of natural protection. These plans also determine which areas will benefit from large transport axes. In the case of Wanderlust township, the Sichuan province's settlement system locates the township right at the boundary between areas of intensive agriculture and areas in which the protection and conservation of landscape is the guideline for all development. This localization had far-reaching consequences for land-use zoning in the township, but also for its overall industrial development strategy.

Governments at municipal, county, and township levels prepare general plans, including settlement system plans and zoning plans for the central city or town, i.e., the local seat of government. Settlement system plans become increasingly detailed as they move down the administrative hierarchy. That means, the layout of structures, settlements, and strategic orientations grows in resolution and detail while treating the higher-level plans as a given.

Plans for central cities or towns of an administrative area work differently: Their core content is the zoning of urban territory into functional areas. Zoning includes the design of the street network, areas for residential use, commercial use, industry and offices, and public buildings' location. General plans also include spatial plans for all kinds of infrastructures, ranging from the networks for electricity, gas, and water to the spatial distribution of hospitals, schools, and public green spaces. In the case of general plans, higher-level plans only prescribe a general strategic orientation and the boundaries of the urban construction territory.

While the entity responsible for compiling general plans is the respective government, detailed regulatory construction plans (控制性详细规划) one level below the general plan are under the purview of planning bureaus. These plans cover those parts of the urban area for which new construction is envisaged. They prescribe the concrete technical details of construction: the height of buildings, floor area ratios, distances of construction to roads and to other buildings, the percentage of green space, or safety and architectural aspects, for example. These are the regulatory basis for the actual construction plans (修建性详细规划), which are the architectural and engineering plans of the construction and investment companies. In principle, these construction plans are formulated based on general plans. In the case of Wanderlust township, however, because of higher-level regulation, regulatory construction plans for new districts of the town had to be included in the general plan so as to save government time and planning costs.

The general plan for Wanderlust township included 1) a settlement system plan for the township. It detailed the location of existing rural settlements, settlements where the relocated population would be moved to, and locations where public service facilities (schools, community medical centers, etc.) would be established, expanded, or maintained. For these settlements, no concrete spatial plans were made since this was village governments' responsibility. 2) For the central town, a zoning plan and issue-specific plans were prepared as well as 3) construction plans for those areas that were to be restructured or newly developed.

In many regards, this hierarchy of plans reflects the FA framework's basic structure: In settlement system plans and technical standards, we see the line authority's power. The hierarchy of plans and regulations serves the function to ensure that higher government policy is communicated and translated into local action. At the same time, local government is responsible for compiling general plans. It decides on the concrete contents; this embodies horizontal relationships of command and control.

The general plan for Wanderlust township included contents that are not listed in the legal framework for plans: a mapping of historic structures in the town center, a concept for the preservation of selected rural homesteads (林盘), and a strategy for economic development. These are non-statutory elements often found in plans. With such additional elements, spatial planning is applied to contemplate development strategy beyond the scope planning legislation prescribes.

5.4.3 Technical standards

Local governments and administrations compile general plans and construction regulation plans. However, this does not mean that local governments are entirely free in how they design urban space: Apart from the restrictions on land use, and apart from the stipulations of higher-level plans, the plans must also comply with the variety of additional legislation. Such legislation mostly takes the form of technical standards (技术标准).

In the planning process for Wanderlust township, much attention lay on standards prescribing per capita square meters for residential space, commercial space, schools and hospitals, and other land-use functions. In a later stage of the planning process, standards for streets generated a problem: an existing street was to be refurbished as the principal connection to a regional road. Since the standards for different types of streets have rather diverse requirements for the width of the street, of the sidewalk, and the accompanying grass strips, this would have meant that the private houses lining this street would need to be demolished (interview Mr Zhang).

Moreover, many discussions between planners and government revolved around one difficulty: The municipal planning bureau had set up a standard for absolute construction bans along regional roads and bodies of water. This standard prescribed within which distance from roads or rivers construction would not be permissible, not even renovation of

existing buildings. For the new, fifth ring road around Chengdu, this distance was 1000 meters in each direction.

This severely limited the choices local governments had: One day, when Luo Zhicheng, accompanied by a junior colleague and me, was at Reverence county planning bureau for other purposes, he had a short meeting with two government officials from Apple village (FN #23). Due to industrial development in the township, the government officials needed to find a new site for settlement on the village's territory. They had come to the county planning bureau specifically to meet with Luo Zhicheng to discuss their options, get a professional opinion, and find out whether they might like to commission Luo Zhicheng with the spatial plan for the new settlement.

Therefore, between two of the meetings for which Luo Zhicheng originally went on this trip, he, one of his junior colleagues, the two officials, and I went into one of the smaller meeting rooms. The officials had brought large printouts of spatial plans and satellite pictures of Apple village. They pointed out the three possible locations they had come up with and explained their rationales. However, the planners directly discarded both options. Each would have been too close to a road, thereby violating the construction ban. As the discussion progressed, and different possible locations were reviewed, it became clear that there was only one spot in the entire village territory where a new small rural settlement could be constructed. Anywhere else was out of bounds due to the construction ban along roads.

This discovery visibly shook the two officials. Clearly, they would have preferred another location for their new village and tried several times to convince Luo Zhicheng to help them make a plan and a good argument for another location. Luo Zhicheng refused them point-blank: He would not knowingly make a plan that went against such higher-level standards.

I discussed this specific regulation several times with Luo Zhicheng and other interlocutors (e.g., interviews Mr Zhao, FN #19) and received various explanations about the construction ban's purposes. In these accounts, the construction ban

- establishes a green belt around the central city and green corridors throughout the municipality;
- protects the surrounding areas from the dust and noise made by traffic;
- is a tool to make sure that it remains possible to add new intersecting streets without having to struggle with homeowners along the street;
- is easy to control and implement.

My interlocutors told me that this regulation was set by governments at the municipal levels and below. These governments would have had considerable discretion in setting the minimum widths of the construction belts. Planners complained in unison that the minimum distances prescribed by the municipality were too large and that this produced difficulties for villages and townships.

The planning ministry or bureau develops standards (usually called 标准, sometimes 规范), sometimes in cooperation with the respective planning institute (interviews Mr Zhao, Director Ba). Employees at the planning ministry or bureau or at the planning institute will research the issue in question, which will then be compiled in a report. Both at the municipal planning bureau and the provincial land administration ministry, my interview partners emphasized how voluminous these reports were. Some effort needed to be made to condense these findings into technical standards that would be usable in the scope of work of their respective branches of administration.

There are different kinds of standards. Some are binding, such as the construction ban or planning guidelines for the width of roads; some standards can voluntarily be applied, through which labels can be achieved. Examples are the sponge city approach for cities which absorb rainwater (海绵城市), or the Historical and Cultural City (历史文化名城). The latter serve as policy guidance and tools to govern the agenda-setting by local governments. Successful application of the standard and the attainment of the label will contribute positively to future career options.

Technical standards reflect the political leadership's values and agendas (interviews Mr Zhao, Director Ba). The initiative for new standards comes from the respective government or Party committee, but researchers in the administration work out the technical details. They will formulate the standard itself and an administrative directive about how to implement it. The standard can then be accessed in book form or online. Textbooks for planning also cover such standards: they list the issues covered by standards, point to the ID numbers of relevant standards, and provide a systemic explanation of what they mean (e.g., Wu/ Li 2010; Li 2014; Melcher 2017).

Technical standards are a central means of coordination between government and ministry or bureau. The government formulates its political agenda; administration works to translate this agenda into a standard that rests on substantial research and is applicable within the respective administrative bodies' working mechanisms. Thus, technical standards are meant to guide construction and planning at the lower level (e.g., interviews Huang Tianming and Ming Lili, Mr Zhao).

At the same time, those standards are used as guidelines and blueprints for planning decisions. In the words of Huang Tianming: 'It is just, if [we] do not have standards [for] this plan, then it is especially tiring to make up.' (就是如果那个规划没有规范，也就特别吃力做起来。 interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili) He explains here that technical standards also serve as a conductor of best practices and of approaches to solve issues that regularly come up; but also that technical standards are a useful tool for complexity reduction in spatial planning: many tricky issues, which might have needed research, conceptualization, and discussions, such as the number, size, and distribution of schools and hospitals over the territory of Wanderlust township, were transformed into the application of a technical standard. Such standards for the distribution and size of public facilities correlate the

prospective population size with the areas that were to be designated for schools and hospitals.

Nevertheless, Luo Zhicheng expressed a criticism that often was present in the subtext of conversations about technical standards (also formulated in Li 2016): these technical standards may be well-meant, but they are too rigid. Even if they do not fit local circumstances, there is no way to adapt them to meet local needs. He added that sometimes, higher levels are ambitious in setting standards. Then – as in the case of the construction ban along the ring road – local governments struggle to implement the standard. For the case of environmental policy-making, Li (2016: ch. 3) describes how such presumably technical standards severely restrict political discussions and policy implementation: A project will be assessed according to these standards by the responsible policymakers. This focus on technical standards supersedes considerations about whether the project makes sense for the specific locality or even achieves its purported objectives.

5.4.4   Conclusion: spatial planning defined from the perspective of regulation

Like the planning law, technical standards demonstrate the ambiguity of what spatial planning is all about: Standards are strict regulations, bound to and expressed in concrete figures (like the width of roads, or the size of a school relative to population.). However, even though the standards are called 'technical' (技术), the initiative comes from politics, and they are often used as a means for policy implementation. And vice versa, even though standards are used for policy implementation, politicians are dependent on professional and administrative expertise to formulate the standards. The lines of differentiation between technicality and politics or between administration and politics are blurry.

This ambiguity notwithstanding, examining the laws, the hierarchy of spatial plans, and technical standards has helped map out one facet of spatial planning in China. Seen from this perspective, spatial planning presents itself as a hierarchical system in which policy prescriptions and spatial conceptualizations are passed down through government levels and made more concrete and specific at each step. This regulation's object is the spatial distribution of public facilities, infrastructure, and different kinds of land use. This distribution includes the demarcation of zones of construction ban or construction restriction, with the objectives of either safeguarding the environment and historical heritage, of reserving space for future uses, or as safety measures. Apart from distribution in space, spatial planning also regulates properties of infrastructure and other construction, such as the capacity of roads and pipes as well as the flor-area-ratio (FAR)[68] or stylistic properties of buildings.

From this reading of regulation arises a very technical and bureaucratic take on spatial planning. Accordingly, administration plays a crucial role in the legal and regulatory facet:

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[68] FAR is the ratio of total floor-space to the area of the site, Chinese 容积率. It describes density of construction.

Oversight of lower-level planning activities, formulation of technical standards, and translation of higher-level spatial plans into local planning are primarily administrative tasks. Politicians might set agendas, but they are strictly limited in their decision-making by existing spatial plans and regulation. Enforcement of those, once again, lies with administrative actors. Market-oriented planning companies, in contrast, barely appear in this narrative at all. Therefore, the conflict that shimmers through the lines of many laws and technical standards is between politics, who aim for expansion and growth, and administration, which puts up limitations and aims to make growth and construction reasonable (合理) and scientific (科学).

5.5 Administration of spatial planning

The theory of *Fragmented Authoritarianism* puts much weight on the *tiao-kuai*-structure of Chinese government, i.e., on the double authority of local government ('horizontal' authority, *kuai* 块) and higher-level administration ('vertical'/ 'line' authority, *tiao*, 条). The vertical line stands at this section's focus: It examines the inner structures and allotted tasks of the ministries and bureaus under whose authority spatial planning lies. I ask how work is organized internally and how in the vertical line, relations between administrative levels function.

Among the three groups of actors, people working in the administration stand in this section's spotlight. They describe their work as supporting politics in formulating regulation and ensuring that regulation is adhered to in spatial plans and that plans are implemented. In this, there is a clear differentiation from both professional planners and political leaders.

This chapter first shows how the vertical line of planning administration is winding between different administrative bodies and varying internal structures.[69] Then, looking at the township level, it is demonstrated how the boundaries between politics and administration and between township- and county-level administration become much less clearl y demarcated at the bottom of the line. This boundary between political and administrative spheres, as is shown in the following section on employment statuses, is an emic distinction in the administration; however, this section again points to the areas where these boundaries are porous. Last but not least, planning institutes as bodies between administration and the planning profession are introduced.

5.5.1 The structure of the vertical line authority

While the planning law demands that spatial planning contributes to various issue areas, spatial planning does not hold a prominent position in the national administrative structure.

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[69] Readers who do not have a keen interest in the intricacies of administrative structures in China are asked to skip that section, since it mainly consists of technical detail.

As the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* leads us to expect, a vertical system of administrative bodies is concerned with spatial planning. However, the line of vertical authority is winding between association with various other branches of administration, be they ministries or bureaus for construction, for urban and rural development, or even for land administration. While spatial planning is allocated in three offices within more encompassing ministries at national and provincial levels, it is one separate bureau, i.e., a whole administrative body, at the municipal and county level in my area of fieldwork (figure 3). At the township level, there often enough is no office which is dedicated to spatial planning. Instead, in part, spatial planning is organized by an office responsible for a related area of administration (often construction or land administration) and, in part, by the county-level administration. Correspondingly, the variety of tasks and responsibilities, as well as the administrative relevance of spatial planning are greatest at municipal and county levels.

In this section, I look at the internal structures and tasks of these administrative bodies in the areas relevant to the Wanderlust spatial plan, i.e., the national level, Sichuan province, Chengdu municipality, Reverence county, and Wanderlust township itself. These official structures and descriptions of tasks illustrate the status of spatial planning and the functions it is assigned. From this angle, spatial planning appears much less rigid and technical than in the previous section, where regulation and legal structure were examined. [70]

Internal structure of central and provincial ministries concerned with spatial planning

At the time of research, spatial planning at the national level was one of many responsibilities of the Ministry of Housing and Rural and Urban Development (MOHURD, 住房和城乡建设部). This ministry is also responsible for all the policies that have to do with housing (such as the provision of social housing), for infrastructure, and for construction control. At the same time, it is also involved in the management and protection of natural and historical heritage (MOHURD n.d., 2008). The department for urban and rural planning (城乡规划司), one of fifteen departments in the central ministry, covered a broad spectrum of mostly administrative tasks, from regulation and monitoring of spatial planning, through the organization of planning practice, to implementation. By including land surveys, public monuments, and protection of historical structures, the department of urban and rural planning's responsibilities go beyond the aspects covered in the planning law. This list of tasks also illustrates the mechanisms of vertical authority discussed in the previous section: The department for urban and rural planning does not only set the overall system of regulation for spatial planning and compile the national-level spatial plan. It also oversees spatial planning in the whole country, which means that spatial plans for important areas have to be

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[70] This section contains a lot of detail about administrative structures of planning ministries and is not easy to read, nor of interest to people who are not specifically interested in the workings of administration in China. Please feel free to skip this section.

Chinese Ministry of Housing and Urban and Rural Development (MOHURD)				
Department for Urban and Rural Planning	Department for Urban Construction	Department for Rural Construction		12 departments unrelated to spatial planning

Ministry of Housing and Rural and Urban Construction in Sichuan Province				
Office for Urban and Rural Planning	Office for Urban Construction	Office for Construction in Villages and Towns	Office for Administrative Assessment	12 offices unrelated to spatial planning

Chengdu Municipal Planning and Management Bureau				
Office for Policy and Regulation	Office for General Planning	Office for Rural Planning Management	Office for Inspection of Urban and Rural Planning	
5 offices for planning management of the central city	Branch bureaus for city districts	Office for Land Survey		2 offices for internal administration

County Planning and Management Bureau				
Office for Formulation of Urban and Rural Plans	Office for Planning Management	Office for Legal Matters	Office for Infrastructure and Land Survey	Bureau Administration

Figure 3: Overview of the vertical structure (条) of planning administration
Source: author

examined by this office. Thereby, this department sets the regulation and policy objectives; it also controls the implementation of both regulation and policy objectives.

The administrative tasks and responsibilities of the Ministry of Housing and Rural and Urban Construction in Sichuan Province (四川省住房和城乡建设厅), as fixed in the regulations of August 2016 (i.e., eight years after the regulation for MOHURD had been set up; Ministry of Housing and of Construction of Sichuan Province 2016), sound very similar and follow the same differentiation of issue areas. There is one Office for Urban Construction (城市建设处) and one for Construction in Villages and Towns (村镇建设处), which oversee implementation and construction activities. Only the Office for Administrative Assessment (行政审批处), responsible for the implementation of planning regulation through control of plans and issuing permits, does not have a counterpart at the national level.

The tasks of spatial planning offices at the national and provincial levels present a more comprehensive understanding of spatial planning than had been expressed in planning regulation: In addition to compiling spatial plans and drawing up technical standards for spatial plans, planning offices are concerned with the design of public space, protection of historical structures, infrastructures, and what might be called the management of the planning profession. This includes issuing planning permits, overseeing spatial planning in localities all over the country, and designing the system of regulations.

Spatial planning does not seem to attract much political or administrative attention: None of the current leading small groups is concerned with related issues. The spatial planning administration is only one of many offices in the ministries that mostly concentrate on housing issues and technical construction issues.[71] Thus, the policy field at the center of this dissertation holds a niche position in the structure of the central Chinese administration. In contrast, much of the rhetoric and discussions around regional development regularly address spatial planning as a major arena of policy guidance. Examples include local planning exhibitions or the wide academic reception of national strategies for regional development, such as city clusters or the New Urbanization Plan.

Central and provincial levels of administration did not have a direct role in the planning process of Wanderlust township. Nevertheless, the issue areas reflected in their structures come up again, in a similar form, at the planning administration's lower levels. Thus, the influence of the planning authority is perceptible in the structure of planning administration.

Tasks and structure of municipal and county planning bureaus in Chengdu

One of the Deputy-heads of the county planning bureau (Urban and Rural Planning and Management Bureau 城镇规划管理局) of Humble county, i.e., a member of the political leadership of the planning bureau, described the tasks of their bureau to me thus:

> 就是我们那个城市的总体规划，是由我们规划局负责编制。然后那个镇村的规划，就是各个镇和村规划，我们县规划局负责指导。然后那个规划的行政许可啊，是由我们来负责。
>
> (interview Mr Zhu)

> *In our planning bureau's responsibility is the compilation of the general plan for our city here.*
> *Then, the planning of townships and villages is planned by each respective town and village, we*
> *at the county planning bureau are responsible for guidance. Then the administrative licensing*
> *[in the field] of planning, this is under our responsibility. [own translation]*

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[71] Both at the central level and in Sichuan province, however, these niches in the administration receive support from prestigious public service units (cf. chapter 5.5.4), both in terms of expertise as well as in administrative capacity.

The Humble county planning bureau's deputy head added that 'licensing' entails investigations of whether engineering plans, architectural land-use plans, and spatial plans comply with the law. He then adds that the planning bureau is also responsible for land surveys (测绘) as well as for the infrastructure networks in the county (市政管理).

Like the respective ministries at the national and provincial levels, the county planning bureau engages in spatial planning, controlling spatial plans of lower levels, and distributing licenses. However, spatial planning at the county and municipal levels have bodies of government (bureaus, both are termed 局) of its own right.

Chengdu Municipal Planning and Management Bureau (成都市规划管理局, Bureau of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality 2015 ）has two internal administrative offices and ten offices that work on different aspects of planning. Of these, five offices are concerned exclusively with 'planning management' of the central city. They are supported by branch offices (分局) in the districts of the core city. These branch offices are responsible only for the implementation and management of plans. They do not have any authority over issue areas deemed of central importance by the main bureau (interview Mr Zhao). Three offices are responsible for spatial planning at lower levels of government: One for urban areas outside Chengdu city, one for rural planning, and one inspection office for regulatory oversight.

In the planning bureau of Reverence county, the office for legal matters (法规科) did a legal check on plans and issued construction permits. The office for planning management (规划管理科) focused on communication with investors and formulation regulation, thereby implementing plans. The primary contact point for the Wanderlust planning team was the office for rural and urban planning (城乡规划编制科), working on county-level plans and supporting township planning projects. In a project such as the Wanderlust township general plan, this office would collect the relevant data from other bureaus, organize assessment meetings, and facilitate communication with the municipal level. Responsibilities of the remaining offices were network infrastructures and land survey (市政测绘管理科) as well as internal administration.

According to Mr Zhao from the municipal planning bureau, there are three forms of guidance to lower-level plans: technical standards, minimum requirements, and non-binding concepts that local planning is encouraged to use. At the municipal bureau, the principle of work is strengthening control at both ends of the planning process (加强两头, interview Mr Zhao). Ons end is municipal regulation, which county governments and below have to take as an input. The second end is the tight control over translating these standards and guidelines into spatial plans by the municipal office for general planning. This office also reviews the plans of counties and important townships in the assessment process. Finally, after a plan has passed into legislation, the inspection office will control implementation, in part by sending remote sensing drones to counties to control whether construction complies to the plan.

The township level

From the national level down to the county, the structures of the planning administration have been roughly parallel: At each level, planning is located in one administrative unit (单位), and they each have a separate political leadership. The most important differences between the levels were the breadth of tasks, the ministry's or bureau's size, and the relationship to other issue areas. Township level government falls outside this structure. Township administrations consist of only one unit (单位) and do not have the status of a full local administration (Zhong in: Chung/ Lam (eds.) 2010: 180f). Moreover, not necessarily all administrative functions are present at the township level. For example, Wanderlust township did not have an office (所) for spatial planning; there was only an office for land management (国土所) with about six employees. This office was also responsible for the administrative aspects of the planning process and would later be the contact point for people applying for a construction permit. This office coordinated and oversaw the general planning process for Wanderlust township on the part of the township government. It was led by Deputy Mayor Wang, who thus was the primary contact person for New Town Company.

The Wanderlust planning process was organized, paid for, and under the township government's political prerogative. Nevertheless, the county-level planning bureau took over many of the tasks in a planning process. The county administration was thereby much more involved in the planning process than a municipal level bureau would be involved in a county-level planning process. The reason given to me was that the administrative task of spatial planning at the township level only had very limited resources available.

Interviews with officials about the relationship between county and township levels in spatial planning did not revolve around standards and regulation, as they did when discussing the line relationships between municipal and county levels (exception: Mr Zhu). Instead, the focus was on practical and organizational support that the county planning bureau provided for the planning process, such as collecting the relevant data from other bureaus. Moreover, the coordinative and evaluation meetings at the end of the planning process would not be held at the township level but at the county level, since the township level offices did not have the authority to make the relevant assessments. Similarly, in implementing the plan, Wanderlust township's land administration office was not entitled to issue construction permits. They would only collect the documents from applicants and sent them to the county-level planning bureau, which would issue or deny the planning permit (interview Ms Deng, Mr Zhu, Mr Zhang; FN #93).

My administrative interlocutors at the county level presented the municipal planning bureau's influence as an outside force, unconnected to their work and decision-making. However, the same bureaucrats described the relationship with the township level in very different terms: they do not only regulate and control but also support and guide.

Altogether, the vertical line of administrative control meanders from national to township level: The institutional affiliation of spatial planning shifts between different ministries

or bureaus, while tasks are becoming more concrete towards the lower administrative levels. However, the core tasks of the spatial planning administration are constant: compilation of spatial plans for the respective administrative level; drafting of regulation and its implementation vis-à-vis lower levels of government; and control and distribution of construction and planning permits.

5.5.2   Spatial planning at the bottom of the line authority

Townships are in charge of their own planning

The deputy head of Humble county's planning bureau, whom I have cited above, talked about the organization of township planning:

> 就乡镇的规划，其实，他的编制主体其实不是那个县级人民政府的规划局。他是镇这里的政府。噢，实际上我们是指导他们；比如说他的城镇能够符合成都大的那个规划原则方向啊，我们来落实这个政策、来指导他们往这个方向发展。但是主体，编制主体，是各个镇政府噢。(interview Mr Zhu)

> *Actually, the principal of compiling village and township plans is not the People's government's planning bureau at the county level. It is the government of the township. Well, in fact, we [the planning bureau] guide them; for example, on whether their urban areas match the broad principles and orientation of Chengdu [municipality]. We go and implement this policy; we guide them to develop in this direction. However, the principal, the principal of compiling [the spatial plan] is each respective township government. [own translation]*

The authority over the spatial plan (事权) is with the respective government, in this case, the township. Thus, in making the Wanderlust township general plan, meetings with the planning company took place in the township administration, under the leadership of Party Secretary Liu.

Among the Chinese state's administrative branches, spatial planning counts as comparatively bottom-up. Higher administrative levels only have a limited influence on local spatial planning, and local politicians will make the final decisions. However, the higher administrative level has some influence, through legislation, prescriptions in their spatial plans, and compulsory assessment at the end of the planning process. Accordingly, whereas Mr Zhao from the municipal planning bureau emphasized that his bureau would not influence lower-level spatial plans, he followed up by stating that the municipal level makes sure to have some oversight: 'The power is in their [county government's; LM] hands, but that does not mean that we do not care at all' ('权力在他们手上，但是不意味着我们完全不管。,' interview Mr Zhao). With this statement, Mr Zhao emphasized the prescriptions and recommendations intended to ensure the quality of spatial plans. As examples, he said that localities were encouraged to implement certain programs, such as sponge cities; the municipal planning administration would also set binding standards (刚性的标准) and strict limits (红线) to the impact on the environment by construction and spatial development. Moreover,

municipal planning administration controlled compliance with other existing standards, plans, and regulations.

Limitations to planning decisions at the local level

In the planning process for Wanderlust township, these restrictions and limitations were felt clearly, since the county and municipal plans prescribed the general direction of Wanderlusts development: That its population was to grow, that its economic strategy was to angle for tourism. The municipal plan set the general parameters of development for the larger area: Wanderlust township sits on the boundary between the agricultural and industrializing areas of the municipality and territories where strict landscape protection standards apply. The county's regional development plan grouped Wanderlust with neighboring townships and prescribed an economic development strategy. Municipal and county spatial plans were given extensive consideration in the planning process; in this regard, spatial planning at the municipal level and below has a much more direct and concrete impact on policy and planning decisions at the township level than provincial and national levels have.

Settlement system plans and general plans of higher administrative levels include a differentiation of the whole area into intensive industrial and urban development zones, predominantly rural areas, and landscape protection zones. Wanderlust township lies in rural and landscape protection areas, and this had a massive impact on plan-making: There was no permission to draw up zones for industrial land use. Therefore, planners had to think of creative solutions, e.g., to produce a more coherent space for the local artisanal industry (interview Deputy Mayor Wang). The ban on the expansion of industrial land use also meant that an economic strategy based on second sector production was impossible. Thus, while Party Secretary Liu was very concerned about the two major industries in the township, which needed new spatial arrangements, higher-level plans barely left any maneuvering space for such facilities. Moreover, the set objective to create a tourism destination was challenging because there was considerable competition. Many already well-established historical towns with very similar profiles in the vicinity attracted weekend tourism from the whole municipality. Consequently, the plan included gestures towards tourism by giving the protection of the historical town center a great deal of attention and by emphasizing that the local artisanal industry would attract many customers from outside who would also visit the town center.

Political decisions in planning

Higher-level plans envisaged the town to grow in population and status – however, there were conflicting statements about this in different planning documents. Some saw Wanderlust develop into a 'small city' (小城市); other documents sketched its future as a 'specialized township' (特色真) with a focus on tourism. Neither term was defined clearly.

The general plan for the municipality (of 2011, revised in 2013) depicts the township as a 'normal township' (一般镇).

These ambiguities led to much uncertainty, first among the planners, and then again in meetings with politicians: The discussions revolved around what these standards meant or which development objectives they included; whether or not such development was realistic, and which functions such a town might have in order to attract the population growth envisaged; which label was the politically adequate one to pick to comply with all the different policies. In the planning documents presented for the expert hearing in the assessment process, the resulting formulation was that Wanderlust was to be a rural small town and a township specialized in the local handicraft industry. The argument that made this the most attractive option was that the construction standards for small cities made a more generous allowance for various land-uses that could be utilized expansively, such as commercial zones and public utilities (e.g., schools and hospitals). The township would have more scope for investment and development of public resources, and thus it would be easier to fulfill development objectives. This argument convinced Party Secretary Liu, who had been worried about displeasing the higher political levels by announcing a too ambitious development goal (FN #35).

Party Secretary Liu was clearly uncomfortable with having to take this decision. It was a decision that in itself was in contradiction to the presumably technical character of spatial planning. As I have shown in my account of the administrative structure, people working at the planning bureaus describe the planning system as rational, as a system in which conflictual decisions were impossible. This became most obvious in my interview with the Deputy-leader of Humble county's planning bureau, Mr Zhu (FN #78). He was young, very ambitious, but also insecure in his role. It probably was this insecurity that made Mr Zhu much more careful than my other interlocutors in what he said and what he did not tell me, in which questions he refused to answer. Thus the interview demonstrates clearly which aspects and procedures within the system this planner perceived as irregular and therefore not presentable: Mr Zhu dodged each question about political decision-makers' involvement in planning; he was even more unwilling to talk about the messiness of coordinative processes and decision-making.

Spatial planning in townships takes place near the bottom of the vertical line of authority in the planning system.[72] The actors involved in plan-making have to follow the regulations and standards formulated at higher levels, most notably at the municipal or county levels. As I have shown with the example of the size and status of the central town of Wanderlust, such requirements can be contradictory, which necessitates choices and decisions by the local political leadership beyond the existing regulations; there was considerable discomfort among some of my interlocutors with this fact.

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[72] Only villages rank below townships

5.5.3   Employment statuses and the work administrations do

What different positions are there within planning bureaus? Let me take Deputy Mayor Wang of Wanderlust township as an example: At the time of the planning process, Deputy Mayor Wang was the politician responsible for planning, construction, and land administration in the township, and he ranked just one level below Party Secretary Liu. Probably in his late thirties, he was young in comparison to most other senior members of the township government. Deputy Mayor Wang drove a new car, wore a sizeable wristwatch, and was usually dressed much less formally than anyone else in the planning process. He often wore just a t-shirt instead of a button-down shirt, and once, he even turned up in jogging pants. Always in a good mood, Deputy Mayor Wang would joke with the planners before and after meetings. Deputy Mayor Wang was also relatively open about his family and career (interview Deputy Mayor Wang): Not long ago, he had been an employee at the county-level planning bureau, the administrative head of one of the offices there. From this position, he maintained good friendships with some of the planners of New Town Company since they had worked together before.

Mr Wang's change to the deputy mayor's post represents a change of career: From having a permanent administrative job in the county-level planning bureau, he now was on a political career track. Suppose he does things right and with a bit of luck. In that case, he may obtain a leadership position at the county level or even above (however, as Kostka/ Yu 2015 argue, the latter is improbable because of glass ceilings in the system). On the political career track, his trajectory is neither bound to a locality nor an issue area. As the next step in his career, he might work as the leader of an infrastructure bureau or even a bureau to unconnected to the issue areas of spatial planning or construction. My interlocutors in the administration usually emphasized that decisions about the contents of plans and regulations were not up to them at all – Deputy Mayor Wang had now joined the ranks of those who, within the scope of regulation, could make substantive decisions.[73]

In my field of research, this differentiation between politicians (领导, lit. leader; used synonymously: 公务员, public servant) and administrative staff (职员 or 雇员) is an emic differentiation. The different career trajectories and job descriptions of these two groups impact their logics of reasoning. The administrative staff is mostly concerned with implementing existing regulation and with coordination and organization. People on a political career track are in charge of formulating policy, interpreting higher-level policy, and deciding how to implement it at the local level. Their orientation, therefore, is much more geared

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[73] During the meetings for the general plan, however, he usually was very silent. This can be explained with the fact that in most cases, Party Secretary Liu was present, who is his direct superior. It was also explained to me that this was due to the fact that his family home was in Wanderlust township and he therefore did not want to run the risk of advantaging or disadvantaging someone.

towards policy preferences and objectives on the parts of their superiors, whereas administrative staff focus on more technical and 'mechanical' matters of governing.[74]

Political leaders

The political career system resembles a chessboard:

由于我们这儿只要进入公务员系统就变成了全国（的）一盘棋。[laughs] 说大了就全国一盘棋嘛，说小了其实就是全市一盘棋。哪天你调到哪去都有可能的。

(interview Mr Zhao)

Because once we enter the public service system, we become [part of] a national chess game. [laughs] If we look at it from a macro perspective, then it is a national chessboard; in the small case, it is a chessboard made up of the whole municipality. They can send you anywhere any day, everything is possible. [own translation]

What is called here the ‚public service system' is not – like in German or English terminology – a system of persons serving a government, independently of their political orientations. 'Public servants' (公务员) in the terminology here are on a political career track; they are in decision-making positions either within the Party apparatus or in government (Ang 2012a: 679). The scope of decision making varies: Deputy Mayor Wang has responsibility for selected areas of township policy-making; however, Party Secretary Liu looks over his shoulders. His position is equal in rank to that of a deputy-leader of a county-level bureau. Ranking above them are township mayors and leaders of county bureaus; then comes the county leadership. At each level, the respective Party leadership can overrule the corresponding government positions.

In the statement above, Mr Zhao says that public servants can be sent anywhere. In the interview, he also explained that the criteria according to which the political superiors choose one's next posting are not technical or professional knowledge, but one's political track record. This means that Deputy Mayor Wang's shift in career was not owed to political merits.

In the case of the Reverence county planning bureau, this political leadership consists of the head of the bureau and two Deputy-leaders as well as the head of the Party inspection group (纪检组长, source: website of the bureau, anonymized). Of the same rank as the Deputy-leaders is the planning master (规划师) of the county. The heads of the various offices

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[74] Research on this question focusses on the *bianzhi system* (编制, i.e., people employed by the state, within the public system of personnel management; cf. Ang (2012a); Brødsgaard (2012)): who counts as a public employee in China, and how big is the public sector? However, the differentiation applied in this strand of literature does not fit the present purpose, since not only politicians and some administrative staff are counted among public employees, as are people working in public service units (see below), but also employees of Party organizations and some employees of state enterprises. In turn, administrative staff are not necessarily included in the *bianzhi* system.

in the bureau, one of whom Deputy Mayor Wang used to be, are senior administrative staff and thus not counted to the political system.

Administrative staff

Deputy Mayor Wang started his career in the late 1990s as a low-level employee at the county planning bureau.[75] He had never received tertiary education but had acquired his knowledge about the administration's working and spatial planning on the job in the planning bureau. In our conversation, it became evident that he did not only identify as an administrator, he also prided himself of understanding many technical aspects of spatial planning (interview Deputy Mayor Wang).

From his former colleagues at the planning bureau (interview Ms Deng, FN #94), I learned that most staff at the planning bureau has never had a formal education in spatial planning. The two office leaders I got to know at the planning bureau had studied public administration (公共管理). Like Deputy Mayor Wang, they told me that their knowledge of spatial planning was acquired from experience on the job. This is also illustrated by an experience of Fan Jianhong from New Town Company (FN #80): At Reverence county planning bureau, he once dedicated much time to explaining construction regulation and its detailed implications to the leader of an office in the planning bureau.

The fact that there was only very little staff with an education in the planning profession was framed as a problem by one of my interlocutors at the county level, who said that they try to recruit more people with technical knowledge (interview Ms Deng). However, Mr Zhao at the municipal bureau did not see this as a big problem (interview Mr Zhao): The bureau's primary purpose is administrative and technical work is usually outsourced (外包). Even technical assessments can easily be given to external professionals. Therefore, his staff does not have to be able to do such work. Instead, his staff has to be well-versed in the general normative direction (价值取向). Thus, what was needed was less technical proficiency but rather an understanding of policy and regulation.[76]

What planning bureaus do was described to me as 'service' (服务) for the government, as being mainly about the implementation of decisions (执行) and management (管理). In more concrete terms, they described the tasks of their offices as (interviews Ms Deng, Mr Zhao, Mr Zhu):

- collecting and ordering documents necessary for the formulation of spatial plans;
- organization of meetings;
- examination of plans about their compliance with existing law;

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[75] At that time, there still was no fully developed job market in China – the best students were still assigned positions upon leaving middle school. So did Deputy Mayor Wang: he had been an outstanding student, therefore, he was assigned the post at the county planning bureau (interview Deputy Mayor Wang).

[76] At the same time, however, the municipal bureau has it much easier to find suited employees; Mr Zhao told me that most of his staff have a background in spatial planning. He added that this is actually not the norm in the administration, since most other branches of administration are not as closely affiliated with an academic discipline.

- management of the process of translating planning documents into law;
- issuing of construction permits based on the plans;
- formulation of policy documents;
- formulation of regulation.

These descriptions of jobs in the administration of spatial planning draw a boundary to the two other groups of actors involved in the planning process: to politicians whose decisions are treated as external inputs to administrators' work. And to planners, who have a technical education, who produce the plans at the center of planning bureaus' work. This separation of actors was confirmed by a professor of planning who did not see it as a suitable option for her students to start their careers in administrations at county level (FN #88).

With his new career, Deputy Mayor Wang crossed this boundary between public servants and regular administrative staff. The shift of career paths that Deputy Mayor Wang achieved is not unusual: Another young employee of the township administration was preparing for the test to enter the political career track (FN #93). Similarly, my interview partner at the municipal planning bureau, who is the head of one office, has moved from a career as a professional planner to a position in the administration.

All in all, the differentiation between administrative and political actors within government and within the planning bureau is not only analytically useful; it also corresponds to an emic differentiation in the field. These two groups bring different orientations to the planning process: politicians look more towards policy objectives in the locality and at higher levels, whereas administrators focus on implementing existing regulation. As I have discussed above, both orientations are included within the scope of a spatial plan. The third group of actors that I have introduced in this chapter, professional planners, then introduce technical considerations and a comprehensive understanding of the application of issue-specific regulation to the planning process. Professional planners will be introduced in more detail in chapter 7.

5.5.4   Planning institutes

There is a group of semi-administrative bodies which further complicate the differentiation between politics, administration, and professional planners: the 'planning and design research institutes' (规划设计研究院, from now on short: planning institutes). Planning institutes are partially government-funded and partially market-based; they both serve the public (public function, 公共职能) and are profit-oriented market actors (market function, 市场职能) (interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili).

In the literature on public administration in China, such institutions are called 'public service units' (PSUs, the Chinese term is 事业单位) and have received very little attention (only Ang 2010; Lam/ Perry in: Lee/ Lo (eds.) 2001; Lo/ Lo/ Cheung in: Lee/ Lo (eds.) 2001).

In the field of spatial planning in Chengdu municipality, however, planning institutes play a central role.

PSUs are organizational units (单位) that belong to a body within the public administration, in this case, planning ministries or bureaus at various levels. Their central purpose is to support administration by taking over tasks requiring special technical expertise, research skills, or other specialized input. Before reforms of the public sector, PSUs used to be fully funded by their superordinate ministry or bureau and worked mostly on their orders. As Ang (2010) describes, by now, they are increasingly independent of public administration, most centrally so in terms of their funding.[77] In the horizontal-vertical structure of the FA framework, PSUs organizationally are subordinate to the respective ministry or bureau, so there is little formalized or direct communication with the respective local government or with other bodies of administration.

Ang (2010: 28-40) coins the concepts of 'extrabureaucracies' and 'bureau-contracting' to explain PSUs' roles and organizational model: they stand somewhat outside the administrative *tiao-kuai* system but are not entirely external to it. Their funding comes in part from the bureaucracy they are associated with, and in return, they support the bureaucracy in its work. 'Bureau-contracting' refers to the phenomenon that the administration outsources some tasks on a contract basis to PSUs. My data confirm this. For example, Mr Zhao above cites the outsourcing of most technical tasks as the reason why he mostly needs staff with administrative skills (interview Mr Zhao).

In contrast to Ang's (2010, 2012a) account, outsourcing is very formalized in the case of spatial planning. As the planning law stipulates, the formulation and drawing of a statutory spatial plan have to be done by planning institutes or companies (in the law simply called 'units' 单位) with the adequate license (资质). The technical and professional expertise required to formulate new technical standards or approaches to spatial planning is provided to the bureaus by the planning institutes. The outsourcing of technical tasks in spatial planning is thus not simply a way of downsizing the bureaucratic apparatus and of finding additional sources of funding for government tasks

With the reform of the administrative system, PSUs have also changed. They have become economically more independent from government and have built up their own business models. The spectrum of different business models of PSUs is well-reflected by the three prominent planning institutes in Chengdu municipality: The China Southwest Architectural Design and Research Institute Corp., Ltd. (中国建筑西南设计研究院限公司) used to be a national state-owned enterprise (SOE). It has been fully marketized and partially privatized.[78]

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[77] Ang (2012a) also tells the story of shifts in personnel between PSUs and public administration: During the reforms of public administration, many bureaus had been obliged to let go of a substantial proportion of their personnel. Many of these persons, however, were shifted to the PSUs, and basically would still perform the same tasks and functions, at only minor losses of income. However, they didn't count in the statistics of public employees anymore.

[78] I didn't have any contact with this institute during my fieldwork, and it does not focus on spatial planning but on architecture and urban design in its work. Nevertheless, when talking both about the planning market in the region as well as about PSUs in spatial planning, my interlocutors frequently referred to this company.

In stark contrast stands the Chengdu Institute of Planning & Design (成都市规划设计研究院). It mostly takes on planning tasks from the municipal government, with little time and space left for other projects. In return, the largest part of salaries and operating costs are funded by the municipal planning bureau. Therefore, the plans that this planning institute prepares for the municipal government are not paid for on a contract basis but are covered through the municipal bureau's regular financial contribution.

The employees at Sichuan Institute of Urban Planning and Design (四川省城乡规划设计研究院) receive a base salary from the provincial planning ministry. However, the bulk of their income comes from planning contracts within the municipality and with other regions in the whole country (interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili, FN #45, #75). In this, employees at the Sichuan planning institute have much more freedom than people working at the municipal planning institute. Like the regular staff of planning ministries or bureaus, people working in these PSUs have the status of public employees. Nonetheless, planners of the Sichuan planning institute whom I got to know saw themselves as planning professionals working on a competitive market. Like the municipal institute, however, they would also do research for the planning ministry and provide input to policies and technical standards (interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili). Moreover, if the ministry needed workforce, personnel would be sent from the planning institutes to help with administrative tasks.[79]

Because of their prominent status both in the profession and in the administrative system, these three planning institutes have a head start in the competition for qualified personnel among planning companies. They are also the biggest and highest-ranking planning enterprises in Chengdu. Working at a planning institute can provide a pipeline to jobs in the administration or in government; for example, one of my contacts in the administration had gotten this job by being dispatched from a planning institute.

Like other bodies of public administration, PSUs have a political leadership, including a Party bureau. However, people working at the institutes told me that the political leadership often had a background in the planning profession, and there was not much political content in their work. The Party bureaus were small and did not have much influence (interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili).

Planning institutes thereby form a link between administration and the planning profession. Their hybrid character is best illustrated when looking at their websites (Chengdu Institute of Planning Design n.d; Sichuan Academy of Urban And Rural Planning and Design n.d; China Southwest Architectural Design and Research Institute Corp. Ltd n.d.): in the descriptions of their institutional set-up, the planning institutes mention that they belong to the respective planning ministries or bureaus; but apart from that, their self-representation

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[79] At the county level, if the planning bureaus had a PSU, then it would usually deal with issues such as land surveys or very simple construction planning, not with spatial planning.

revolves around their flagship projects, their experienced personnel, and awards they received for their projects. In this, they are comparable to the websites of private planning companies.

5.5.5   Conclusion: spatial planning from the perspective of the line authority

Just as in the hierarchy of plans and regulation, the administration of spatial planning at first appearance seems very straightforward: Regulation is formulated and concretized down the line. Higher administrative levels control the implementation of regulation and planning by lower levels. This is done by administrative staff, who receive professional support and sometimes additional workforce from planning institutes, which are in their possession but operate partially on a market-basis. These administrators see their role in spatial planning strictly as organizational support for planning processes, professional support in the formulation of regulation, responsibility for implementing plans, and oversight over the planning activities at lower levels. Thereby, they separate themselves firmly from both politicians and professional planners.

Looking closer, the lines of separation and hierarchy become blurred. People shift from careers in the administration to politics or from planning to administration; regulations and plans may conflict and thus necessitate local decisions beyond the demarcated scope. Planning decisions are made at the intersection between politics, the administration, and the planning profession. More importantly, and in contrast to many other administrative branches, there is relatively much scope for local decision-making in spatial planning.

Therefore, when we look at the administrative system, spatial planning appears to be not only the execution and implementation of regulation. Seen from this perspective, these inherently administrative tasks need to be balanced both political programs and aspirations and technical expertise. This balancing and political content stand in contrast to the picture formed in the previous section on spatial planning regulation, where spatial planning appeared as a much more straight-forward hierarchical system.

5.6   Coordination of planning with the work of other administrative branches

Spatial planning connects to the issue areas of other branches of the administration in many ways. For example, spatial plans usually reflect a strong interest in protecting cultural heritage and a well-preserved landscape: Demarcation of parks and historical construction is one of the most usual contents of a spatial plan, as are concepts for the renovation and restoration of streetscapes according to local traditions. However, these issues are the core charges of the bureaus for culture and environment, respectively. Each time I inquired about how these overlaps are being managed, I would meet silence.

Let me recount one such instance in more detail:[80] At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was invited by a planning institute to come on a reconnaissance trip to Mountain city. The team filled three big cars and included the planning institute's scientific head, its most distinguished planning expert, and teams from various sections in the planning institute. Present were specialists for transport planning, economic geography, landscape planning and cultural projects, and planners more oriented towards construction and design.

The formal basis for this journey was that the provincial government had mandated Mountain city prepare a new general plan since the last one made assumptions of economic and population growth which had not materialized. This was a high-profile project, even for the prestigious planning institute.

Presently, Mountain city sported quite many industrial parks with substantial vacancies; 6-lane crossroads which were not connected to any roads; empty plots designated for construction, onto which agriculture had crept again; and in addition, many unoccupied real estate projects. Housing prices were extremely low, and yet the current general plan envisaged even more growth and construction. All this was shown to the visitors by officials at the municipal planning bureaus on three days of field visits; there were also discussions with local governments. In site visits, the general issues and problems were explored directly. The four-day-visit ended with the planners collecting the necessary data and preparing several preliminary analyses and concepts at the planning bureau's request.

On the second last day of this trip, the three landscape planners on the team took me on a walk through the inner city. We were looking for traces of historical structures, green spots that could be developed into parks and spaces for local tourism, and further aspects in which landscape planning expertise could contribute (FN #1). Ms Wu from the planning bureau in Mountain city also came on this walk.

Already on the trip to Mountain city from Chengdu, Ms Wu had been the topic of talk and rumors. A young woman in her late twenties, she had only recently graduated from a renowned university where she had studied spatial planning. Now, in her first posting, she was working as the deputy leader of the spatial planning bureau (副局长) of Mountain city, which drew the respect of the planners I accompanied. After concluding her studies, Ms Wu must have directly entered the political system. She was on a political career track, clearly aiming for more than a planning bureau in Sichuan's periphery.

In Mountain city, Ms Wu had the goal to achieve the label 'Historical and Cultural City' (历史文化名城), which is awarded by the central government for places that combine important and well-preserved heritage with scenery and good tourism infrastructure. On this walk, she showed us some old houses, rests of the city wall, and other built structures that she hoped to utilize as resources for earning the label. Among other places, she took us to a

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[80] I give considerable context information here since this field trip will come up again in this section. I did not follow this planning project much further, however, since the focus of my own research were smaller towns. Nevertheless, this fieldtrip provides many insights especially into the relationship between different administrative bodies, and into the relationship between professional planners and local government. This is why I introduce this trip as a case in its own right at this point.

park, where there stood an old pagoda between old trees. The park itself was well kept, but the pagoda was in disrepair.

Ms Wu dropped a couple of remarks about how sad this state of things was; that the bureau for culture had left the pagoda to fall into disrepair already for several years; and how difficult it was to achieve the label when the bureau for culture was so hesitant to move. After we had left the park and when Ms Wu was out of earshot, one of the planners in the group told me that there was indeed a rigorous separation between the different bureaus of local government, and that, for example, there was basically no communication between the bureaus for culture and for spatial planning.

These conversations led me to ask Ms Wu about how the work necessary to achieve the label of 'Historical and Cultural City' would be distributed among the bureaus, and how she would go about coordinating this. In her answer, Ms Wu remained vague: yes, of course, especially the cooperation from the bureau for culture would be needed for this project. The efforts would have to be coordinated, and she hoped that the others would do their part. The planning bureau could do nothing about issues such as this pagoda; this was clearly in the purview of the bureau for culture. For her project of achieving the label of 'Historical and Cultural City,' she envisaged a clear separation of tasks and programs between the two bureaus.

The tasks and contents of spatial planning connect to the work of other bureaus in many ways. Policies and needs of other bureaus and of other issue areas have to be taken into account and accommodated in plan-making. Moreover, statutory plans have to include issue-specific plans (专项规划), i.e., concepts for network infrastructures such as water supply and wastewater discharge, gas, and electricity. These maps are included in the last part of the planning documents. This is to say, there are considerable overlaps between the purviews of various bureaus.

These connections of spatial planning to other administrative branches make Ms Wu's silence significant. She seems to be at a loss to name mechanisms of communication and exchange through which to approach the other bureaus with her ideas and objectives. This is a silence I often encountered in the field. As answers to my questions for coordination with the programs, policies, or expertise of other bureaus, people would refer to technical standards, to the collection of material at the beginning of the planning process, the role of the Party secretary, or the assessment meetings at the end of the planning process. Therefore, in this section, I explore these mechanisms of coordination and communication between different bureaus in the field of spatial planning.

The *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* (FA) not only introduces us to horizontal and vertical lines of hierarchy, but also to what is called 'systems' (系统) (Lieberthal 2004: 218f). These are different ministries that cooperate and communicate closely and regularly. They often share responsibility and decisions in projects. Even though these systems do not appear in more recent literature on the Chinese bureaucracy, we can see in the case of spatial

planning that there are close relationships to certain ministries. Most notable among them are the ministry of land administration, the ministries for transport, and – at the local level, where these entities have been split – the bureau for construction. Thus, in many larger cities, land administration, spatial planning, and construction now form one administrative entity (interview Mr Zhao).

The FA framework postulates that horizontal links between bureaus and vertical links between administrative levels are primarily made up by extensive meetings with all parties concerned, and by bargaining between bureaus and levels of administration (Lieberthal 2004: 189-192). However, in spatial planning at county and township level, I have not witnessed bargaining between local bureaus. Instead, it seemed to me that there was very little substantial communication between bureaus in the planning process. Where there were instances of communication, the actors involved did not seem to be very enthusiastic. Sometimes, spatial plans are utilized as arguments to obtain permission for projects from higher levels of government. There is no bargaining about the contents of a plan in these cases, but the plan is one argument in the bargaining for local government's projects.

The silence on communication and coordination with other issue areas and other bureaus caused me some bemusement since it is thoroughly at odds with the functions and best practices of spatial planning as I had learned about them in Germany. I had come to the field, expecting spatial planning in China to have a coordinating function in the local policy process and to bring together various administrations to harmonize their strategies and spatially relevant measures. Thereby, spatial planning would serve as a platform to discuss various scenarios for the future of the locality and finally spell them out into a spatial design.

In order to address this bemusement, this section explores the links with other bureaus as they present themselves in the planning process and in the work of the planning company. To this end, I first present the instances of communication and exchange of information in general planning processes in Wanderlust township and Mountain city: The exchange of documents between administrative bodies, the role of the political leadership, and assessment meetings at the conclusion of the planning process. Finally, I turn to instances in which the plan is made in service and for the sake of projects of other bureaus. Thus, I demonstrate that the linkages to other branches of administration are either so highly formalized that substantial communication is almost precluded; or the linkages are highly personalized and solely in the responsibility of the political leadership. This confirms the finding of 'ruptures' or 'fragmentation' in the system postulated by the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework*.

5.6.1   Coordination and communication during the planning process

In the planning process for Wanderlust township, as in the other planning processes I have witnessed, there are two concrete instances of communication with other bureaus. At the beginning of a planning process, data and material are collected from other bureaus. Towards the end of the planning process, there are two assessment meetings: The first is

with administrative representatives of other bureaus and external experts. The second assessment meeting is with the political heads of relevant bureaus. Throughout the planning process, the presence of the Party secretary or another member of the political leadership in the planning process also constitutes an instance of coordination between the contents of the spatial plan and other local policies or political agendas. In the following subchapters, I discuss these mechanisms of coordination and communication in turn.

Collection of data from other bureaus

On the last day of the trip to Mountain city, Lin Xiuying, a planner from Beijing, and I collected material from other bureaus (FN #2). She had a copy of the introductory letter (介绍书), with several signatures and a big red stamp from the planning bureau. The letter explained the planning project's rationale and kindly asked the respective bureaus to supply the planner with the necessary data. Lin Xiuying was also equipped with a list of the data needed to compile the plan and where this data might come from. Lin Xiuying also brought a hard drive for the data and had been given phone numbers of contact persons at both the bureaus where we were to go.

First, we went to the municipal Development and Reform Commission (DRC, 发展改革委员会，short 发改委). The official we met there, a friendly man in his mid-thirties, received us cordially, red through the introductory letter, and asked some questions about the purpose and the background of the plan. After consultation with his superior, he and Lin Xiuying looked through the files and data; they discussed which material Lin Xiuying could receive and which data either did not exist or was too sensitive. There was quite some information he was unable to give her. Nonetheless, copying the data to the hard drive took at least five minutes.

Our second destination was the municipal bureau of civil affairs (市民政局). The conversation and the whole situation were much less formal and earnest than in the DRC. Lin Xiuying's contact came to the street to meet us, and the matter was settled quickly: Lin Xiuying showed him the introductory letter and her list with the required data, and they agreed to send everything online. In the meantime, other teams went to those bureaus which lay closest to their respective areas of expertise and collected data in the same manner.

Even though Lin Xiuying collected data she needed for her own contributions to the new general plan, there was no substantive discussion about the plan's concepts or the respective bureaus' views. In both cases, the conversations revolved around the sorts of data that the bureaus had and what could be given to Lin Xiuying and around whether the data was so sensitive that it could not be transferred online.

This is significant because it contradicts one of the central narratives of the FA framework: Contact between bureaus takes place in extended meetings, on which positions, contents, and policies are negotiated until the positions of all administrative entities involved

are accommodated.[81] The purely technical exchange of data, documents, and statistics that I observed does not seem to tally with the descriptions of open-ended discussions described in much FA research. It also represents a very technocratic approach to spatial planning: The plan will be derived from an independent analysis of the data provided. Other bureaus' political strategies are only taken into account in as far as they have been formulated in writing and have been provided to the planning institute or company. In the early stages of the planning process, when concepts and ideas are being formed, other bureaus' political and administrative representatives are not involved.

In Wanderlust township, collection of data and documents from other bureaus would mainly be done by the planning bureau at the county level since most of the data had to come from county bureaus. I had not entered the project at this stage yet; however, New Town Company has sample-lists for data to be collected, which are adapted to each specific project. One such Excel-document for a township general planning project lists concrete documents in six different areas that have to be collected: (1) different plans from the county level; (2) morphological maps and geodata; (3) data on land use and existing construction; (4) data on water management as well as on ecological and geological conditions; (5) documentation of social and economic circumstances; and (5) data on existing and planned infrastructures. Each of these categories has several subcategories (except the social and economic documentation), under which concrete documents are listed. In a separate column, the required format of the respective document is listed: mostly written documents, but also much geodata are required; in some cases, paper maps are suggested as a lesser alternative to geodata, and only for the map of flooding areas, just a paper version is anticipated. Of the 97 items on the list, 52 are marked 'needed urgently' (急需), and 38 are marked 'needed' (必须). For most of the data, the Excel-file suggests approaching the county planning bureau; the township government also figures prominently on the list. Data on infrastructure and existing construction is to be acquired from the respective bureaus. The cadaster bureau and land administration are to supply geological and morphological maps and land-use plans. As sources of socioeconomic data, the annals of county and township, the official statistics of the last three to five years and/or a working report of the township government, the county's current FYP, and detailed demographic data are listed.

This list focuses on technical aspects: infrastructure, existing construction, existing construction plans, and environmental conditions and restrictions. All of this is in line with a technocratic understanding of spatial planning, which coordinates various fields of construction activities and regulates real estate construction. Following this understanding, spatial planning at the township level ensures that other administrative branches' projects are sufficiently coordinated. Consideration of the data from other bureaus avoids a clash between

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[81] The FA framework knows a number of other mechanisms of coordination and emphasizes in particular, that often contradictory requirements are passed on to lower levels of administration, which then have to find ways to implement them (Habich (2016)). However, none of them explains how there can be so little communication in the preparation of a spatial plan.

construction, high-voltage power lines, flooding prevention, and transport development; it supports the development of suitable infrastructures for new villages and industrial parks and sets them into a regional context; and it accommodates regional infrastructures such as water reservoirs or new highways into the spatial development of the locality.

However, what about the strategic aspects? Spatial plans also lay out conceptualizations of regional economic specializations within the township area; they suggest economic strategies for the central town; and they map out investments in social infrastructures such as schools, community centers, and hospitals. Statistical data and reports from previous years, as named in the Excel-list, would not be sufficient since these are considerations about future decisions. In the next section, I will discuss how this void is filled through the local Party secretary's intensive participation in the planning process.

Role of the Party secretary: Strategic coordination of policy fields

书记讲的都是空话。(FN #97)

What the Party secretary said was all empty talk. (own translation)

This is how Fan Jianhong explained how he perceived the meeting we just stepped out from. The subject of the meeting had been a plan for the historic rural structures of the village. Fan Jianhong was a mid-level planner at New Town Company; he led one of three technical departments there. On that day in November, he, two more planners from his department, and I had traveled to Reverence county.

At this moment, we were leaving a meeting at a village government about a design of environment and construction to make this village more attractive to tourism. Apart from the three planners and me, present were the Party secretary of the village, a deputy mayor, and two or three local government representatives. Several other people went in and out of the room during the discussion. The meeting took place in a small room of the government building; the planners sat on a black leather couch, the political leaders sat on two fitting armchairs, we other son miscellaneous chairs. Tea in paper cups was served during the discussion. On the couch table, a projector was placed haphazardly and the planners presented their input in the form of a Powerpoint presentation.

This was the second meeting in the overall planning process; during the first one, they presumably had only discussed the assignment's general outlines. Now, the planners presented some very rough concepts for the landscaping and the village building's facades. There were design ideas for public squares in rural settlements, greenery in the village, and the outer walls, doors, and windows of houses. The presentation was given by one of the junior members of the team. Then Fan Jianhong, as the team leader, emphasized that these were only initial ideas (理念), and that, of course, the political leaders would certainly know much better what exactly to do.

After some critical questions from other people in the room, and Fan Jianhong's attempt to bring the discussion back to the strategic and design aspects of the plan (he called for a discussion of the 'node points' 结点), the village Party secretary weighed in: In his view, the strategic position (定位) of the village and the individual settlements was obvious, this was to be tourism, maybe with some specialization. He did not see much scope for discussion in this regard. However, he was worried that the investment would run in the wrong directions; therefore, he wanted to have an investment plan that detailed multiple stages of construction. It was also important to him that the location's strengths and resources had to be analyzed more clearly; for example, the planners should develop more concrete concepts for capitalizing on locations in the vicinity of the central town. He mentioned that he was only allowed to spend two or three million RMB (roughly 260.000-390.000 Euro), so he needed a clear roadmap of investing this amount of money. He then talked about the fact that these rural settlements were indeed unique. In light of the regional competition, he agreed that the location's strengths needed to be brought out effectively. Overall, he made many references to municipal policies and strategies which had to be followed in the spatial plan. After some more discussion with the other members of local government, the Party secretary made clear that he thought today's presentation had been too rough and too simple, that the next time, he expected more analysis, more concrete designs, and faster results.

Conflicts between planners and politicians

It was on the way back to our car that Fan Jianhong told me he thought that all that the Party secretary had said was empty talk. He explained that the Party secretary had not been happy with the results he had seen, and therefore he had talked and talked. In my interpretation, Fan Jianhong was frustrated not only because of the criticism but also because he had had clear objectives for this meeting. He wanted concrete feedback on the initial designs, to present the list of necessary data and documents, and to prepare a clear roadmap for the next steps in planning. Neither the Party secretary nor any other member of the local government reacted at all when he raised these aspects. Here, as in the introduction to this chapter, when I retold the views of the Wanderlust Party Secretary Liu at the mid-term meeting, we see an example of the tension between professional planners at planning institutes and companies on the one hand and people on a political career track on the other hand.

At the same time, I was impressed by the Party secretary's monologue, by how he brought up other strategic considerations for the location and how he referred both township- and municipality-level policies with which the plan was to be in harmony. Despite Fan Jianhong's frustration, I had the impression that this Party secretary filled the leading politicians' role precisely as Deputy Mayor Wang from Wanderlust township had described it: They would have an overview of the policies of the various bureaus; therefore, it was their role to coordinate the contents of a spatial plan with other branches of the local administration (interview Deputy Mayor Wang). This is especially the case at the village and township

level, where administrative branches have much less the character of independent units than at higher levels of government.

Within the FA framework, Party secretaries are assigned a leadership role over all policy decisions and actions in a given territory. This position contests with higher administrative levels' authority and with the policies and political objectives decided at higher levels. These limitations to political decision making and leadership on the part of the Party secretary are reflected in how they acted: They hedged carefully against the risk of going against their superiors and simultaneously utilized the planning process as an opportunity to carve out some scope for strategic decision making. This is reflected in the vignette above, when the village Party secretary is careful about his spending decisions, about being in line with higher-level strategies, while still aiming at a development that sets the locality (and thereby him) apart from regional competitors.

The Party secretary bears responsibility for implementing higher-level policies, which can be very concrete or very general; often enough, these policy prescriptions conflict with the technical standards and prescriptions that the planners have to observe. This conflict has been hinted at by many of my interlocutors in the phrase 'the leader does not understand planning' (e.g., interviews Deputy Mayor Wang, Chu Weide; FN #33, #68). Both administrative staff and planners working for New Town Company used such wording to describe the difficulties of convincing political leaders of the quality and technical soundness of their work.

Both Party Secretary Liu from Wanderlust township and the village Party secretary in the case I just introduced show a certain disregard for the professional planners' agendas and processes. Instead, they bring in a variety of other topics and issues, which shows that their agendas are formed outside of the conversations in the planning meetings: Secretary Liu talks about road access to the school (cf. chapter 5.3), which I suppose has been brought to him either by the director of the school or by parents who have access to government, and he brings up the macro concept for regional development. Such a macro concept is easy to display and to explain. It certainly brings more prestige than a careful concept for the waterways through the town – which explains why Secretary Liu was rather dismissive about this problem. The village Party secretary of Fan Jianhong's project was highly mindful of public spending limits and the policies of higher administrative levels. His concern about running in the wrong direction with the project and his emphasis on clearly planning out a step-by-step procedure of investment and construction shows that he was wary about criticism from higher administrative levels. The statements of the village Party secretary display how he hedges against political pressure from above and how he introduces these concerns into the planning process.

Agendas of politicians

At the township and village levels, Party secretaries generally are in an onerous position (Kostka/ Yu 2015; Habich 2016; Lam/ Lo in: Chung/ Lam (eds.) 2010; Zhong in: Chung/ Lam (eds.) 2010). At the very bottom of the Party apparatus, they are in closest contact with the population. They are also responsible for implementing higher-level politics, which does not leave much scope for independent decision making. At their end of the political hierarchy, inconsistencies, gaps, and inequalities between and within policies will become apparent and local governments are left to deal with them. Township and village governments do not make FYPs; thus, the instance of strategy formulation other government levels have is missing. Township and village administrations are much smaller, and usually, they have to cope with minimal funding and a broad scope of tasks and responsibilities.

Political personnel is evaluated based on a rigid evaluation scheme, focusing on compliance with political directives and on positive contributions to development (e.g., Zhong in: Chung/ Lam (eds.) 2010). This career logic is reflected in many considerations and positions of the Party secretaries and other political leaders in the planning process. Nevertheless, Party Secretary Liu introduced new issues to the general planning for Wanderlust township, for example, when he brought up the frequently blocked road leading to the school. Similarly, the Party secretary in Fan Jianhong's project carefully coordinated the plan with the local government's budget and regional policy documents. In those policy areas that they deem important, political leaders ensure coordination and streamlining between bureaus and strategies.

In this context, spatial planning at township and village level shows another dimension that it does not have at higher administrative levels: A spatial planning process presents an opportunity for strategy-making and the development of overarching concepts. This can be seen in Secretary Liu's focus on regional economic specialization. In the case of the general plan for River township, this element was even more evident (FN #18, #19): While the spatial plan contained, of course, construction plans, the focus was on the question of how to position the central town vis-à-vis the county town which was growing more and more onto the township territory. It was clear that workers in the new industrial parks would, in part, live in the town. The question was how they could be made to spend their money there, what sort of leisure activities to offer, and how to make the town attractive for day visitors. Moreover, I witnessed many instances like the village plan discussed above, in which township governments sought out New Town Company to formulate a concept for tourism development.

This lack of other opportunities for strategic planning makes it especially appealing for township and village Party secretaries to position their own political agendas in the planning process. This is reflected in the contents of plans at the township level, which usually have more economic and strategic components than municipal plans. Therefore, by using spatial planning as an opportunity for strategic considerations and by introducing issues from other

areas of their work as political leaders of a township or a village, Party secretaries did indeed, to a certain extent, facilitate communication between different offices and issue areas.

Assessment meetings at the conclusion of a planning process

Once political leadership, administration, and planners are reasonably satisfied with the plan, an assessment process starts. Only when the plan has passed this assessment process can it be endorsed and passed into law by the local People's Congress. The assessment by other bureaus takes place in the form of two meetings (figure 4): the technical meeting (技术会议), where administrative staff from other bureaus assesses the plan; often, external planning experts are invited to this meeting as well, since this is also required in terms of assessment (专家会议). After this, there is a meeting of the planning commission (规划委员会会议), in which the political leadership of relevant bureaus takes part. In both types of meetings, the representatives from other administrative branches first listen to a presentation of the plan, given by someone from the planning company. Then the politician in charge of the plan defends the plan before the representatives are invited to give their assessments, ideas, and requirements. In the end, the highest official states their views.

The literature on *Fragmented Authoritarianism* postulates that it is in meetings that coordination between bureaus happens and that compromises between the agendas of various political or administrative bodies are negotiated. This research accords high relevance to such meetings, arguing that policy implementation depends to such a great degree on cooperation from other bodies of government. Because of the *tiao-kuai-structure* of government, relevant bureaus in many cases cannot be mandated to implement a particular policy by local government but have to be convinced and integrated into the decision-making process. Therefore, I expected to find instances in which different agendas are discussed, priorities are contested, and complex constellations of interests become visible.

However, I found that the function in terms of policy coordination of both technical and expert meetings and the planning commission's meeting is a final check for conflicts with either bureau priorities or broader policy strategies. The participants of both meetings have veto-positions in the planning process; they may reject a plan. Yet, I did not witness the negotiation and bargaining about policy agendas that the FA framework describes as a crucial component of policy coordination in China.
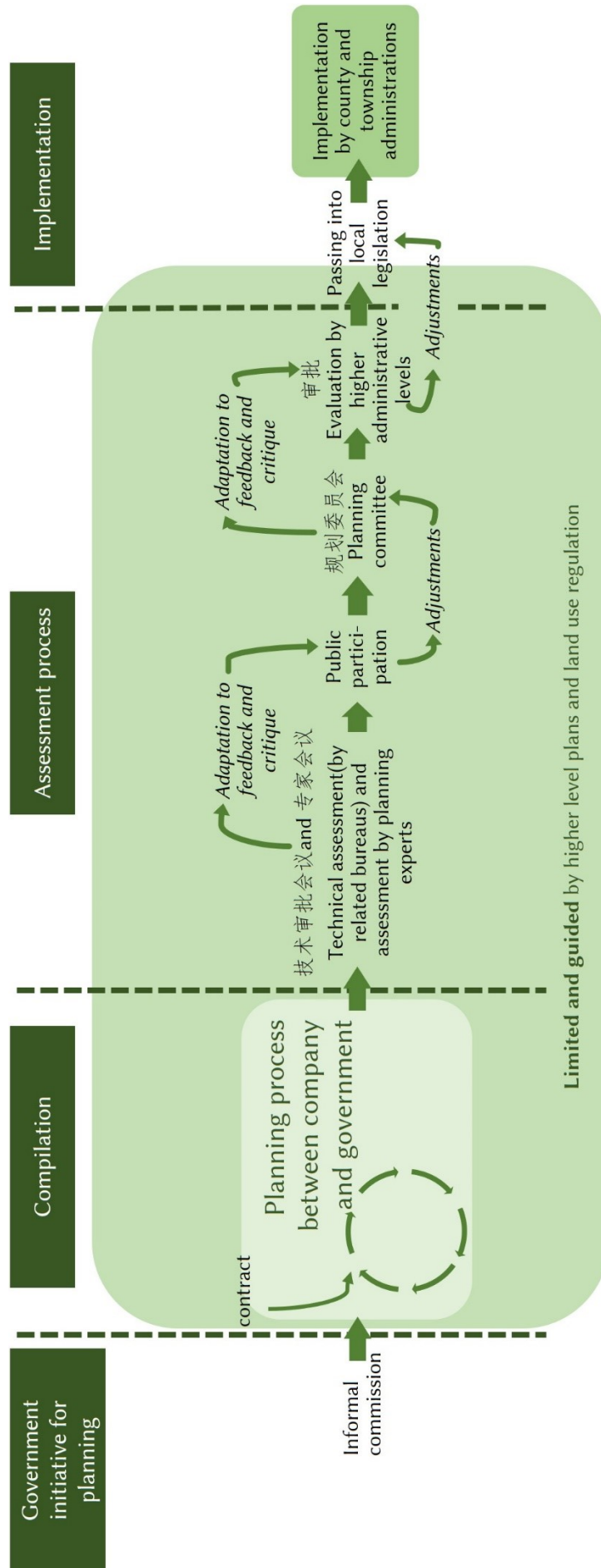
Figure 4: Assessment and evaluation process of general planning at the township level
Source: author

Technical and expert meetings

Moreover, the technical and expert meetings I witnessed in part had the appearance of a formality, in part of a feedback session rather than of an instance of policy coordination. The technical and expert meeting for the general plan of River township in Reverence county took place in the big meeting room of the county planning bureau in the afternoon (FN #18).[82] The purpose of the plan was to adjust the township's spatial layout for a large industrial district to be built on parts of its territory, provide housing to the migrant workers expected in the industrial district, and generate economic growth by providing leisure facilities. Luo Zhicheng, one junior colleague, and Teacher Wei had come from New Town Company, accompanied by me. Present were also three external experts from public planning institutes in Sichuan, two representatives from the planning bureau who moderated the meeting, and at least ten administrative representatives from various bureaus. Thus, as was often the case, the expert hearing (专家会议) was integrated with the technical meeting (技术会仪): External experts reviewed the plan for their technical and professional qualities; representatives from all relevant bureaus at the county level provided an assessment and further requirements from their bureaus' expertise and strategy.

After Luo Zhicheng had presented the Powerpoint presentation, the official from the planning bureau called for one bureau representative after the other to voice their views. Many did not make any statements, only the representative of the bureau for public health and family planning said that the plans for dispersed rural settlements should be more detailed. The transport bureau's question about the concrete number and width of roads triggered a broader discussion about the county town's transport connections. Later there were calls for more kindergartens and schools, followed by a discussion about the population figures. The result of this discussion was that since the population growth was projected to be mainly migrant workers, it would not be necessary to increase the areas for schools and kindergartens. Another representative criticized the plans for leisure facilities along the river. He argued that the water quality was not sufficient and that there was a risk of flooding, which had not been considered sufficiently. Altogether, seven representatives voiced opinions; additionally, each person had to fill in a form sheet with their views and thoughts.

The atmosphere in the meeting was relaxed, with people jumping out of the meeting to answer phone calls or checking their mobile phones under the table. One person was re-

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[82] Township governments do not mirror the *tiao-kuai-structure* of higher administrative levels, in which ministries or bureaus are organizationally relatively independent from government, have their own political leadership and cover all administrative issue areas. Therefore, for the township level, technical meetings as well as the meeting of the planning commission are convened by the county planning bureau. The representatives present at the meeting also come from the respective bureaus at county level. For spatial plans at county level and above, these meetings would take place at the same administrative level and the plan would only be sent up the hierarchy for the last legal checks.

placed by a younger colleague about half-way through the meeting. After every bureau representative had been asked for a statement, the external experts were called for their opinions. While they were still speaking, the representatives from other bureaus filled the evaluation form sheets. They left one by one until the room was empty but for the planners, the experts, the moderator from the planning bureau, the assistant who had been serving tea, and me. In the end, the moderator summed up the results, the assistant gave Luo Zhicheng the collected written statements from the representatives of the other bureaus, and the meeting was over.

The Wanderlust technical and expert meeting most certainly had the same format, and it did not go all too well (FN #39, #53; internal documentation of New Town Company):[83] The team from New Town Company arrived one hour late, so the experts and representatives were in a rather harsh mood already. The plan was approved only with conditionality; several comments and objections (意见) called for changes. On the side of the administration, these ranged from the suggestion to integrate facilities for elderly care, hospitals, and an additional school to an invitation to the bureau for agricultural development to discuss the need for harmonization with rural development strategy.[84]

The day after this assessment meeting, the team sat together and went through the comments. They brainstormed about how to implement those opinions and reported to Fan Jianhong, the head of their section in the company. Han Ruishan recounted that the planning bureau was happy about the plan, whereas the bureaus for civil affairs and for education had had substantive criticism. After discussing the issues, Fan Jianhong looked over the list of opinions and criticism and dismissed quite a number as not being the object of a general plan. He categorized most of the other changes as small issues that could be addressed by minor changes, then he distributed the tasks and set a deadline within two weeks.

Both the coming and going at the technical meeting and the planners' reaction seem to suggest that these meetings are not perceived as the crucial instance of discussion and communication that the FA framework would suggest them to be. A planner who works on the harmonization of plans by different bureaus (多规合一) at another planning institute once described the problem to me as follows: The specialists from other bureaus are involved in the planning process only briefly and at a late stage. Therefore, they can only look at the major lines of their policy and the spatial plan instead of the technical details and concrete decisions where conflicts with their policy would surface (FN #62). Additionally, the format

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[83] Unfortunately, at the time of the meeting, I was out of town. The story that I tell here is my reconstruction of events, based on the accounts by the planners, the internal documentation at New Town Company, and on the report which county government had put online. I have however witnessed other such meetings and am therefore confident in my interpretation.

[84] The experts additionally raised issues such as the implementation of protection and further use of historical rural settlements, and criticized that the plan left too many dispersed rural settlements unmoved; they asked about the coordination of the land use plan with land administration policies, about the distances between public service facilities and schools, and called for a change in delimitation of the zones for protection of historical heritage and architectural style.

of comments to be implemented or answered by the planers without additional feedback also does not seem to invite the negotiations and bargaining described in the FA literature.

Meeting of the planning committee

The planning committee consists of the political leadership of all relevant administrative bodies of the respective government. The fact that the persons present are from the political rather than the administrative staff gives such a meeting a much more strategic outlook – the questions in focus are mostly about strategic positioning, general fit with other strategies, and future policy. This is illustrated in the following vignette about the planning committee meeting for the tourism development concept and concept plan for the river promenade (旅游发展研究及江滨河空间概念规划) of Tiger township in Resounding county. At that meeting, the presence of both township mayor and township Party secretary and the clash with the county government also hint at a higher political significance.
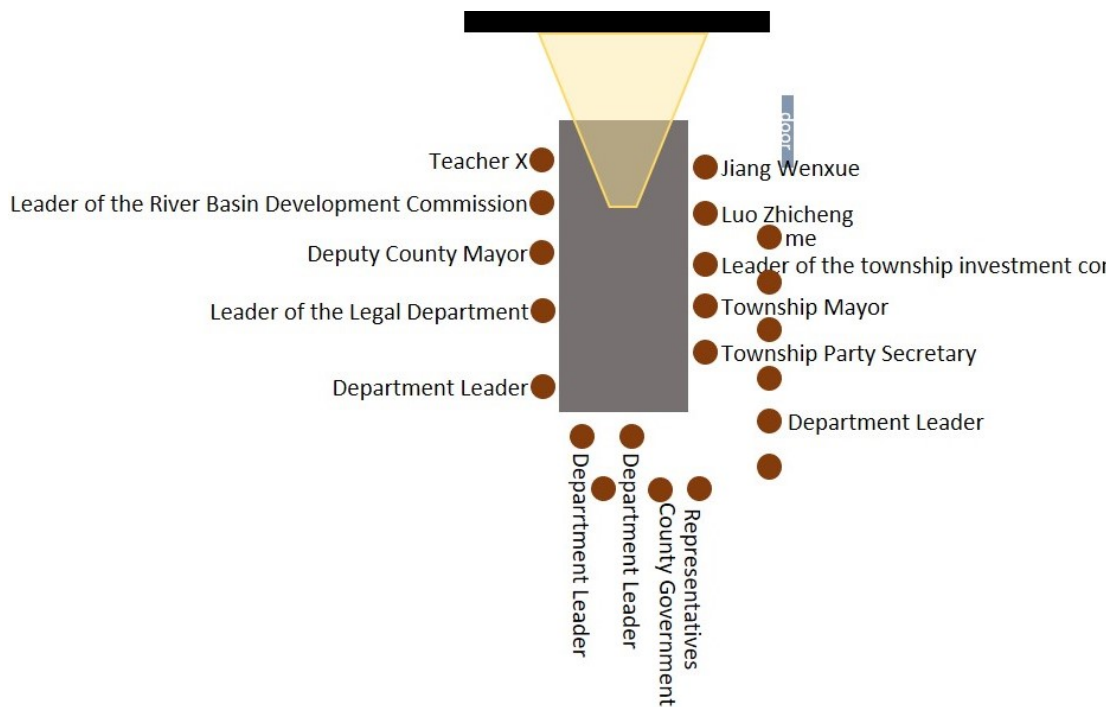
Figure 5: Seating arrangements at the planning committee meeting in Reverence county
Source: author, FN #91

The planning committee meeting's seating arrangement was representative of all assessment meetings I attended (figure 5; FN #91). Despite being for a township plan, the meeting took place at the county government and the plan was assessed by the county's leadership. In the middle of the room, there was a big conference table, seating around fifteen persons. Some more chairs stood along the wall. I took my seat at the wall, whereas the planners sat in the very front, with a computer and a projector, ready to present the plan.

The object of assessment was not a general plan; however, I was told that the planning committee's meetings would be very similar in the case of a general plan.[85] Once again, I accompanied Luo Zhicheng there; Jiang Wenxue, the head of this project, was also present.

The meeting's overall format was similar to the technical and expert meeting: First, the planners presented the material, and there was a round of comments and critique. However, before the bureau leaders were asked for their views, the mayor of Tiger township spoke for a while about the plan's rationale, why he fully supported its contents, and what his objectives for the envisaged projects are. In a short statement, the township Party secretary also expressed his full support. Only then did the moderator ask the bureau leaders one by one to present their views. After three statements, however, the deputy county mayor herself jumped in, even though she would usually have been the last to be asked for her views. She called for high-end development, catering to young tourists willing to spend much money on outdoor activities. Both the mayor and the Party secretary of the township directly answered her statement, accommodating her views and emphasizing that there was enough flexibility in the plan to adjust the implementation.

After this, the round of statements of bureau leaders continued. The leader of the river basin development commission, who moderated the session, called for a more regional orientation of the strategy. Another bureau leader called for a detailed analysis of the earthquake risk in the area and a more ambitious concept. Towards the end of this round, the deputy mayor was asked again for her opinion. In her statement, she assessed the plan as pretty good but mentioned that the analysis could have reached farther. Then she opened the discussion to broader issues, most notably about how to approach regional development in the county's Western areas, about the resources and potentials for tourism, and then about earthquake risk assessments. Soon, the bureau leaders and the deputy mayor talked about earthquake assessments for the entire Western region of the county, about finding external experts for that task, and how much this would probably cost. The discussion also turned to concepts for regional development. The planning team and the township government were not involved in the conversation anymore.

When the discussion finished, the township mayor asked whether the plan could be decided now and left as it was. Despite her positive earlier assessment, however, the deputy county mayor insisted that the changes requested must be included in the plan and that there would be another meeting for endorsing the plan. This left the township mayor pretty frustrated; there was long, at times heated discussion that the deputy county mayor ended on a somewhat threatening note.

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[85] Actually, this is the only full planning committee meeting that I was able to witness. I can only conclude that the planners were a bit hesitant to take me to a full planning committee meeting on a general plan, out of reasons of political sensitivities. The fact that this is not a statutory plan might have an effect on how people involved treated this meeting: the discussion might, in a regular meeting, not be as wide-ranging as in this case; also, I would assume that the planners would take the results more seriously.

Due to a number of reasons, the planning committee meeting for the Wanderlust general plan took place only after my fieldwork had ended.

After the meeting, in conversations with the planners outside the meeting room and later in front of the government building, township officials insisted that the plan was good as it was; they would simply have to change the framing and the presentation strategy. There, the township mayor vented some more frustration and expressed his appreciation for the plan as it was again. On our way back to Chengdu, Teacher Wei wrote to Jiang Wenxue and asked whether the plan had passed. Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng told him that it had.

Compared to the technical meeting recounted above, there was a much livelier discussion in this meeting of the planning committee, which quickly left the concrete plan and looked at more general policy issues. The politicians' statements also reflect much more strategic considerations than did the statements by bureau representatives in the technical meetings. Whereas in the latter, technical matters such as the number and width of roads or the risk of flooding were the object of discussion, at the planning committee meeting, the concrete locality mattered much less than broader policy agendas.

On the way back, Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng told me that the decisions at stake were much smaller than in a planning committee meeting for a general plan since this was not a statutory plan. They and other planners (FN #45) explained that in the case of a general plan, it is improbable that the planning committee requires adjustments to the plan since it already has gone through much technical checking and usually is in line with relevant political orientations.

5.6.2 Planning under the coordination and leadership of other actors in (or outside of) the administration

General plans draw on data from other administrative branches; other bureaus and their leaders get the chance to comment on the general plan after its formulation has been by and large concluded. During this assessment procedure at the end of the planning process, they can make demands and voice opinions that have to be included in the spatial plan. However, there are situations in which this sequence is turned around and spatial plans are made to support or assess projects from other issue areas.

In spring, I accompanied Luo Zhicheng and his younger colleague to a meeting in River township (FN #23), where they were commissioned with a new project: A zoning and construction plan for Apple village in River township, which would be designed so as to accommodate an envisioned tourism resort. As was the case with many parts of River township, much of Apple village was to be taken up by the new industrial district of Reverence county town.[86] Simultaneously, a local entrepreneur planned to construct a holiday resort around two small lakes on the village territory, which offered a rare economic opportunity. As required by law, the investor and the village government needed an official construction plan

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[86] In fact, Apple village needed two plans: one for the lakeside resort, which is presented here; and one for relocation of residents from the land which will be taken up by the industrial district. Some of this is being presented in chapter 5.4.3.

to get permission to construct the holiday resort. Moreover, since the concepts for the resort envisaged some changes in land-use regulation, a new general plan would be needed. On this occasion, they asked Luo Zhicheng and his colleague to draw up the necessary planning documents.

We met the village Party secretary, a few other people from the village government, and the entrepreneur in one of the township government's meeting rooms. The Party secretary explained the context and his expectations for the plan: There was time pressure since he would leave his post in the coming year, and there were no personal contacts to his successor. Still, he wanted to make the holiday resort project possible – therefore, they needed to move fast, even though the Reverence county general plan was not finalized yet. When Luo Zhicheng asked about the land administration bureau's expectations and requirements and the planning commission, he was told that no obstacles and problems were to be expected from that side. Previously, they already had commissioned a construction plan, which the Party secretary showed to us: a glossy book with many ideas for design and architecture of the various buildings of the resort, but which, according to Apple village's Party secretary, did not go deep enough. What Apple village needed was a plan that fulfilled the requirements of higher-level land administrations and planning bureaus; the plan was also to have enough detail and depth to start construction immediately. This plan had to be prepared within two weeks, and the investor had already compiled the necessary material and data. He would also cover the cost of the plan since this was his project.

The meeting included discussions, questions from the planners, elaborations by the investor, and a tour of the village and the future resort site. The following two weeks were hectic for Luo Zhicheng and his team. They reformulated the concepts and construction plans that the entrepreneur had given Luo Zhicheng into a form that could be approved by the planning administration.

There were various instances in which spatial plans were drawn up based on existing conceptualizations for development projects. In such cases, investment companies and other actors involved had already formulated and refined their ideas before New Town Company was contacted. The spatial planners' tasks were to render the project ideas in the graphical language of spatial planning, draw up the necessary plans, and trouble-shoot for violations of planning and construction law before the project was handed to the relevant authorities for approval. In those cases, spatial planning was subordinate to those actors who conceptualized the project, and it was performed as a procedure necessary to obtain permission to go ahead with construction.

This is at odds with the phrase 'planning comes first' (规划先行, cf. chapter 5.4.1), which I encountered so often during my fieldwork. 'Planning comes first' stands for the principle that at the beginning of conceptualization and design of any project, there needs to be a check whether it is in line with existing legally binding plans (i.e., general plans and detailed construction plans). If there are no plans yet or if the construction project necessitates

changes in the legally binding plans, new plans must be drawn up and approved by the respective mechanisms. This principle is supported by the planning law (NPC 2007: § 28-34, § 36-37), and it assigns spatial planning substantial regulatory and coordinative power. However, the plan for Apple village was made only after project conceptualization; it justified the project vis-à-vis higher administrative levels.

The planning genre of 'location planning' (选址规划) follows a similar logic, which is fully formalized: for infrastructure projects with a regional impact, such as roads or dams, the affected administrative bodies have to state their positions to the construction plans. For this, they need assessments from various bureaus, among them spatial planning. Such location plans constituted a substantial proportion of the assignments of New Town Company.

For location plans, the planners check whether there are any conflicts between the project plan and existing construction or existing spatial plans. For example, in the case of a dam construction, they found that part of a kindergarten would be below the flooding line. In the case of a provincial-level road, they discovered that the construction ban along the road would cut across a planned new industrial district of a township (FN #34, #87). The planners also assess what sort of changes in the plans might be in the respective local government's interest. Such findings and assessments would then be compiled in the planning documents, on which the respective local government would base their comments and objections (意见) to the construction project.

These are examples where spatial plans are made to assess or support construction projects which originate from other administrative bodies or from a coalition between government and business. In the case of the Wanderlust township general plan, even though it is firmly rooted in the administrative branch of spatial planning, there are similar aspects: the spatial plan was initiated to accommodate the spatial changes in the township brought about by a major infrastructure project. This project would lead to resettlements of rural population. Moreover, both spatial planners and township government figured that it was their turn to be allotted a large slot of construction land quota. In the previous rounds of allotment of construction land quotas, two neighboring townships had been hugely favored in turn. Therefore, there was the expectation that by compiling an ambitious and high-quality general plan, this would support the township's lobbying for construction land quotas.

In this section, I have turned around to look at how spatial planning is used to support projects from other issue areas. Spatial plans may be needed by local government or administration to receive permission to implement a project; or they may be part of the material that local governments consult to formulate their opinions towards larger infrastructure projects which affect their territories. However, as the case of Wanderlust township demonstrates, even general plans are drawn up with specific agendas in mind or to adapt to changes arising from projects from other administrative sectors and higher-level governments.

5.6.3   Communication and the lack of it

The FA framework describes how in projects that require cooperation between governments of the same level or between various levels of governments, meetings between all parties concerned are the primary site of coordination. It is argued that such coordination usually takes the form of negotiations and bargaining so that each side gains from the projects in question. In this section, however, I have shown that in spatial planning, meetings between bodies of administration and government do not take on such a central function: The relevant meetings take place at the end of the planning process. This allows the representatives and leaderships of other bureaus a veto position, but it also means that they cannot meaningfully introduce their priorities and agendas into the planning process. The same is true for the collection of data at the beginning of the planning process. Here, statistical and technical data, as well as policy documents are collected from other bureaus; however, there is no face-to-face-discussion between the persons working on the spatial plan and representatives of the affected bureaus about the contents, foci, or objectives of the plan.[87]

Thus, my expectation that a core facet of spatial planning was coordination between policies and programs of different bureaus has been disproved. There is little direct interaction with administrative or political actors from other policy areas in the processes and routines of spatial planning. This is even though spatial plans often directly address issues such as the protection of historical heritage or landscape and environment and the provision of infrastructure and public facilities. All these issues are directly related to other bureaus' working areas; however, as I have shown, there is little direct communication with the respective bureaus in the course of a planning process.

The involvement of political leadership in planning processes at the township level and below is different: The Party secretaries of the respective locations showed a lively interest in spatial planning, and they brought up many issues from related areas of policy-making. This interest can be explained by the fact that spatial planning presents a rare occasion for strategic considerations to governments at the township level and below (these levels not formulating their own Five Year Plans). Thus, even though Party secretaries' inputs were often received with irritation by the planners, this forms an important instance of policy coordination.

Sometimes, spatial plans are formulated not as a guide to future policy or investment decisions, but as an addendum to projects which have already been planned. In these cases, planners are asked to assess whether there are conflicts with existing spatial regulations in these projects or to present those projects in a way that they will obtain the necessary permissions. General plans, too, often include some previously conceived projects. In such circumstances, the logic of coordination, which I expected to find, is turned on its head: The

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[87] However, at the time of fieldwork, much research and conceptual work went into designing procedures to improve the coordination between branches of administration in the context of spatial planning. The discussion there took place under the heading of the integration of many plans into one（多规合一）.

spatial plan is drawn up not as a prerequisite or a policy creation process. Instead, an already conceptualized project is framed in the language of spatial planning; this includes troubleshooting from the perspective of spatial planning. Probably, the same procedure simultaneously takes place in other administrative branches.

5.7   Conclusion

The meeting in Wanderlust township I described at the beginning of the chapter was one of the first stages of the planning process, when the township government and New Town Company worked out the contents and the general bearing of the plan. Following this, the planners compiled the plan and the necessary documents. After several rounds of discussion, the township government agreed to the plan. Then, the plan had to pass through the technical assessment meeting with representatives of various bureaus at the county level and external planning experts, then the planning committee's assessment. Finally, the planning bureau of the municipality would review the spatial plan. After each of these assessments, the planners would revise the spatial plan accordingly – only then could the township government pass this spatial plan into law.

In this chapter, I looked at the structures and procedures of spatial planning as a task of local government, with a focus on spatial planning in townships. For this, I showed how existing legislation frames spatial planning as a tool to shape physical space and how spatial plans connect in a vertical hierarchy. In this hierarchy, general plans prescribe out the outlines of detailed construction plans and those of general plans at lower levels of government. Technical standards are used as the regulatory tool to introduce politically defined contents to spatial plans and to set requirements for all subordinate levels of government.

This hierarchical structure does not only apply to the regulation of spatial planning but also to the relationships between planning ministries or bureaus at different levels of the administration. Even though planning bureaus work closely together with and are under the political control (领导关系) of the political leadership at the respective level of government, the superior planning administration has oversight and control of the actions and decisions at the planning bureau. From the national level down to the county level, each of these administrative bodies deals with the making of spatial plans and formulation of technical standards, with the control of the bodies below it, and with the implementation of spatial plans through issuing or refusing construction permits. Thus, there are layers of regulation and control above the people sitting together in a meeting room in Wanderlust township, compiling the spatial plan. Even though the decisions taken in the planning process are in the purview (事权, lit. duties and responsibilities) of Party Secretary Liu, these decisions have to remain within the boundaries of existing plans and regulations. Higher administrative levels have the oversight of planning decisions.

The presentation of empirical material in this chapter revolved around two central questions: What is planning all about? What are the stakes and roles of the different actors in

this process? The picture that emerged is that spatial planning is put to varying purposes and uses by different actors in different contexts; depending on the context, actors involved in spatial planning engage in the formulation or implementation of regulation, in the application of technical procedures, or in strategic deliberation about the future of their locality.

The political leadership is mostly interested in development strategy and employed spatial planning for this purpose. I have introduced people on a political career path as they hedge against the risk of spending too much money on beautifying their village, as they deliberate on regional and local economic specializations, or as they lobby for a strategy to obtain a politically prestigious label. In doing so, they contribute to the coordination of spatial planning with other bureaus; they are conscious of their political superiors' policy agendas and take great care that spatial planning was in line with current policy priorities. All in all, politicians use spatial planning either as an opportunity to think about policy strategy or a mandatory formality; therefore, they often have little patience for the technical and regulatory detail discussed by planners and administrative staff.

For people working in the planning administration, spatial planning is mostly about regulation. They manage and coordinate the formulation of spatial plans, regulations, and standards, and they are responsible for implementation. Therefore, my interview partners from the administration mostly described their work as controlling documents for conflicts with superordinate documents, coordination between the different actors in a planning process, and sifting through the material provided by experts to formulate regulation. From their point of view, spatial planning is the regulation of how construction and facilities are distributed across space.

Research and academic engagement with bureaucracy and administration in China have so far almost exclusively looked at the political leadership of administrative bodies, who are part of the Party apparatus. However, the administration's permanent staff has a different career outlook and often operates under a very different logic. With a high likelihood, they will stay at the respective planning bureau for their whole career. Therefore, they strive to understand the requirements, processes, and technical aspects of spatial planning and to organize planning processes and implementation efficiently.

In line with these different understandings of the purposes of spatial planning and notwithstanding the administrative hierarchy, I found a considerable amount of ambiguity in plan-making between a facilitative and a regulatory role. This is visible in the fact that spatial planning, especially at the township level, is used for strategy formulation, but at the same time is bound to adhere to relevant regulation and even implement it. This ambiguity is also embodied in the persons involved in the planning process.

I expected to find coordination and communication with other bureaus at a prominent spot in the scope of planning since spatial planning can work as the coordinating function between policies and measures with effects on physical space between various issue areas. Contrary to my expectations, I found little substantive engagement and communication in

those stages of the planning process explicitly dedicated to such matters: The collection of data and policies from other bureaus and the assessment meetings at the end of the planning process. Instead, the Party secretaries which oversee spatial planning at the township and village levels introduced issues from other policy areas into the planning process as they met such issues in their work. Also contrary to my assumption about planning taking a leading role, spatial planning in some projects is one of the last steps, sometimes even an afterthought to project planning and conceptualization. In these cases, planning is treated as a formality or as an additional argument needed to obtain the permissions necessary to implement the project.

The *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* framed the presentation of empirical material about the administrative and government structure of spatial planning. This framework was highly useful in explaining the relationships between bureaus and the respective government and the motivations and aspirations of politicians. The approach of telling the story from one administrative branch's point of view and the engagement with the structures and processes within this bureau contributes a new empirical perspective to this framework. Seen from the perspective of spatial planning, coordination and communication between bodies of government and administration do not seem to be as emically important as FAF presents them. Instead, there is very little substantive exchange between bureaus, and the official procedures do not present many opportunities for this.[88] From applying the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework,* I got the sense that although the framework explains the larger structures of government in China, the perspective upon administrative procedures and the formulation of political positions still has many insights to offer.

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[88] Fragmentation can be seen clearly in the data: there is little communication between branches of administration, and this can be expected to lead to major frictions in the implementation of spatial plans. Also, the spatial planning process takes place under multiple authorities: formally under the authority of local government, regulation by higher level planning administration have to be adhered to, and policy strategies by governments at different levels have to be served in the spatial plan. *Authoritarianism* however, can mostly be seen in the self-descriptions within planning administration – these people described themselves as straightforwardly performing the tasks that were necessary in the system.

6   Analytical Interlude: *Orders of worth* in the administrative system of spatial planning

Even though this dissertation claims that that the five *orders of worth* inform spatial planning for small towns in Sichuan, the investigation of the administrative system of spatial planning in the previous chapter has not utilized this analytical perspective at all. Instead, the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* has been used to map out structures, institutions, and power relations that shape planning projects. In the present analytical interlude, I now ask for the ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness, i.e., for the *orders of worth,* which, from the administrative system's perspective, inform the making of spatial plans. The theoretical framework of *orders of worth* has been developed based on Boltanski/ Thévenot (1991/2006) and Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury (2012) in chapter 3. *Orders of worth* are shared ideal imaginations and social objectives, with each person knowing several *orders of worth.* Persons may routinely follow the prevalent *order* in accordance with the situation at hand, or they reflexively switch and negotiate between orders in case of uncertainty or conflict. *Orders of worth* thus serve as a guidance for people's actions and decisions and as a template to evaluate situations and as argumentative recourse in case of disputes. In this interlude, I flesh out the five *orders of worth* as they present themselves in the administrative system of planning based on the previous chapter's account. Thus, I demonstrate that representatives from both administration and politics are invested in each of the *orders.* How professional planners engage the *orders of worth* will be analyzed in detail in chapter 8.

The analytical interlude follows a very rigid structure, analyzing each *order of worth* in turn by moving through the descriptive categories of *common good*, *measure of worth*, *tools and mechanisms*, *state of worth*, and *fall from grace*. First, however, let me turn to a piece of regulation which has been drafted by New Town Company and was very important to some of the planners working on it:

Fan Jianhong's project on rural housing regulation addresses the issue that there is barely any regulation or control for self-built construction in Reverence county. This is even though in the countryside, many people still build their own houses. The Powerpoint presentation, which was used to present the almost-final result of the project to the planning committee of Reverence county, formulated the problem as follows:

> 随着城乡一体化建设步伐的加快，农民住房拆迁、安置、重建、管理方面的问题逐步显现，出现建筑风貌各异、形式混乱、标准不统一等问题，对 Reverence county 整体形象及未来乡村发展极为不利。(Powerpoint presentation rural village self-constructed housing plan, p. 5, 9)

> *In the wake of the integration of urban and rural areas and of acceleration of construction, problems in the issue areas of demolishing the housing of the rural population, relocation, reconstruction, and management have become increasingly manifest [. In this course,] problems like manifold different architectural styles, a disorderly arrangement of shapes, and inconsistent standards*

have emerged[.] This is highly unfavorable to Reverence county's overall appearance and its ru-
ral areas' future development. [own translation]

This project covers almost all five *orders of worth*. In the quotation, especially the *order* of 'planning as regulation and public provision' is apparent in the call for better regulation of construction and the mentioning of relocation and reconstruction. Housing and construction, so the problem definition postulates, must become more uniform and effective. When addressing disorderly architectural styles and overall appearance, the quoted passage references the order of 'planning for ecology and civilization' by alluding to an alternative landscape characterized by one recognizable style of vernacular architecture. As the Powerpoint presentation discusses in detail, the issue at stake is that new rural construction is in no relation to the traditional Sichuanese countryside architecture with its white and grey walls and its gabled, decorated roofs. Instead, it often uses colorful tiles and strictly rectangular, flat-roofed shapes. In addition, 'a disorderly arrangement of shapes' has a distinct connotation of messiness. Thus, contemporary rural self-built construction is a *fall from grace* as seen from the *order* of ecology and civilization.

The quotation references 'development and growth' as both precondition and effect of the new measures: economic development and public development policy have generated accelerated construction. For growth to persist in this region, the landscape has to be ordered and made more appealing. In this quotation, unorderly construction is a negative side-effect of long-awaited and necessary development in the area. At the same time, development and growth are an additional purpose for implementing this project.

This planning project's object is a county-level regulation for rural houses constructed by the residents themselves on their own parcels of land. Once it is passed into law, it will apply to all self-built construction on rural land in the county. [89] Therefore, the project's output will not be a classical spatial plan with zoning and distribution of land uses, but a legal standard. This project does not include any strategic economic considerations, zoning maps, or regional analyses. Instead, its analysis focuses on the current and traditional construction styles in the area. The material developed for this plan includes various ground plans for the people building houses, sample renderings of decorative elements to be approved or rejected, and a few CAD-renderings of single houses. Special attention was given

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[89] There are two types of rural land use-categories: one is agricultural land, which is reserved for production. The other type is homestead land, which are the plots on which the housing for rural households can be built. Typically, each rural household has rights to both agricultural and homestead-land.

If the state intervened in construction in rural areas before, this would have been done through the construction of ready-made rural settlements, so called 'New Villages' (Bray in: Hillman/Unger 2013) to which people would then be relocated. This would happen in the context of the densification of rural settlements in order to free construction land for urban growth or when resettlement was necessary for other reasons, for example in the context of infrastructure projects. There has been widespread critique of such villages, because especially in the early 2000s, they did not accommodate the needs and preferences of rural population, and people often would refuse to move in (Bray ibd.; FN #51). Effective control, in this context, was hindered by faulty design.

Important policy contexts for the present plan, therefore, are a strengthening of land use administration and the establishment of a system for trading land-use rights.

to developing form sheets for local administrations, which in conjunction with the exemplary positive and negative renderings, are to facilitate easy implementation. From what I have seen of the project, both its process and groups of actors involved are comparable to any other planning project.

In the presentation, the objectives and principles of this project are presented in the form of diagrams. One such slide is divided horizontally; the upper part gives an overview of the core parameters of the projects: Core objectives are, first, the regulation of rural construction for the purposes of safety, usability, and quality of life; and, second, a modeling of the stylistic characteristics of rural areas of the county, in order to give the region a relatively uniform architectural appearance. There is a list of aspects that stood in the focus of considerations, including policy, implementation, costs, and residents' requirements. Variations are allowed for different regional and economic contexts. Following this, sample construction plans regulate style, material, and decoration. Included are explanations to administrative staff about how to read spatial plans and which other regulation must be observed in an administrative review of applications for construction permits. A wide array of sample floorplans for rural houses helps building-owners to professionally plan their project and fulfill administrative requirements for a construction permit.

Persons from the three groups of actors related to this plan in very different ways: Fan Jianhong, the responsible planner, had invested a lot of effort in the measures and designs to preserve the local architectural style, as can be seen from the presentation. He also told me that he really wanted to ensure that the plan would be implemented in this case. Thus he had spent considerable effort to make implementation easy by providing sample material, overview charts, and negative examples (FN #66, #73). Fan Jianhong explained that large parts of the plan, particularly the sample floorplans, are a service to homeowners, helping them plan and design their houses. For the responsible office leader in the planning administration, these sample floorplans constituted the project's main strength. Many local people did not have the resources to prepare floor plans for their construction. Therefore, having these samples would make granting construction permits easier for both administration and applicants (FN #94). She put much less emphasis than Fan Jianhong on the construction styles prescribed by the documents.

A discussion with leadership-level officials at the county planning bureau, in contrast, mostly revolved around aspects external to the plan: internal contradictions between different regulations and/or standards and how exactly to implement specific regulations. Regarding the plan, there was a discussion about whether the regulation on construction material and colors might not be too detailed (FN #80): What would people do if the respective materials and colors were not available on the market?

With its varying meaning to different actors and the range of aspects covered, this project offers excellent material for analysis in the framework of *orders of worth*. The following analysis will be based on and interwoven with the results of chapter 5. There, I have shown

how plan-making at the lower levels of government is embedded in a hierarchy of regulations, spatial plans, and administrative bodies; how it is also coordinated, to a certain extent, with other bureaus. The following analytical description of the individual *orders of worth* is independent of the findings and reasonings of the above presentation of the administrative system of spatial planning.

6.1   Planning as a craft

Whereas the *orders* of 'regulation and public provision' and 'development and growth' certainly have the most immediate relevance to persons in administration and government, the order of '**spatial planning as a craft'** receives substantial recognition, too. This recognition is shown both by the formal set-up and regulation of the planning system as well as - often - by the officials with whom planners interact.[90] Planning companies and planning institutes are often involved or consulted in formulating technical standards and other regulations, as was the case in the rural self-built housing regulation. Planners' role in providing expert knowledge to government was also often mentioned in interviews with administrative personnel (interviews Mr Zhao, Director Ba).

Expert input was taken to be a requirement for making regulation realistic and adequate. For example, in a collaborative research and pilot project for rural development led and sponsored by another ministry and coordinated by Director Ba (FN #34, #51, cf. chapter 6.4), a wide range of specialists took part, among them many planners. Discussions about the approaches and formulations for policy that would support local development were long, controversial, and often heated. In this way, the organizing ministry would not only acquire policy documents and data but certainly also profit from these discussions and the variety of views proposed there. In this vein, the planning law stipulates that for statutory plans, professional planning institutes or companies must be commissioned. The fact that spatial plans, containing regulation and public policy, must be formulated by technical experts working on a market and are thus not exclusively controlled by government bodies is a clear indication that planning expertise is seen as an important ingredient in formulating spatial policy.

The ***common good*** cannot be concretized any further from the present material: Spatial planners provide independent expertise about how to create spaces – they have the necessary sense of space and technical expertise, they know the state of the art, which technical and regulatory aspects to consider, and how to compile a plan that is good to the locality. Involving such expertise is beneficial for the overall result of the resulting policy or regulation.

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[90] Nevertheless, in the present chapter, analytical results in this *order of worth* are thin, because the focus of the previous chapter lay on the state.

That Fan Jianhong did a good job, based on the ***measure of worth*** in this order, can be seen from the fact that the internal review meeting at New Town Company on the construction regulation for self-built housing did not have any substantive criticisms (FN #65). On the side of government and administration, the planning law cites principles for the formulation and implementation of plans, which can be understood as *measures of worth*: rational zoning, sparing use of land and spatially concentrated development, planning preceding construction, conservation of environment and tradition, and more (NPC 2007: § 4). Use of current scientific technology and scientific approaches to spatial planning are also encouraged ('国家鼓励采用先进的科学技术，增强城乡规划的科学性,' NPC 2007: § 10). Even though the law's references to *tools and mechanisms* and *measures of worth* of 'planning as a craft' remain vague, they can be understood as an endorsement of the importance of planning expertise in the formulation of spatial policy.

Of the ***tools and mechanisms*** to achieve the *common good*, the rural self-built housing regulation is based on a thorough analysis of the spatial setting and a survey among rural residents in the county. The plan differentiates between different areas of the county and thereby aims for locally appropriate designs and regulation. To this end, the economic and cultural characteristics of each area are discussed in the presentation. Technical work has been very fine-grained, with many sample designs and very detailed specifications. The self-built housing regulation thereby is an example of the utilization of standards and regulation as an administrative mechanism to ensure the realization of the objectives within 'planning as a craft.'

Planners' ***state of worth,*** like that of planning institutes and companies, is bound tightly to the planning system: planning companies or institutes must earn graded licenses (资质), which are awarded by planning administration based on a company's experience and track record. A higher license signifies a higher status. Only senior planning professionals who have some position in the public system (at university or in planning institutes) are included in the list of experts for assessment of the plan.

The *state of worth* of administrative staff and politicians in the *order* of 'planning as a craft' is measured according to their recognition of the general purpose planning and their understanding of the technical and regulatory requirements involved in planning. Thus, Deputy Mayor Wang (chapter 5.5.3) was very popular among planners of New Town Company. In contrast, planners were frustrated with those politicians who had very clear own agendas, as was the case in the meeting for a village plan with Fan Jianhong (FN #96, chapter 5.6.1.2). The village Party secretary there was not enthusiastic about making a plan. He was worried about the local government's expenditures instead of entering the logic of generating ideas for the plan, which Fan Jianhong had planned for this meeting. Similarly, Fan Jianhong was somewhat disappointed after the meeting with the planning committee's discussion on the rural self-built housing regulation (FN #80, recounted above), which in his opinion, had not been far-reaching enough.

A ***fall from grace*** is what Fan Jianhong wants to prevent this plan from becoming. He told me that often enough, plans are made only for the sake of planning (规划为了规划, FN #73): Many plans are being made just so that the local leaders can show that they fulfill the requirements of higher government levels. In such cases, there would not be a real intention of implementing the plans. According to Fan Jianhong, this happens because there are cases in which a plan is are legally required. However, the people responsible do not intend to use them or work with them. Another reason would be that the local political leader has to show initiative and engagement and opts to have a plan prepared to present it to their superiors without having to take action. Fan Jianhong's motivation to add carefully designed administrative tools to the rural self-built housing regulation was to avoid that this plan fails to be implemented.

Planners also often criticized regulation or technical standards that did not make sense from a technical perspective. One case in point is the regulation on minimum distances from roads, which any new construction has to observe (chapter 5.4.3). Luo Zhicheng explained some of the criticism against this regulation: For one, there was no scientific argument to be made for the precise distances defined in the regulation. There was an argument for keeping a certain distance from roads to protect people from pollution, but this would be far less than the current standard. Therefore, the distances had been decided based on a political logic: The central government set a minimum requirement; each level downwards strove to surpass the others in their regulations. Thus, the outcome was out of proportion (FN #74).

Altogether, the formulations of *common good*, *measure of worth*, and *tools and mechanisms* of 'planning as a craft' lie with the internal discourses of the planning profession; politicians use these discourses as input for new policy and administration implements based on these policies and the ensuing regulation. However, while state administration recognizes the inherent worth and benefit of integrating spatial planning expertise in both the formulation of regulation and in the making of spatial plans, there are many criticisms leveled from the order of 'planning as a craft' against how planning is put into practice in administration and politics.

6.2   Planning as regulation and public provision

编制出来了，就相当于，我就有法可依。[…] 其实某些程度上来说，规划其实就是制定的这个所谓的法，不管它对不对，合不合理，它只存在了，那这个法就出来了，是吧。

<div align="center">(interview Teacher Yuan)</div>

Once [the plan] is fully compiled, it is commensurate to, we just have a law as a basis. […] Actually, in some respects this means that planning actually is just a formulation of so-called law, no matter whether it is right or not, whether it is reasonable or not, once it exists, then there just is a law, isn't it. [own translation]

This citation of Teacher Yuan, one of New Town Company's owners, explains statutory planning's elementary relationship to the state: Once a plan is finalized, it is a binding law.

Therefore, a planning process is intimately connected to the state's tasks, state action objectives, and its tools and mechanisms.

Spatial planning as a right and responsibility of the state is, to a large extent, about ordering the territory and establishing control over space (Scott 1998; Mitchell 2002). This goes hand in hand with the distribution of infrastructure and public services according to political priority. A frequent theme in the context of this *order* is that higher levels of government aim for control, standardization, and the safeguarding of public goods (such as protection of the environment or limitation of land use). This is countered by local governments, which try to maximize their resources (land, fiscal income), aspire for representative construction, and search to attract investment into their territories. Such local government activities are subsumed in the order 'planning for development and growth.' Therefore, higher levels of government use regulation and technical standards to restrict local governments' expansive aspirations.

The preceding empirical chapter has shown that a hierarchical structure defines this *order*. Higher levels prescribe policy benchmarks and distribute resources to lower levels, and lower levels have to answer to higher levels for their actions and decisions. The state presents itself as paternalistic, providing public goods such as infrastructure, safety, order, and social services, for which effective regulation is necessary. This can be seen, for example, from the formulations in the planning law, which alternate between prescribing procedures and responsibilities on the one hand and setting the objectives of spatial planning as improving the spatial arrangements and thus the living conditions in the locality on the other hand. 'The state,' however, is not a unitary actor but made up of many organizational entities and individuals which have to be controlled and coordinated. The state structure has an inbuilt tension specifically between higher and lower levels of government (c.f. Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015; Chung/ Lam (eds.) 2010), which – while consenting on the *common good* of strong state control – compete over the realization of other *common good*s. Often, local state strives for development and growth while more central levels focus more on ecology and civilization.

Concerning this tension, Fan Jianhong's rural self-built housing regulation can be seen as one of the measures of a county government to contribute to the central government's New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) and to the policy of the integration of rural and urban areas (城乡一体化). Both of these policies, among other objectives, aim at improving living conditions and infrastructures in rural areas. The extension of construction regulation and control to rural areas, on the other hand, serves to gain a tighter overview and regulatory hold on construction activities in villages, thereby strengthening the county government's control over rural areas.

The ***common good*** of 'planning as regulation and public provision' is a territory held together by capable government and administration through both control of activities in this territory and provision of public goods (both services and reliable norms). The rural self-

built housing regulation spells out many aspects of this *common good*: Extending urban administrative practice to rural areas offers, in villages, urban standards of safety, style, and order.

This *order's* scope includes the provision of infrastructures and social services, which must be considered in making general plans. This covers control of construction, of land use, and of the size and distribution of technical and social infrastructure such as roads, electricity networks, schools, and hospitals. The objective of such control is the state's capability to realize policies over the territory (Cartier 2015; Oakes 2019),[91] but also the safeguarding of minimum standards for infrastructure and construction. This is a demonstration of a functioning state which provides well for its population. Moreover, these measures support cohesion by equitably distributing services between urban and rural areas.

Territorial cohesion also is a core objective of the rural self-built housing regulation, which frames it as regional stylistic coherence. Thereby, county government marks and orders its territory, binding residents to it not only through administrative procedures but also through a sense of local identity. Thus, planning facilitates effective state control of the territory, which in turn is accompanied by public provision.

The central ***measure of worth*** in this order is how effectively and to what degree central level policies are put into practice. Thus, the rural self-built housing regulation is validated by quoting central and provincial policies. Cited, among others, is the first document of the central government of the year 2016 (2016 年中共中央 1 号文件, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs n.d.). According to the summary in the presentation, this document calls for coordinated development of urban and rural areas (城乡协调发展), appreciation for the intrinsic logics of rural development, and preservation of rural characteristics and the environment. Spatial plans invariably reference higher-level policies and plans as a preamble to argue their legitimation and purpose. Similarly, Party secretaries and other government officials in many situations exhibited concern about not violating higher-level policy or excelling in strategic prescriptions from higher levels of government. Thereby, worthiness in the order of regulation and public provision is demonstrated in the local transposition of higher-level policies.

Interlocutors at planning administrations added the practicability of implementation as a *measure of worth*. This aspect was especially emphasized by office leaders at the administration of Reverence county when I asked them what, in their eyes, constituted a 'good' spatial plan (interview Ms Deng, FN #80). Fan Jianhong, too, aimed to facilitate implementation by including checklists for administrators in the rural self-built housing regulation. He wanted to ensure that this would be implemented and, therefore, concentrated his efforts on administrative tools (FN #73).

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[91] At the time of research, policy objectives which were relevant to spatial planning included the realization of the New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) and thus the growth of smaller cities and extension of urban methods of governance to rural spaces; the restriction of land use; and the construction of environmentally more sustainable settlements through standards such as the 'sponge city' (海绵城市) or through eco-city approaches.

Spatial planning in itself is among the **tools and mechanisms** for realizing the *common good* of 'planning as regulation and public provision,' i.e., control and cohesion of the territory coupled with a favorable distribution of infrastructure and public services. As the quotation of Teacher Yuan at the beginning of this section illustrates, once a spatial plan is finalized, it has the status of a law and is used by administrations as the 'basis' (依据) for making decisions about construction permits. These plans are also binding for local governments' decisions about investment in infrastructure and social services and for the administration's decisions in implementing both control and public goods. Thus, the rural self-built housing regulation is needed by the administration to bring construction regulation to the county's rural areas. Like in the order of 'planning as a craft,' well-formulated standards and regulation provide orientations and frameworks for decisions about kinds, scales, and numbers of such structures and thus count among the essential *tools and mechanisms*.

An important mechanism in ensuring adequate control and effective distribution of public provision is the balance between local decision making and hierarchical control. Compared to other branches of administration in China, the planning system is characterized as one that allows local governments relatively much autonomy in decision making (chapters 5.5.1, 5.5.2). As I have described, local governments make their own spatial plans within the regulatory framework; the planning law and other policy set benchmarks for the objectives and qualities that such plans should fulfill. [92] For example, in general plans, decisions about the plots for schools or hospitals are a core part of zoning settlement areas. This ensures that the implementation of the respective standard fits the concrete local circumstances. Therefore, the scope for local-decision making about the concrete spatial parameters of higher-level policies is a tool to ensure effective implementation of these policies.

State of worth of persons and organizations in the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision' is first and foremost set by formal ranking. There is a hierarchy of government levels and a vertical line of authority between ministries and bureaus. Administrative bodies at the same administrative levels also have a hierarchy among them: Spatial planning is subordinate to land administration, but sets parameters for infrastructure. Within each ministry or bureau, there are differences of rank. Political officials always rank above administrative employees and above spatial planners.

The politicians introduced in chapter 5 were very careful not to violate policy priorities of higher government levels. At the same time, conflicting political priorities were a regular occurrence. For example, the village Party secretary mentioned above (FN #96, chapters 5.6.1.2, 6.1) had to integrate the strict limits on spending for construction with a spatial plan for his village's beautification and development. His argumentation demonstrates the orientation towards higher-level governments' policies: He was against any expensive interventions and for a clear roadmap of investment, so as to avoid waste and to remain within his

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[92] This relative subsidiarity in spatial planning resonates well with the order of 'planning as a craft': there, careful analysis is a central tool (and even *measure of worth* for a plan), in order to achieve a spatial plan which fits the concrete local circumstances, supports the strengths, and answers to the needs in a locality.

prescribed limits of spending. He required that the strengths and opportunities of the location be set in the right light, in order to succeed in the competition with other localities in the area and thus achieve the better development of the tourism industry.

My interlocutors in planning administrations told me that their task was to apply and implement plans and regulations (interviews Mr Zhao, Mr Zhu, FN #94). Effectiveness and efficiency in this regard was the relevant source of *state of worth* for administrative bodies or individual offices these bodies. For this, management capacities were needed: Administrations should be well-staffed, capable to control their constituencies effectively, and able to assess the quality of spatial plans. Regularly, I was told that concerning expertise in the administration, it was important that staff were well-versed in management and administration rather than in the skills of spatial planning. Therefore, it was not imperative for planning administration to employ professional planners (interviews Mr Zhao, Teacher Yuan).

Spatial planners' *state of worth* would be derived from knowing relevant regulation and utilizing this knowledge in formulating the plan, since only a plan which does not violate regulation and standards can be worthy. This sometimes involves enforcing standards vis-à-vis governments. One such instance has been recounted in chapter 5.4.3, where Luo Zhicheng refused to draw up a plan for Apple village that would violate land-use restrictions.

The ***fall from grace*** in this *order of worth* is the lack of regulation, of implementation of regulation, and thus of control, cohesion, and order. Thus, the rural self-built housing regulation extends control by the county administration to an issue area that had previously not been subject to spatial planning and construction control above the village level.

Another failure in state control happened in Wanderlust township: The previous plan had envisaged an access street to the local school situated at the center of the town. However, after Party Secretary Liu had told the planners about the daily traffic chaos in front of the school when parents dropped off their children or came to pick them up, we went to have a look at this street (chapter 5.1). There was a little shack where the street was supposed to be; moreover, the gap between the houses, where the street was supposed to be, was too small to let through two vehicles (FN #30). Accordingly, in the subsequent version of the spatial plan, a new access street to the school via a different route had been inserted.

To sum up, in the *order of worth* 'planning as regulation and public provision,' everything revolves around the state and its hierarchies, which order the territory and hold it together. In this *order of worth*, spatial planning is a service to government and supports the ordering and administration of physical space.

6.3   Planning as a business

Local governments commission (委托 or 外包) the formulation of spatial plans to planning companies or planning institutes, the latter of which are publicly owned but partially

marketized.[93] This was also the case with the rural self-built housing regulation, whose formulation was commissioned to the privately owned New Town Company.

Thus, the client-service provider relationship is an essential characteristic of the relationship between local governments (甲方, the principal) and spatial planners. In the order of 'planning as a business,' government and the planning company are business partners, with government as client and planning company or planning institute as service provider, which works for a fee set by a contract. This shapes the relationships between government and planners: Both parties strive to maximize their respective cost-benefit-relationship from the transaction. For both government and planners, this order is of considerable significance, since governments at the township level and below often have limited funds, while at the time of the research, the planning profession in Sichuan was experiencing a crisis, with many enterprises struggling to remain in the market (chapter 7.3).

The **common good** of 'planning as a business' is the planning capacity and effectiveness, which has been created through marketization. One argument is that in the context of China's current speed of development, so much planning has to be done. According to this line of argumentation, the sheer volume of planning cannot be covered by the state because state-owned planning institutes are not big enough; planning is a technical task and can easily be bought from service providers.[94] Since the mid-2000s, government has actively taken measures to marketize the planning system. Nevertheless, it still retains some control over the market.

The *common good* is illustrated by the contrast between how public planning institutes used to operate at the time of the planned economy and today: Today, government buys the services, just as other government organizations would, for example, buy technical equipment. At the time of the planned economy, in contrast, municipal or provincial planning ministries would pay the salaries at the respective planning institutes (chapter 5.5.4, interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili). Like many of my interlocutors, Huang Tianming fully supported this marketization (chapter 7.3, interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili). He argued that the state does not have to have the technical expertise to formulate a spatial plan. In his view, it is also unnecessary that the state has such expertise, since the market can more effectively cover such tasks.

In this *order of worth*, the **measure of worth** is the relationship between cost and benefit of a project. One illuminating disagreement about the adequate depth of analysis for a given remuneration happened at a coordinative meeting in Resounding county's planning bureau. There, Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng presented a nearly finalized tourism concept plan

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[93] Most of the data on the *order of worth* 'planning as a business' is covered in the next empirical chapter on the planning profession. For this reason, the discussion here is relatively short.

[94] This *common good* has to be understood in context of the policy of reform and opening since the 1980s: While in the era of the planned economy, different forms of state or collective enterprises controlled more or less the entire production, since the 1980s, and increasingly in preparation to China's entry to the WTO in 2005, many areas of the economy were privatized, while strategically important branches, especially profitable enterprises, and core tasks of government were kept in state ownership.

for Terracotta township (FN #82). The township government officials had much criticism: They wanted to have more analysis, more concrete measures pointed out, and an economic strategy that brought together the every-day lives of residents with the development of tourism. The political leader present at this meeting, in particular, called for a development strategy which would be regionally embedded, for a style that stands out from the newly fashioned traditional appearances of the other tourism destinations, as well as for analysis and conceptualization which was adjusted to the specific target group of tourists.

Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng endured this meeting, but on the way back, they were fuming. In Luo Zhicheng's words: How can you expect to buy a car if you are only willing to pay for a motorcycle? The plan was entitled 'concept plan' precisely because the government had refused to pay enough money for a real spatial design. In the follow-up to this meeting, Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng therefore only implemented what the political leader had demanded, and this also superficially, merely pretending they had done some further research. While this conflict describes a *fall from grace* in the order of 'planning as a business,' it also illustrates the relationship between effort, quality, and price of a plan.

Tools and mechanisms: Planning projects were based on contracts, which defined the contents and results, price, and timeframe for the project. Payment would usually be made in installments at fixed points of the planning process so that planners would have received the full amount only after the plan had passed the assessment process.

State of worth: In the order of 'planning as a craft,' the relationship between planners and government was posited as one in which spatial planners consult government in technical matters and thus have a certain professional autonomy; in the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision,' spatial planners are subordinate to politicians due to the formers' lower political status. In the order of 'planning as a business,' in contrast, the two parties are on equal footing in a relationship between a service provider and client.

One ***fall from grace*** has already been presented at the example of the tourism concept plan for Terracotta township: Here, the government had expected much more than it could get for the amount of money that had been agreed. Another *fall from grace* was the preceding plan for the tourism resort in Apple village by another company before Luo Zhicheng was given the assignment (chapter 5.6.2, FN #23): The political leader said that it indeed looked pretty, but it lacked detail. Therefore, even though the village had already commissioned a plan, they still did not have the adjustments to the general plan with which they could pass assessment. The construction plan of the previous project also did not include sufficient detail to start construction. In this case, there had already been a finalized plan that did not fulfill the client's needs.

6.4   Planning for development and growth

At a conference room in a mid-range hotel in central Chengdu, one of a series of workshop meetings of a project for the development of 'empty villages' (空心村) took place

(FN #34, also referenced in chapter 6.1). The project was sponsored by another ministry and was to inform future policy for rural areas. 'Empty villages' are settlements from which so many people have migrated that there are almost only old people and children living there; there is barely any economic activity going on, and many fields lie fallow. During the meeting, each participating research team presented the interim results of their respective subproject. In these case studies, villages were shown to lack infrastructure and social services, and construction was old and derelict: An impression of deep poverty was presented.

In one case study, relocation of residents to central villages was being discussed as a measure to support economic activity and the provision of infrastructures and services. This triggered a controversy about effective measures and the costs related to measures such as relocation. At the center of the discussion stood a few households whose houses were located in unfavorable, mountainous terrain, far away from the central village. The research team working on the locality suggested resettling the households to the central village. An argument ensued between a professor involved in the project and Director Ba, the ministry representative. The professor's position, brought forward emphatically, was that it is no good to force people to resettle since they would not have any income source after resettlement. Nothing could be achieved with resettlement; it was a mistake to think that such a measure would support the residents. Instead, the government should let the localities develop out of their own accord.

Against this, Director Ba asserted that the concentration of the population must be an objective of development. He supported this argument with a comparison with the countryside in other countries, which was also composed of more concentrated settlements; therefore, this should be the direction in which China would develop. He also pointed to the family histories of the people whose resettlement was being discussed: They had moved there after personal conflicts in another county, which forced them to leave their homes. Since then, they had lived in poverty in this village. He also argued that in the peripheral location where the households were currently living, they did not have any infrastructure, no running water, electricity, or waste disposal; he state could not provide such infrastructure in this remote location.

At its core, this discussion is about the role of the state in improving the living conditions of individual persons and about whether the concentration of population is an effective measure to bring about an improvement in living conditions. While there is pronounced disagreement over the *tools and mechanisms* that bring development, both persons share an understanding that the current situation is problematic, and that 'development' would be much better.

Research on urban policy and spatial planning in China, often under the heading of 'entrepreneurial city' (e.g., Wu 2015), often focusses on development and growth as an objective of spatial planning.[95] Development and growth are seen as guided and driven by local government, not by entrepreneurial initiative. They are supported by central policy programs and strategies, such as the New Urbanization Plan (NDRC 2014) or the drive to achieve a moderately well-off society even in poor areas by 2021. From the perspective of this body of literature, my conceptual separation of regulation and public provision from growth and development seems to go against established knowledge. However, since *orders of worth* are situated in parallel and must be negotiated in concrete circumstances, this separation is heuristically highly insightful: we see officials maneuvering between these objectives and trying to bridge them.

Development as a ***common good*** is also mentioned in the rural self-built housing regulation: The development of recent years is cited as a precondition for improving the administration of rural construction today. What is this concept, development (发展), in the context of small-town planning in Sichuan? The rural self-built housing regulation aims to balance (协调) rural and urban development; this necessitates improved construction standards in rural areas. The presentation for this plan also proposes differentiated construction standards for varying economic specializations, ranging from industry over intensive agriculture to tourism. In this presentation, the term development is located at the intersection between well-ordered spatial arrangements, high-quality physical construction of buildings, and a stable and modern economic base. The discussion about the merits of resettlement cited above adds adequate infrastructure and possibilities to earn a living. Between the lines of all these discussions, modern economic practice is evocated based on the division of labor, mechanized and large-scale production techniques, and the production for urban or modern consumption.

Growth is not mentioned in these two empirical examples because the general direction of policy demands the concentration of rural and smaller urban settlements. Both examples are from dispersed settlements, which are to be diminished in number. However, growth in the meaning of expansive territorial growth of settlements was envisioned for Wanderlust township. The spatial plan is made for a territory almost double the size of the current construction area. Teacher Wei explained to me that in this case, the spatial plan would be used as a justificatory tool at the land administration in order to receive an advantageous amount of land-use quotas in the upcoming round of land use planning (interview Teacher Wei). Growth also refers to economic growth, to the attraction of investment, and to the protection

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[95] Wu's (2015) monograph is entitled 'Planning for Growth' – the title of this book has inspired the label for this *order of worth*. It is argued in this strand of literature that spatial planning first and foremost caters to the objectives of political officials. Because GDP growth is one of the central indicators determining officials' evaluations and careers, and because local governments depend on the sale of land use rights for their incomes, spatial planning must make construction and investment possible. However, in the rural and small-town contexts in which this research took place, the economic mechanisms behind this logic can be expected to work differently than in big cities.

of local industries. For example, in Wanderlust township, the government emphasized designating space for the local wholesale trade and handicraft industry.[96] The ideal imagination which emerges is of wealthy localities rather than wealthy people or wealthy local governments.

Accordingly, the **measure of worth** is conspicuous wealth, large-scale business and agriculture, modernized infrastructure, and high-quality construction standards and designs. As can be seen in the disagreement about relocation in the empty-villages-project, for a spatial plan or a policy the question is which measures benefit development.

Thus, the vignette presents a disagreement about the **tools and mechanisms** which bring about development. In general, it was taken for granted that the state takes a leading role in pursuing development and growth in rural areas and that investments and improvements in physical infrastructure are essential. However, the other measures to reach the objective of 'development and growth' were contested.

In an interview, Director Ba listed the prevalent measures to increase economic activity: Concentration of population in central settlements, protection of culture and the environment (also for the sake of tourism), the building of basic infrastructure (基础设施), and last but not least, support for production and economic activities (interview Director Ba). However, a participant at the following meeting for the empty-village-project made the case that the prevalent approach was not sufficient (FN #51): On a field trip, the team had visited a newly constructed village, with high-quality small houses with gardens. However, the village was empty; none of the beneficiaries of this construction chose to live there. The participant argued that the construction of settlements, i.e., the concentration of population and the provision of basic infrastructure, does not have any effect. Instead, rural development should focus on economic interventions, on the creation of economic opportunities and of jobs. Accordingly, his presentation of a plan for such a village looked at the economic situation before it analyzed and made suggestions for land use, construction, and infrastructure.

The **state of worth** which the different parties to these discussions worked towards was measured by substantively contributing to a locality's development and growth.

Fall from grace: On the way back to Chengdu from the tourism concept plan-meeting for Terracotta township (chapter 6.3), Jiang Wenxue criticized that spatial planning provides a comparatively painless way for politicians to gain status in the order of development and growth: Renovation of facades and beautification of the townscape is usually an easier course of action than tackling issues like schooling, social security, or others. To show that they are doing something and bringing about results, many local politicians will focus on such a project instead of dealing with pressing social issues (FN #82).

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[96] Somewhat counter-intuitively, neither local GDP-growth nor the sale of land use rights as a means of financing local government come up in any substantial measure in my data. This can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that in the towns and rural areas on whose planning processes I focus, there was not (yet) much profit to be gained from speculation with housing. On the other hand, this mechanism is so commonplace that probably neither planners nor officials needed to discuss this in the planning process.

Poverty itself, of course, constitutes a *fall from grace.* The rural self-built housing regulation states that the currently prevailing disorder of construction, the inconsistency of architectural style, and the lack of construction standards are highly unfavorable to rural development. Economically, rural small-scale agriculture or old-fashioned handicraft production only for a local market have been criticized as backward and not profitable.

6.5   Planning for ecology and civilization

Teacher Wei explained to me that control is important:

所以规划师的第一个作用就是所有的这些规划，应该是说要和上位规划相吻合。但是上位规划更多的是对 —— 起的是控制的作用，控制重要的对吧？水源的保护啊，生态灾害呀，国家公园啊，生态和历史的保护啊，上位的规划重点是从控制方面来说。但是对于地方来说，他们要在这种框架下求得发展。[…]良好的一个规划给他们带来效益，所以两个责任对吧？就是一方面控制是承接上面的任务。另外一方面是规划还有目标，就是叫做促进当地的这种发展。

(interview Teacher Wei)

Thus, the first purpose of a professional planner is that all these plans should tally with the plans of higher levels. But plans of higher levels are more for – it comes down to a controlling purpose, control is important, isn't it? The protection of water sources, natural disasters, national parks, the protection of ecology and history, the planning from higher levels mostly comes from the perspective of control. However, for the locality, they will try to obtain development under such a framework. […] a good plan brings them benefits, so it is two responsibilities, isn't it? On the one hand, control is a responsibility imparted by higher levels that has to be carried on. On the other hand, the plan also has objectives, that is to say, bringing ahead that development of the locality.
[own translation]

In the process of making a spatial plan, the *order of worth* of 'planning for ecology and civilization' connects to the order of 'planning for development and growth' in a very ambivalent way: On the one hand, many of the localities in my research had an economic development strategy based on tourism. Spatial plans for this always included protection or revitalization of local traditional style and the designation of scenic areas for landscape protection. Seen through this lens, ecology and civilization are instrumental to the pursuit of economic growth. On the other hand, many standards, plans, and regulations from higher administrative levels restrict expansive construction to facilitate landscape and local heritage protection. There are quotas for protecting the environment and natural resources, which are assigned downwards through the administrative hierarchy. Thus, many localities that had commissioned tourism development concepts from New Town Company were located in areas with strict restrictions; they did not have any other options for developing modern industry or agriculture.Fan Jianhong's rural self-built housing regulation for Reverence county reflects the same ambiguity between protection as an essential worth and its instrumental use for the tourism sector. The plan's overall statement of purpose includes a better positioning of the county in the increasingly ferocious competition in the tourism sector.

The county general plan divides the township into three zones: A periurban zone, a zone of intensive agricultural production, and zones of ecological preservation and tourism development. In the construction plan, more detailed designs and much stricter prescriptions apply to the houses in the tourism and ecology zones. In contrast, in the periurban zone, modern cubic designs are permitted (critique of this was stated at the company internal review meeting, FN #65). Thus, in those areas where there is otherwise most development restriction, requirements for construction and the associated hopes for tourism development are highest.At the same time, protection of the environment and of culture are perceived as having an essential worth for improving people's lives. There is a clear picture of what a suitable living environment is and an agreement about its relevance. However, concepts and approaches about how to bring this about are still vague among my interlocutors and the planning profession (Melcher 2017). Similarly, policy experimentation and the search for methods of implementation of this concept at the national level are also just beginning (Chengshi Guihua Tongxun 2016). The slogan '生态文明建设' (Construction of an ecological civilization) describes a harmonious coexistence of society and natural environment. The concept and slogan are, on the one hand, discussed as general policy and ideology (Geall/ Ely 2018; Goron 2018; Ren 2018; Zhang 2018), but on the other hand, there is also a discussion among planners and architects how to realize these ideas in their work (Wu/ Wu 2014). From this policy discourse, I derived the label for this *order of worth*; however, I explicitly include preservation of local heritage in this *order of worth*, which is not among the core contents of the official policy of 'ecological civilization.'

A valid argument can be made about the *order of worth* 'planning for ecology and civilization' and the *order of worth* 'planning for development and growth' ultimately being one and the same, since the objective of both is an improvement of life in a locality. I analytically separate between these two orders, however, because very candid criticism is made from the standpoint of *ecology and civilization* against practices which pursue *development and growth*; the ideal imaginations in those two orders are also markedly different, wealth does not describe the same outcome as tradition, environment, community. Higher-level administrations issue technical standards, regulations, and policies explicitly to defend the objectives of 'ecology and civilization' against the drive for growth and development at the local level.

Common good: The rural self-built housing regulation focuses on technical and design details to preserve the local architectural style in the countryside; it addresses the problem that so far, there had been little if any construction regulation in rural areas. This issue is also addressed by a project of Chengdu municipality, in which professional planners are sent to work for rural governments. This project aims to support rural development and improve the quality of spatial policy in the countryside (in more detail in chapter 7.5.2). An information brochure on this project, displayed in 2016 on a computer terminal of the Chengdu planning exhibition, offers illustrations of how 'ecology and civilization' is imagined (Bureau

Figure 6: Summary of the three principles of rural planners' work
Reproduction from the rural planning brochure, source: Bureau of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality, own photograph, 26.09.2016.

of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality, 2016 or earlier; figure 6). Three principles are postulated for rural planners' work: First, 'put ecology first' (生态优先) is represented by a picture of mother nature holding green earth as well as houses between hills, fields, and a small river; a mother shows a field to her child and explaining that this is how the food we eat comes from the soil. Second, the 'people-centered' approach (以人为本) is illustrated by a group of young women, a grandmother pushing a child in a stroller, and a lady raking grains in front of her farmhouse. The rural planner is shown to collect information and opinions from people. Third, 'respect for history and culture' (尊重历史和文化) is accompanied by the argument that 'Only if historical memory and the diversity of culture are protected, can cities develop in a better way' (要保护历史记忆和文化多样性，城市才能更好发展). In a speech balloon, the rural planner explains that respect for history and culture is coupled with preserving the diversity of localities; not only is the aim to differentiate Chengdu from other big cities, but each township should also have its own characteristics. This statement is illustrated with a tourism street and a display of traditional Sichuan opera. These illustrations give a fair and government-approved impression of the *common good* of clean landscapes, small-scale farming, lived connections to tradition and history, and spatial planning done for the people who live in these areas.

Measure of worth for 'ecology and civilization' is the regulatory detail in plans, as can be seen from the rural self-built housing regulation and the quotation from Teacher Wei: Only with careful regulation, based on well-grounded analysis, can protection be implemented effectively. As described in chapter 5.4.1, measurements and prescriptions for ecology and civilization within the regulatory framework are often present but vague. In other cases, such as the construction restriction along roads (chapter 5.4.3), the regulation may seem too strict and too broad to be implementable.

Among the *tools and mechanisms,* Teacher Wei emphasizes the role of planning and regulation by higher administrative levels. For example, with the rural self-built housing regulation, the county government takes measures to preserve the countryside's vernacular architectural style and overall appearance against unregulated construction activity.

As incentives for local governments to invest in 'ecology and civilization,' there are labels, such as the historical and cultural city (历史文化名城) or sponge city (海绵城市, for the conservation of rainwater) to be obtained by implementation of the respective policies. Similarly, the trend for tourism development also provides an incentive to invest in ecology and civilization.

State of worth is measured based on the acquisition of labels, the quality of plans, or success as a tourism destination. However, my interlocutors from the planning profession often felt they had to assert the public interest in ecology and civilization against politicians' will. For example, Han Ruishan, the responsible planner for the Wanderlust project, explained to me:

但是我有我们的立场 […]。所以你政府给我钱，我就帮你划很多土地上去。但是我们不
可能是这个，以这个角度去帮他。
我们是有我们的考虑。我们会从生态平衡 [考虑]，然后就是，比如生态保护，我不可能
[让] 你无限制的发展。(interview Han Ruishan)

But we have our own standpoint [...]. So you, the government, give me money, and then I just
draw up a lot of land for you. But we cannot do this, help them from that angle.
We have our own considerations. We may [consider] from the perspective of the environment,
and then, for example, the protection of ecology; I cannot [let] you develop unboundedly.
[own translation]

This quotation and the quotation of Teacher Wei at the beginning of this chapter make it apparent that higher-level governments and planners often do not expect local governments to put much essential value (as opposed to instrumental value) in protecting the environment and cultural heritage. A ***fall from grace*** is often expected, and planners, with the support of regulation and the promise of income from tourism development, try to defend heritage from local governments' aspirations to develop.

6.6　Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how the five *orders of worth* are present in the administrative and government system of spatial planning. Thus, I have shown that 'planning as a craft' is inscribed in the planning process and in regulation. Politicians, who would formally be more powerful, therefore at times follow the expertise of planners. 'Planning as regulation and public provision' is, of course, what the administrative system is all about: Planning is a legislative process; it is also understood as a tool in order to chart the territory and to achieve an effective distribution of public services and infrastructure. In this regard, planning administration both standardizes the planning process and implements plans. 'Planning as a business' stands for the gains in capacity and effectiveness that the marketization of spatial planning has brought about; it also stands for achieving the most beneficial relationship between the monetary cost of a plan and the product. In this relationship, local government and professional planners stand in a client-provider relationship. 'Planning for development and growth' stands for changes, for gains in wealth and in other markers of development which are to be brought about by policy; in contrast, 'planning for ecology and civilization' describes the growing interest in preserving and protecting what is already there. Thus, while the former *order* is expansionist and very much an interest of local governments, the tools of 'environment and civilization' are oriented towards regulation, restriction, and especially towards a top-down control of local government action.

In the diverse planning discussions and decisions I have presented, there are various overlaps between *orders of worth*: First of all, there is a common understanding that effective legislation (be it regulation, standards, or spatial plans) must be based on sound and professional analysis and must take professional expertise into account. Therefore, 'regulation and

public provision' need 'planning as a craft.' Arguments from the *order* of 'planning as a craft' may moreover lend support to any side in the strategic interplay between 'development and growth' and 'environment and civilization.' In the interaction between these two *orders*, typically, the lower-level government strives for growth in area, GDP, and tax income (planning for growth and development),[97] while the higher level aims to restrict the use of public goods and resources ('planning for ecology and civilization'). The *tools and mechanisms* of 'planning as regulation and public provision' are top-down and therefore tend to support 'planning for ecology and civilization.' For example, the pursuit of better administrative control over rural areas, which represents a higher worthiness in the *order* of 'planning as regulation and public provision,' supports the rationale of the rural self-built housing regulation. Vice versa, the rural self-built housing regulation depends on the regulatory and financial capacity of the state, which has to possess both capital and administrative clout to be able to implement control of construction styles and land uses throughout the entire territory.

Provision of modern infrastructure, while of high worthiness in the *order* of 'development and growth' since it brings investment and boosts GDP, has high worthiness in the *order* of 'regulation and public provision,' too. Thus, arguments from the *order* of 'regulation and public provision' may also support local aspirations for growth.

Similarly, the orders of 'development and growth' and of 'ecology and civilization' are not necessarily antagonists: In the case of the rural self-built housing regulation, the aspiration for ecology and civilization has only become relevant based on the accomplishment of a certain wealth, i.e., a level of worthiness in the *order* of 'development and growth.' Another mutually supportive connection between these two *orders of worth* can be found in many tourism development schemes, in which *tools and mechanisms* from the order of 'ecology and civilization' are employed to attract tourists and thereby attain a higher level of 'development and growth.'

In the previous empirical chapter, I have introduced three groups of actors, each of which switches between *orders of worth*: Planners, by their education and their working environments, are committed to 'planning as a craft.' Planning companies' and institutes' licenses depend on their implementation of planning regulation; thus, they are bound to the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision.' Since their income is derived from contracts with local governments, the order of 'planning as a business' might compel spatial planners to follow local politicians' preference for growth. While being organizationally bound tightly to the order of 'regulation and public provision,' politicians can also be expected to strive for a productive balance between 'development and growth' and 'ecology and civilization,' whether motivated by their own convictions or by the tendencies of higher-level political strategy. As explained above, the realization of 'regulation and public provision' may prove instrumental in increasing a locality's worthiness in those two *orders of*

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[97] The small towns at the center of this study also struggle for growth of or at least stable levels of population.

worth. The administrative staff is employed to realize the *common good* of 'regulation and public provision.'

In the current setting, policy and the state have a formative influence on the formulations of *common good*s, *state of worth,* and *tools and mechanisms.* Regulation often determines the decisions which will be made. However, I maintain that this does not compromise the validity of the framework of *orders of worth* for spatial planning in Sichuan, since persons in the planning process reference these *orders of worth* in their arguments and positions. The complex constellation of requirements, norms, and influences in the administrative process of planning in Chengdu also justifies the use of this theory.

7   The planning profession

At the beginning of chapter 5, I have introduced three groups of actors: politicians, administration, and professional planners. Chapter 5 has focused on politicians and administration; it has also shown that professional planners must be hired for their expertise in any planning project. This chapter turns to these professional planners. It describes the profession as increasingly independent and of growing status; it demonstrates how spatial planning has marketized; and it shows how the internal hierarchy of spatial planning is still shaped by seniority, but also increasingly by expertise in a broad range of issue areas. I also demonstrate that planners position themselves between a still highly technical self-description of the profession and an involvement in policy-making. Like the empirical chapter on planning administration, this account will not apply the analytical perspective of *orders of worth*. Instead, as a conceptual basis, I draw upon two conceptualizations of varying roles in architecture (Xie, Tian 2010) and urban planning (Feng 2016). At the end of this chapter, an analysis based on the different roles these two authors describe demonstrates that planners prefer a position of expertise and technical consultancy vis-à-vis government to a subservient technical formulation of politicians' ideas. It also sketches the various contributions to society which planners strive for.

Three meetings of the Wanderlust planning team illustrate a tension between the routines and the aspirations of spatial planning: In one team meeting for the general plan for Wanderlust township, Teacher Wei suggested that the team might take a different, more creative approach to plan-making (FN #20). The meeting took place in the large seminar room at the company office dominated by a long meeting table. It was already long past dinner time, and only the core team, Han Ruishan, Chu Weide, and Gao Yuanchao were present to discuss the state of their work with Teacher Wei. Teacher Wei is one of the owners of New Town Company and was responsible for the Wanderlust project.

At this point, the team was working on generating leading ideas for planning the town proper. Han Ruishan, Chu Weide, and Gao Yuanchao each had brought a hand-drawn sketch of their respective idea for the future layout of Wanderlust town, which they presented in turn to Teacher Wei. Only two days before, the team had met and planned out the next steps in this planning process. Chu Weide had proposed that each person would prepare a conceptual layout(方案[98]) for the meeting with Teacher Wei, so that more ideas and a more creative general concept for the plan could be generated. At this preceding meeting, apart from the sentence 'each person prepares a concept' (每个人做一个方案), the three had not talked at all about what exactly it was they were to prepare.

Two days later, when the team presented their sketches to Teacher Wei, I was surprised to see how similar they were: The overview maps employed the same coloring and symbols,

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[98] Literal translation: scheme, plan – not to be confused with 规划, the word for plans like spatial plans; 方案 was used for spatial concepts which include layouts and zoning, but not for the formal planning documents.

the area covered by the plans was identical. All three plans specified land-use functions and construction at a street block level, not by building or larger entities. In this, they were obviously based on the template of the zoning plan within a general plan.

Teacher Wei seemed somewhat disappointed about the similarity of the layouts and designs of the three sketches; therefore, he suggested taking a different, more artistic, and creative approach to coming up with the initial concepts and directions for the plan. He recommended paintings or essays about how the place should be in the future. His arguments for this were that, 1) the usual approach of considering by drawing and discussing maps does not fit the requirements of the time anymore – what is needed is a more strategic approach; 2) for the local politicians, such a vision is more understandable; it gives them more practical tools and guidelines to work with; and 3) this would make us think more about what place and people really need.

The planning team agreed to this approach. Three topics were defined and distributed among the members of the team: The tourism concept, the local handicraft industry, and the natural environment.

The next project meeting took place one week after. Each planner had done research on the status quo in Wanderlust township and had prepared a concept for their respective topic (FN #24). These included analyses of existing strengths and weaknesses, upon which the development ideas would be based. Only Han Ruishan had tried a change of medium and brought an essay. Gao Yuanchao and Chu Weide used Powerpoint to present their thoughts. However, everyone present at that meeting (again Teacher Wei, Han Ruishan, Chu Weide, Gao Yuanchao, and me) had many other projects at the time and Teacher Wei was utterly exhausted. Therefore, there was not much discussion about these concepts after they had been presented. After this day, the planning process moved on at high speed, and those initial concepts were not further discussed or developed.

This interest in innovative approaches, the pressures that made the initiative dry out, and the combination of ambitious objectives with difficulties in moving beyond the confines of established planning methodology are characteristic for the everyday work at the planning company. While a point was being made by the company's leadership to invest workforce, time, and money into research and training, project work usually happened under time pressure. In such situations of big workload, long working days, and time pressure, planners often fell back to entrenched routines.

Literature on spatial planning in China often criticizes the planning profession for overly relying on construction design, for not considering the needs of the local population or local tradition and way of life (Bray in: Zang/ Kou (eds.) 2013; Bray in: Hillmann/ Unger (eds.) 2013; Curien 2014). For example, Curien (2014) examines the mismatch between the lofty environmental goals and proclamations of central government with their implementation at the local level and criticizes the 'generic method of hyper-productivist and functionalist planning' (Curien 2014: 23):

> *The construction of new Chinese cities therefore proceeds according to a hyper-quantitative, matrix-based functionalist method, reflected as a pyramid structure from the plan allocating land to be urbanized, which is drawn up in Beijing, to the proportioning of every urban block in each new city, and is embodied by urban zoning on a vast scale. Everything revolves around detailed standards and urban functions, leaving little room for qualitative considerations, discussions airing other points of view as to how to lay out cities, and dialogue with local stakeholders, in particular populations. (Curien 2014: 28)*

Curien (2014) describes how this method impacts the products of planning and shows that, due to political disinterest and especially due to structural factors, there is no change in planning methods. This is despite criticism of the established approaches by members of the planning profession (Curien 2014: 28-30).[99]

By and large, I agree with Curien's (2014) critique of spatial planning methodology; the vignette above confirms that members of the profession are very aware of its shortcomings and are looking for ways to address the problems. In this chapter, I describe the professional field of spatial planning as well as the pressures and ideals shaping the roles of planners. I look at the planning process and the planning system from the planning profession's perspective and demonstrate that professional planners have agency and certain professional independence in consulting local governments. I also show that to my interlocutors, making a substantial contribution to a locality's future is an important motivation. This account complements the more systemic approaches and the critical perspective on spatial planning in the literature reviewed in chapter 1.2.1. The empirical account of the roles of planners in Sichuan and their organizations again leads to an analysis of the *orders of worth* to be found in spatial planning in Sichuan (chapter 8).

In order to provide a conceptual basis to the investigation into the planning profession, this chapter starts with a review of two dissertations which look at the role expectations and self-images of professions in construction design: Feng Xin (access restricted dissertation, 2016) uses institutional theory's concepts of rules of appropriateness and role expectations to describe the roles of urban planners and their capacities to 'make a difference.' Xie Tian (2010) looks at architecture from a cultural studies perspective and shows that architects are caught between different professional and personal roles. Their theorizations of profession, professional roles, and the objectives pursued by members of the professions provide the fundament for the empirical exploration of the planning profession.

The following empirical account moves from a macro perspective to a finer resolution: I first discuss whether it is legitimate to talk of planning as a profession at all. Here, again, I draw upon Feng's (2016) and Xie Tian's (2010) theoretizations of the same question and present planners' characterizations of the field they work in. I then go on to demonstrate the

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[99] While in principle, I agree with much of Curien's diagnosis, his line of argument to me appears overly deterministic and to a certain degree even culturalist: even though he cites critical voices of prominent personalities within in the planning profession, in his narrative, the system is determined by the political system as well as cultural influences from the Soviet system and even 'inspiration from Confucianism in terms of order and hierarchy' (Curien 2014: 29).

degree to which the profession has been marketized in recent years and present the economic strategy of New Town Company, arguing that for this reason, planners' roles as economic actors on the market cannot be neglected. Zooming into New Town Company, I then present different positions in planning teams and the conditions of success in the profession. Afterwards, I investigate how planners understand their jobs by exploring the conceptual differentiation between technical and management work and by presenting the rural planner program, a pilot program in Chengdu municipality dispatching professional planners to work in village and township governments. Finally, I reinvestigate the roles Feng (2016) and Xie Tian (2010) conceptualize in light of my data. Thereby, I demonstrate that spatial planners have a set of roles to choose from both vis-à-vis their clients and vis-à-vis society. Unsurprisingly, they aim to take an active and formative role in planning processes rather than straightforwardly applying prescribed concepts, as Curien (2014) describes it.

7.1 Complexity of space-constructing professions: Conceptual framework

This chapter started with the contrast between the high aspirations and interests in innovative approaches many planners have and the pressures of work, making them utilize routine approaches. Both Xie Tian (2010) and Feng Xin (2016) address this tension and describe the occupational groups in the focus of their dissertations, architects and spatial planners respectively, as caught in between multiple professional roles. Both accounts correspond well with my own observation.

Xie Tian (2010) depicts architects as a group variously oriented towards professional standards, artistic self-expression, and intellectual contributions to society and the public. Feng (2016) describes a tension between a range of objectives that planners should strive for in their cooperation with local governments, which range from enforcement of regulation to strengthening the public's voice. She also identifies a tension between a very technical planning curriculum and an increasingly policy- and economy-oriented planning practice. In their interactions with government, planners must strike a balance between their three roles of being technicians, consultants, and enforcers of regulation at the same time.

Both Xie Tian (2010) and Feng (2016) use the concept of 'role' (角色) as the link between the persons' aspirations and motivations, or the persons' subjectivity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the larger structures they work in. Roles are shaped both by a person's understanding of their identity (as a spatial planner) and their counterparts' expectations. Despite these similarities, the two publications' angles are different: Feng's (2016) analysis concentrates on spatial planners' roles and objectives in their interactions with and service for local governments. In contrast, Xie Tian (2010) focusses on the internal discourses and self-reflections of architects.

7.1.1   Xie Tian (2010): 'Identity Crisis, Professional Role, and Subjectivity of Chinese Architects'

Xie Tian herself is an architect by training and occupation. In her research (Xie, Tian 2010), she digs deeply into cultural theory to explore how architects' work, identities, and relationships with society in China have changed in recent decades. Her analysis focusses on the 'identity crisis' in both the professional roles and subject identities of architects. It takes three different angles: architects as an occupational group, the subject identity of individual architects, and the identities expressed in architectural works. Her focus lies on how the profession has changed in a social context that has modernized, liberalized, and internationalized within only a few decades. This has brought about far-reaching changes to the organization of the field of architecture and architects' tasks. As Xie Tian shows, architects have increasingly been taking on managerial roles while at the same time increasingly emphasizing aesthetic appearance and even artistic expression in their work. With this, the architect's subject identity and her*his individual contribution have acquired a higher relevance, as has the role of architecture as a cultural and social medium of expression.[100]

Xie Tian (2010: 64-80) demonstrates that there are three ways of doing architecture, as technical professional, as artist, and as intellectual. Each of these three ways contains different approaches to working, but often enough also different practitioners' backgrounds. For example, persons who practice architecture as an art and emphasize aesthetics or subjective expression often have a background in visual arts rather than architecture. Xie Tian's (2010) presentation of architects' different roles implies that practitioners tend to subscribe to one of the three roles, not to combine them. However, she also argues that the three roles belong together within the field of architecture: The three roles share a humanistic spirit and value orientation. Each of them connects technical and cultural questions within their work. Moreover, they are also held together by the objectives of making a living from the creation of architectural works, furthering their profession's purview through innovation, and strengthening their profession's influence by improving the system in which they work (Xie, Tian 2010: 83f).

The argument starts from an understanding of architecture as including technical knowledge, arts, and academia, or, formulated as roles, architects either being professional architects (职业建筑师), artists (艺术家), or intellectuals (知识分子). Xie Tian (2010) then formulates the concrete contents of each of the three roles. From these formulations of three different roles, i.e., three different ways of doing architecture, she finally derives the common element and the common objectives that shape architecture as a profession.

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[100] Both spatial planners and architects are specialized at intersections between engineering and society or culture; both create spatiality and ask how people use space. In their professional practice, they often enough are engaged in the same projects, but on different sides. Planners on the side of regulation and the public; architects are usually on the investors' team. Because of these similarities, and because I found many of Xie Tian's findings reflected in my data, her research on architecture has proven to be very productive as one of the bases for my analysis of the planning profession.

7.1.2   Feng Xin (2016): 'The Changing Role of Urban Planners in Transitional China'

Like Xie Tian, Feng Xin practices the profession that her research is about: She is a spatial planner in Shanghai and, in her research, explores the role expectations and rules that spatial planners follow in their work from the perspective of institutional theory (Feng 2016). She, too, does this in light of political, social, and economic transformations and contrasts the old rules and roles with the new ones. The theoretical framework for this analysis is *New Institutionalism*, of which Feng utilizes mainly two concepts: *rules of appropriateness*, which describe the objectives of spatial planning practice and the sorts of knowledge which are relevant to realize these objectives; and *role expectations*, which describe how actors, in this case spatial planners, are to embody this knowledge and their professional personas. She shows that there are diverse ways of enacting planners' work, and they often enough are in conflict. In particular, there is a pronounced tension between the more traditional role of a silent technician for local government and a newer and more active role of planners. Taking this active role, planners would actively enforce planning regulation, introduce concepts based on their professional authority, or even act as spokespeople for various stakeholders.

Feng's (2016) approach moves in the opposite direction from Xie Tian's (2010) narrative: She first empirically establishes measures for the success or quality of planners' work. Here, she applies *rules of appropriateness* as a concept for rules describing how something is done, instead of focusing on the result of the action (Feng 2016: 54-56). She identifies a more recent and a more traditional set of rules (Feng 2016: 128-152). Under the current conditions of political and economic transition in China, so she argues, both sets of rules are at play and create an ambiguity about the roles and tasks of spatial planning. The new rules of appropriateness are: implementing rule of law; supporting GDP-oriented urban growth; providing professional judgment; and strengthening the incorporation of standpoints of the population into planning considerations. These new rules prescribe a relatively active mode of planning in which planners make procedural suggestions, introduce concepts and analyses, and actively enforce planning regulation. Taking these roles, planners derive their authority from their professional knowledge, from the legal framework for spatial planning, and from local politicians' lack of knowledge about the planning system and the resulting uncertainties.

Feng also demonstrates that the old rules are still active, which for the largest part describe a more passive mode of planning: Planners draw up designs according to local politicians' or central political directives. These old rules define planners as enforcing central government policies, legitimizing local authorities, and acting as objective experts to set the world in order and strengthen the public good. Feng (2016: 153-191) also describes different bodies of planning knowledge and capabilities connected to the respective rules.

From these rules and bodies of knowledge Feng (2016) derives the three different role expectations through which professional planning can be enacted. The concept of role expectation emphasizes the social character of filling a role: Not only are roles the templates for planners' interactions with governments; more importantly, officials have expectations of how planners fill their job and what spatial planners do for them. Different rules of appropriateness are relevant under different role expectations; and role expectations are the link between the persons' belonging to the profession, their individuality, and their enactment of being a planner vis-à-vis their clients. Feng (2016: 192-214) finds that planners choose from three different roles: As *handmaiden of power*, they refine and explicate government's policies; as *initiative knower*, they consult government on policies and rules that need to be implemented and on how to improve projects; and as *active initiator*, they give impulses for policies or measures to address issues on their agenda. In this, Feng (2016) demonstrates that planners switch between roles according to the concrete task at hand and according to the expectations of their clients.

7.1.3   Operationalization

In this chapter, I use these two dissertations as theory in three ways: to sensitize me to the range of different aspects that need to be considered when studying professions or occupations which simultaneously have a technical content and engage public space and society; to triangulate my findings with previous research; and as secondary concepts with which I look at my data.

While the two works are based upon very different theoretical frameworks and scientific traditions, the questions they address are very similar and highly relevant to my research: How do representatives of both professions understand their professional role? How do the professions connect to broader society, both in terms of being shaped and regulated by their context and of taking an active influence upon their environments? Both authors provide accounts of role and profession as well as templates for analysis, which support me in my engagement with the planning profession. My observations at New Town Company confirmed many of Xie Tian's and Feng's findings. Of course, the planning profession contains different social roles from architecture; however, here, too, tension can be observed between divergent professional roles.

Both Feng's focus on the political role of planning and Xie Tian's emphasis on creativity and intellectual commentary on society have proven helpful for the interpretation of my data. Both authors differentiate architects' or planners' roles according to how much (respectively, what kind of) own initiative and independent conceptualization planners or architects contribute to their projects. However, while Feng (2016) understands roles as defining how planners act vis-à-vis their clients, Xie Tian's (2010) analysis focusses on internal discourses of architecture and self-identification: *architects as professionals* looks at the in-

ternal structure of the profession; *architects as artists* looks at expression of self and communication to the outside; and *architects as intellectuals* looks at how architects comment on society and culture. Both perspectives matter in my data; there is intensive interaction with local government and planners have to find their role in each project. At the same time, internally within the profession, there is differentiation and specialization, as well as a conversation about planning's contributions to society. As I will demonstrate, self-identification has shifted between the generations of planners.

While Xie Tian (2010) sees architects as taking on one of the three roles permanently for themselves, Feng (2016: 241) describes planners as switching according to situational needs. My data has confirmed the latter: Sometimes, spatial planners take on the role of technicians and draw a plan that legitimizes a politician's pet project (*handmaiden of power*); sometimes, they consult local government about the regulation, about how to address problems, or how to design a planning process (*initiative knower*); and sometimes, they have to draw lines where a politician's ideas would go against regulations.

Based on both Xie Tian's (2010) and Feng's (2016) research, I take the conceptualization that there are three types of roles which planners fulfill: technical services to local governments, an advisory role within the set objectives of government, as well as a more creative initiation of projects. Planners' different roles arise from both their concrete interactions with local governments and the various *measures of worth* for spatial planning.[101]

In my following account of everyday spatial planning, I ask how these different roles are enacted and how they intersect and intermingle. In this, I follow Feng's understanding of roles being the enactment of rules and objectives in concrete interactions and situations; like Xie Tian, I do not take analysis to the level of individual subjectivity but remain on the scale of planners as a professional or occupational group.

The empirical data I analyze contributes novel perspectives, since my research engages practical everyday work in the professions. Both Xie Tian (2010) and Feng (2016) take the respective professions' elites as empirical interlocutors. This chapter focuses on whether spatial planning is a profession and which roles are at play in planning practice. By applying the conceptual findings of both dissertations to ethnographic data about working in a middle-position of the planning field, I contribute to the validity and gaps of their findings. In particular, neither Feng (2016) nor Xie Tian (2010) engage the fact that spatial planning is a business and that planning institutes and companies earn an income from their work for local governments. This, of course, has a substantial impact on how a project is approached.

7.2   Is planning a profession?

'职业' 一词有两种含义，一种是与 '业余的' 相对的概念，另一个是指社会学意义上的专
用名词，强调经过系统的理论教育和专业培训获得技术性的、知识化的并属于服务范畴

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[101] Feng's (2016) rules of appropriateness address similar phenomena as my framework of *orders of worth* but from a different conceptual angle and theoretical background.

的技能，是'技术知识的熟练应用与伦理实践两着的结合'。 *(Xie Tian 2010: 67f; citation: Spector 2001: 8, Xie Tian's translation)*

The term 'profession' has two meanings: one is the opposite concept of 'amateur,' the other one points to a technical term in the sense of sociology. It emphasizes that one goes through a systematic education in theory and technical training to achieve technical and intellectual capabilities in the realm of service provision; [profession] 'combine[s] the skillful application of technical knowledge with an ethic of practice.'
(own translation; citation: Spector 2001: 8)

Both Feng (2016: 39-43, 239-245) and Xie Tian (2010: 68-70) argue that because of an overbearing involvement of the state in the self-regulation and knowledge-codification of the fields of planning and architecture in China, the term 'profession' as defined in social sciences (e.g., Demszky von der Hagen/ Voß in: Böhle/ Voß/ Wachtler (eds.) 2010; Kurz in: Endruweit/ Trommsdorff/ Burzan 2014) cannot be used to describe planning and architecture in China. In this chapter, I first revisit their argumentation before making a case for treating spatial planning in China as a profession despite its high degree of state regulation.

7.2.1   What is a profession?

Feng (2010: 39f) uses a traits-based definition of profession which emphasizes the autonomy of a profession from the state, which it develops by forming its own knowledge system or ideology as well as by attaining the power of self-regulation, for example, organization of education of new recruits to the profession or a licensing system. The definition cited above is the one Xie Tian (2010: 67) works with. Its focus lies on the connection of technical knowledge with a theorization and canonization of the profession's moral standards.

Feng (2016: 39-43, 239-245) highlights the lack of autonomy from the state: Until recently, it controlled the education of upcoming planners and, more importantly, licensing of planners and planning companies, planning regulation, and the professional organizations of spatial planners. Thus, practitioners of spatial planning themselves do not have enough autonomous control over the core contents and principles that define the occupation; where they have autonomy, it is locally and temporarily granted by representatives of the state and, therefore, not reliably permanent. Similarly, Huang (2012: 98ff) criticizes the incomplete professionalization of spatial planning expressed in its limited self-administration, since licensing and curricula are still heavily influenced by the state. Xie Tian's (2010: 67-70) arguments about architecture as a profession hold true for spatial planning: People who work in spatial planning have not necessarily undergone an education in this discipline; the exams which are necessary for registration as an architect focus exclusively on technical aspects and exclude the theory and heuristics of the discipline (cf. Feng 2016: 241-243). Xie Tian (2010) surmises from this and from the fact that architects cannot operate independently of a registered institute or company (单位) that the moral principles of architecture (foremost autonomy 独立 and fairness 公正) are not sufficiently institutionalized among practitioners.

In a nutshell, membership and core knowledge of both architecture and spatial planning are influenced heavily by the state. There has been no space to develop a systematic and common understanding of the professions' social responsibility and objectives. These are strong arguments against using the term 'profession' for spatial planning in China.

This critique of overbearing state involvement is certainly well-founded. However, both authors work with definitions of 'profession' derived from Western, liberal democratic systems. State-society relations in China are different from state-society relations in liberal democracies, and notions about which spheres ought to be in- or outside state control diverge. Moreover, as is shown in this dissertation and by Feng (2016), spatial planners take part in the formulation and specification of spatial policy, even though they are often not directly employed by the state. Spatial planners themselves formulate the standards for construction and the regulation on which decisions about infrastructures or construction permits are based. It is, therefore, not surprising that the state takes a strong influence on spatial planning. As I demonstrate in the following section, the field of spatial planning is well integrated. It has a developed institutional and organizational set-up and control of entry to this field, and its activities are accompanied by lively academic discourse. I, therefore, maintain that the term 'profession' is, to a certain extent, applicable to spatial planning in China.

7.2.2   The professional field

When talking about the recent history of spatial planning in China, Teacher Wei said:

我们的规划一直在努力的争取社会地位。[...] 以前我们有一句话叫做规划的这个地位啊，就是叫做纸上画画，你听说过没有？纸上画画，墙上挂挂，不如领导一句话哈，最早以前的时候。[...] 那个时候规划的那种地位是比较低的，就是叫做纸上画了，然后就挂在墙上，大家讨论嘛。最后领导说怎么干就干，完全不按规划来执行。(interview Teacher Wei)

Our spatial planning, it is always struggling hard for social status. [...] In the past, we had a sentence to characterize the status of spatial planning, it was 'Paint a painting on paper,' did you hear of it? 'Paint a painting on paper, put it on the wall, that is nothing against a sentence from the leader,' ha. That were the very early times. [...] At that time, that status of planning was relatively low, it was just called: Paining on paper, then you put it on the wall, and everyone discusses. Last, the leader says how to do it, and that's how it is done; the implementation does not follow the plan at all. [own translation]

Teacher Wei then countered this with the statement that today, there is planning regulation and oversight by the ministries for land administration, for spatial planning, and for construction. Additionally, legitimation is derived from academic discourse. Therefore, he concludes that spatial planners now have authority, but the profession is still struggling for status. Thus, Teacher Wei sees an institutional framework that bolsters the legitimacy and status of spatial planning. Feng (2016) tells the history of spatial planning similarly: It transformed from technical drawings according to the relevant political leader's ideas towards

independent policy consultation or even policy-making initiation. My interlocutors also talked a lot about how planning had changed and had risen in status; they would couch these stories more in structural terms

Despite the objections by Feng (2016) and Xie Tian (2010), I continue to use the term 'profession' for spatial planning because the organizational field of spatial planning is firmly established and formalized.[102] Spatial planning in China is both a discipline at university, an occupation also to be chosen by persons from other academic backgrounds, and a branch of public administration structured by a specialized body of legislation. While until the 2000s, spatial planning was exclusively done by state employees, it is now based on a market with a diverse array of organizations (chapter 7.3). Now, the field of spatial planning consists of three sectors: state administration, practical planning, and research and knowledge dissemination at university.

However, even today, planning companies cannot entirely freely enter the market. There is a government-run licensing system for planning companies and individual planners (interviews Teacher Yuan, Sun Beihai). Thus, entry to and status within the field of plan-making is regulated by a formalized licensing system based on the professional experience, as the various definitions of the term 'profession' stipulate. However, this licensing system is not controlled by organs of the profession itself but by the state planning administration. The most plan-making bodies, the planning institutes, also are in state ownership (chapter 5.5.4). In terms of professional practice, therefore, independence from political command has increased through the marketization of spatial planning. However, there is indeed little autonomy from the state in terms of regulation of the professional field.

Planning knowledge is disseminated and, to a considerable part, produced at planning institutes at universities. A reform in 2011 gave spatial planning the status of a discipline; until then, spatial planning had been categorized as a subdiscipline of architecture (Huang 2012: 94f). Reform of the organizational set-up is still ongoing: when I was at Southwest Jiaotong University in 2016, the planning department was still subordinate to architecture. Many academic planning departments share large parts of their curricula with architecture. Only in their year are undergraduate students taught contents that genuinely belong to the planning profession (interview Han Ruishan, Huang 2012: 71-97). However, in some departments, the spatial planning curriculum has been developed close to human geography, thus focusing more on social and economic aspects and putting less emphasis on design. Besides, landscape planning has also grown out of architecture and is closely connected to spatial planning. At New Town Company, people from all three backgrounds were employed and worked together.

New Town Company also sent a group of employees to the annual planning conference, which in 2016 took place in Shenyang (Liaoning province). Apart from this conference, the discipline of spatial planning has its journals, most notably 城市规划 (China City Planning

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[102] This aspect, to my best knowledge, is not captured by any term other than 'profession.'

Review); there is a lively output of research and textbooks for teaching as well as for practitioners.[103] The most prominent publishing house is the China Architecture & Building Press (中国建筑工业出版社).

Spatial planning in China presents itself as a well-institutionalized field separated into three sectors: planning practice, academia, and state planning administration. However, there are substantial personal and organizational interconnections between these three sectors. For example, at New Town Company, some of the owners were simultaneously teaching at university; university planning departments also have good connections to the local planning institutes; and former employees of planning institutes founded New Town Company. New recruits of New Town Company also at times came from one of the planning institutes in Chengdu. Similar connections exist with planning administration: Planning institutes are owned by planning administration, and they provide operational support. Planning institutes do research and formulate policy recommendations or dispatch staff for support if the planning administration's personnel is short (interview Mr Zhao, chapter 5.5.4, Ang 2010). Employees of the planning institutes may transfer into leading positions at the planning ministry or bureau. Having worked at planning institutes, owners of New Town Company now also have strong contacts with the planning administration.

To summarize: I agree with Feng and Xie Tian that spatial planning in China does not entirely fit the definitions of the term 'profession' derived from Western liberal democratic contexts. However, today, the organization of the field of spatial planning is sufficiently formalized and institutionalized; there is a very active academic discussion in the field of spatial planning. For these reasons and for lack of a better term, I will continue to use the term 'profession' for spatial planning in China.

7.3   The economics of spatial planning

One morning in September, in an elegant office in downtown Chengdu, Teacher Yuan and another planner of the company took me with them to a meeting with representatives of a hotel business in Southwest China and with some planners from a notable planning company from another province. They met to discuss the last changes for their joint bid to a tourism development plan for a municipality in another Chinese province (FN #58). This scene offers many insights into how business relationships and sales are framed in spatial planning.

The project was massive since there would be follow-up plans to be made after the tourism development plans. If they obtained the assignment and the government was happy with their work, the three companies would certainly be commissioned with the follow-up plans, too. This project, therefore, promised several times the profit than a typical general plan

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[103] The central textbook for teaching planning is Wu / Li 2016(4): 城市规划原理 (Principles of urban planning). For an analysis of canon and emerging topics in small town planning textbooks, cf. Melcher 2016.

could bring. The collaboration also offered New Town Company the chance to add a planning project far above their current status to their portfolio. Today, the staff of New Town Company had prepared the documents.

The tender would follow a two-stage procedure: first, the companies would hand in a document to get invited to a presentation; there, they would have the chance to present their ideas to a commission of the local government.[104] The call for bids emphasized development policy over spatial planning: development of local industry (引导产业发展), poverty reduction (扶贫), and infrastructure. All policies were tailored to fit the requirements of the tourism industry.

The planners and businesspeople present agreed that the concept in itself was already developed enough, that, actually, the technical aspects were a bit too detailed. Thus, the discussion focused on strategies for presentation and sales pitch. It was emphasized that the presentation should not be too long (no more than thirty slides), that the core arguments should be very clearly explained for the Party secretary. The presentation also should not go too much into technical detail, which the Party secretary would not understand.

In the discussion, the idea was raised to connect the whole concept to one of the leading national political slogans. The reason was that the local Party secretary was not a local; therefore, he certainly had career ambitions and saw the municipality only as a stepping-stone. This person would surely want to have a plan that could be presented to higher levels of government. This would be best achieved if the argumentation departed from broader political strategy, illustrated how this strategy would be implemented in the concrete case, and above all, demonstrated that this government was following the political line and contributing to the envisaged development. The senior planner from the other company made the point that the Party secretary would be interested in making the municipality a symbol of some national policy or other (在全国什么什么表达). Then he listed various current national policies and settled on the point that everything that was asked for in the call for bids fit perfectly with the national concepts for strengthening consumption. In order to speak to the Party secretary's career aspirations, the presentation should moreover include a couple of slogans that include the term 'national' (全国).

The same planner encouraged the team not to follow local policy documents or the call for bids to the letter. He argued that governments usually allowed space for technical expertise and that it was essential to give the local leader a programmatic choice: 'They [politicians; LM] are not made of iron, they want to have a good plan, independently of personal relationships' (FN #58).

Teacher Yuan, however, came forward with the idea that it might be advisable to take an additional partner on board who was personally acquainted with the local government to secure the contract. This idea, however, was rejected. As another counter-position to the

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[104] Even though first, the written application had to be handed in, the discussion focused on the Powerpoint presentation for the commission and the arguments and storyline that this presentation should take.

senior planner's strategic line, the question was raised what would happen if the Party secretary would not be present at the hearing, and instead, it would be presided by planning experts. They were likely to base their choice on their preferred technical concepts; technical detail would be needed to convince them.

Spatial planning is a business. In this vignette, we see the devising of a strategy to win a new customer, one that would be relatively certain to bring future assignments. My interlocutors often explained how spatial planning works in terms of the market: The history of the profession was told as a history privatization or marketization of activities and tasks that until the late 1980s had been under the state's control. In the context of Reform and Opening, the marketization of spatial planning was just one of many areas of privatization of economic activities and, therefore, not remarkable at all. Indeed, some of my interlocutors complained that the marketization (市场化) or opening (开放) of the planning profession was incomplete (interviews Huang Tianming and Ming Lili, Chu Weide, Teacher Yuan). The framing in market terms extends to the characterization of the current situation: Currently, I was told repeatedly, there was a surplus supply of young planners; the market was extending to rural areas because there was not enough demand in the big cities anymore (e.g., FN #45, interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili).

The role of planners (or architects) as actors in a market is not addressed at all by Feng (2016). Xie Tian (2010: 79f) mentions that achitects' economic independence from government bolsters their intellectual liberty. However, both their accounts are substantially supported by the narratives of the marketization of spatial planning.

The narrative of the marketization of spatial planning typically is told as follows (interviews Huang Tianming and Ming Lili, Sun Beihai, Teacher Yuan, Teacher Wei, FN #45): In the course of Reform and Opening, urban growth increased manifold. This meant that much more services in the area of spatial planning and architecture were needed. Before, these tasks had been covered by planning institutes belonging to public administrations (事业单位, chapter 5.5.4), but now, they could not cover the demand anymore. In this time, private architecture and construction firms appeared on the market; and with time, they started to apply for spatial planning licenses (资质). The legal basis for the contracting-out of spatial planning from planning administration has been established in the years 1989-92 (Huang 2012: 58-60); the current planning law postulates that plan-making should be contracted out to companies or institutes (单位) which hold the respective license. However, it is only since around the year 2010 that private companies are permitted to hold the highest certificate for spatial planning (城市规划甲级资质, interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili), and it is New Town Company' ambition to obtain this license.

New Town Company was founded in the early 2000s, at a time, when private companies could increasingly participate in public statutory planning projects. Most of the company's owners worked at one of the planning institutes before; some came from university. Teacher Yuan, one of the owners, explained the decision to join the company thus: At the planning

institute, she had had to work according to political command; now, thanks to market principles, she was free to accept or refuse assignments according to her workload and her interest in the respective projects (interview Teacher Yuan).

The planning market thrives best in places and at times of rapid economic development (interview Teacher Yuan; FN #86). Now that the big cities are consolidated, as they grow more slowly and as the changes in the urban landscapes are not as drastic anymore, there is less need for spatial planning here. Therefore, planning organizations are now pushing to smaller cities, towns, and the countryside, since there, the rapid spatial transformation and construction is still ongoing (FN #46).

In 2016, different kinds of planning institutes and companies were present in Chengdu. The planning institutes at various administrative levels had been marketized to different degrees. One of them now had a business section and one section that still served the respective planning administration; another one had been converted into a limited liability company altogether, while the third was still mostly working for administration (chapter 5.5.4). There also were private companies of varying qualifications. However, only few of them competed directly with the better established and higher-ranking planning institutes (FN #87).

The price of a planning project depends on the quality of expertise and independent professional input. Because they are relatively expensive, public planning institutes are sought out by local governments only if they aspire to an ambitious plan and seek substantial expertise for their local development (FN#45). Much less expensive are planning companies that draw up plans following the projects envisaged by local leadership. This is described by Feng (2016) as *handmaidens of power*: The plans are devised in such a way that they justify those construction projects and with little respect to planning expertise or even to regulation (interview Han Ruishan, FN #74).

As one of the better planning companies in the region, New Town Company distances itself from such procedures: Luo Zhicheng was criticized sharply for accepting an assignment that only aimed to justify a tourism investment at a lake in Apple village (FN #32., chapter 5.6.2). In many of the internal review sessions at the company, one crucial criterium to assess a plan was whether or not took responsibility vis-à-vis local government (对政府负责任) (FN #47, interviews Han Ruishan; Huang Tianming and Ming Lili, Teacher Yuan). Taking responsibility meant to take a stand in the discussions with local government and to tell them if their projects or ideas would violate binding regulations or if a project did not make much sense from a professional point of view. This is the role that Feng (2016) describes as *initiative knower*: planners take the initiative to provide professional advice.

In order to strengthen New Town Company's professional and competitive position, there was a rigorous mechanism of quality control at the company: Each plan was assigned to one of the offices in the company; one of the owners would personally oversee and guide work on this project. There were weekly evaluation meetings by a team of the company

owners, which each plan had to go through at least once before it went into the government's assessment process. These meetings were also open for project teams if they felt stuck; anyone was invited to listen in on these meetings if they were interested in the respective project. When interesting projects were discussed, ten persons or more would join to listen.[105] In these sessions, planning documents would be presented in the same way they were presented in government assessment meetings. The senior planners would then give their opinions and suggestions on the plans before the person presiding over the meeting would wrap up the session with the final, binding changes that had to be made to the plans. These sessions usually took around 45 minutes for each plan, sometimes much longer.

The discussions usually took both professional and technical aspects into account as well as cooperation and communication with local government: What did the government really want? Was the cooperation so promising that the company should invest a bit more effort? Or had the company already put too much work into a poorly paid project, and it was now time to wrap up? At the same time, these sessions often took the form of professional discussions about technical problems in the plan or tricky aspects that needed to be solved. Sometimes, fundamental questions about the possible contribution to a locality's development were raised. Thus, while being the site of quality control and of regulating the time and effort invested in each project, these meetings were also important forums for professional exchange.

New Town Company hired people from diverse disciplines: Gong Zhetai and Jiang Wenxue had a background in economic geography, my desk neighbor came from landscape architecture, and someone with a background in rural development also joined the company. Also, there were monthly trainings for employees and active participation in research projects. In these ways, New Town Company strategically invested in its professional position and in its depth and scope of expertise. The objective was to achieve the highest-ranking planning certificate (FN #38, #61, #80).

There are different ways planning assignments can be procured on the market (FN #38, interview Huang Tianming and Ming Lili): First, the local government approaches a company or an institute directly with a commission. This can be based either on an already existing partnership or on the prestige of a company or institute. In the case of Wanderlust township, there was a longstanding cooperation between New Town Company and Reverence county, and there were continually planning teams working on projects in the county. Wanderlust township thus gave the assignment to New Town Company on the recommendation of the county planning bureau. In turn, the company was willing to invest much more time and energy into the plan than was agreed in the contract: The plan had to be reworked entirely after a municipal infrastructure project was devised for the area of the township (interview Chu Weide). Both in the cases of Wanderlust township and the tourism planning

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[105] These meetings were a prime source of data about normative assessments in the planning profession for me.

project described above, the planners expected with high certainty that from the initial assignment, follow-up contracts would arise for more concrete plans. In the case of Wanderlust, such follow-up assignments included plans for the relocation settlements and the new districts of the central towns.

Public tenders, as described at the beginning of this section, constitute a second way for planners and their clients to find each other. New Town Company actively took part in such tenders to gain additional stable partnerships such as the one with Reverence county. In such tenders, the government has two different modes of deciding for a planning institute or company: either according to the best price or through a competition between initial concepts.[106] At New Town Company, these different modes of procuring contracts were differentiated into an active and a passive approach, i.e., the acquisition of projects with new partners and the building upon existing relationships. There was criticism at a staff meeting that most teams overly relied on the passive mode of procurement (FN #38).

In 2016, the situation on the planning market in Southwest China was cooling down, especially smaller companies were struggling (interview Sun Beihai, FN #45, #58). Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors preferred working on the free market to the public institutes (interview Teacher Yuan, FN #87): In a planning institute, they had to follow orders (命令), whereas in a private company, the basis for planning were contracts between equals. At the planning institute, they had to do more projects where they could not voice their views and their workload was much higher. Therefore, my interlocutors appreciated marketization as central to the recent history of spatial planning and as conferring more authority and autonomy to the profession. Marketization was thought of as an indispensable driver of the transition from technical support for governments towards more initiative and independent consulting.

7.4   Success in the planning profession

A typical reason to study spatial planning at university is an interest in fine arts (美术). Suppose someone with this interest or passion wants to find a more tangible profession with a more secure outlook. In that case, they might choose architecture since design, aesthetics, and pen-and-paper work figure prominently in this profession. However, the requirements to be accepted to a school of architecture are relatively high; therefore, applicants also choose a closely related discipline with less challenging requirements. This may be spatial planning.[107]

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[106] Not quite based on market mechanisms are those assignments to public planning institutes which are based on directives from government, as was the case in Mountain City (chapter 5.6).

[107] The need for such strategizing lies with the system of university entry examinations in China (高考), where students are assigned to universities on the basis of their score in the exam and of the discipline they choose when they take the test. This involves for midfield students a calculation of whether they prefer a discipline with high entry requirements or want to enter a university with high reputation.

Two persons who chose the profession out of precisely this rationale are Ming Lili and Han Ruishan. When I met her for the first time, Ming Lili had just attained her master's degree in spatial planning and had taken a job at one of the planning institutes, in the office where she already had interned during her studies. After a bit more than half a year on the job, she complained to me that – although having looked forward to starting to work – she already was disenchanted. Her experience was that planning was less fun once one had to carry responsibility; Ming Lili felt like she was doing the same thing every day. This did not come from the kinds of plans she made, so far, she never had done one kind of plan twice and she got to see a wide variety of places. She said that the steps and content of the work stayed the same, no matter what type of plan and where it was. Another reason for her frustration was the high pressure: In the first two years or so in spatial planning, people had to do much overtime and were still learning a lot. Therefore, at that point, she also did not want to see herself in any higher position than she currently was because then, the demands and responsibilities would be even higher. At this point, Ming Lili was part seriously considering changing her job or even marrying, just to escape this mix of boredom and pressure (FN #75, #84).

Han Ruishan, the leader of the Wanderlust planning team at New Town Company, told me that what she had learned at university only covered one part of what was expected from her on the job and that she had learned what planning really is about only after she started to work (interview Han Ruishan). She was around 30 years old and had already been working for more than five years. Much of her university training had been together with the students of architecture; only in the third year, students in spatial planning started to learn about planning theory in separate classes.

In working with her, it was evident to me how much this joint training with architects had shaped her style of working: She preferred to sketch plans out by hand. Even though plans and maps would be compiled digitally for presentation, she would sit down with a pack of different pens, a large sheet of paper, a printed map of the planning area, and start drawing spatial layouts (布局). She told me that this was her preferred way of thinking through spatial plans (FN #40). Even though spatial planning had not been her first choice as a discipline, she discovered an interest in it. Now, for her, while architecture with its focus on design, physics, and mathematics seemed relatively straightforward (单纯), planning was still complex (综合), since it also required knowledge about society, policy, economics, history, and more (interview Han Ruishan). Due to these challenges, and because there were so much change and variety in spatial planning, she planned to stay in this profession (interview Han Ruishan).

Ming Lili had been the top student in her master's degree. However, now that she started working in the job she had trained for, she suffered from a combination of boredom and pressure. Han Ruishan, who already has worked for a few years in the profession, has come to enjoy its complexity. I have encountered both views multiple times in the field, and the

contrast captures the tension which younger planners encounter very well: They chose the discipline because of a presumable relatedness to fine arts; then studied technical drawing and planning theory, architecture, and zoning at university; on the job, they are confronted with a set of tasks in which – as Han Ruishan describes it – communication with politicians, an understanding of administrative structures and a variety of socio-economic analytical skills are expected.

Feng (2016: 58f) states that the roles and role expectations which planners incorporate vary according to their knowledge and experience. Thus, how spatial planning is practiced depends on both the professional status and specialization of a person. Therefore, this section investigates the different career trajectories and measures of success in spatial planning. I do so first by sketching out the different positions at the company and within the Wanderlust planning team. Following this, I look at the different requisites for a career in planning 15 years ago and today, and at the bodies of knowledge and skills planners have to obtain after their formal education is finished. These two accounts offer some explanations for the sentiments stated by Ming Lili and Han Ruishan at the beginning of this chapter.

7.4.1   Division of work in a planning team

New Town Company, below the leadership level, had three planning offices (which shared one large office space), each headed by a planner in their thirties. In principle, the three offices were supposed to specialize in different areas of planning: research and general plans, construction and detailed plans, and transport (interview Sun Beihai). In practice, however, this did not materialize. For example, the Wanderlust planning team belonged to the office for construction and detailed planning and not to general planning.

In the current Wanderlust planning team, Han Ruishan was the project leader or 'responsible person' (项目负责人): If the project did not go well or if there were any problems with the plan, the company would hold her responsible. Thus, the project leader was also in charge of general oversight and making the final decisions. In New Town Company, project leadership is a rotating position between employees with a working experience of at least five years. Persons who currently lead a project may later work under the leadership of someone who is now a team member (FN #38).

However, there was tension surrounding the leadership of the Wanderlust project. Han Ruishan, as the project leader, had organizational responsibility and was in the position to take the overall decisions. However, Chu Weide also took a prominent position, which he jokingly called 'leading creator' (主创, interview Chu Weide). He felt confident about his ideas and concepts; because of his long connection with the Wanderlust government, he would often take care of communication and organization. Sometimes, the Wanderlust government would actually prefer to talk to Chu Weide instead of Han Ruishan, who would have been their regular contact person (interview Chu Weide; FN #85).

One reason for this tension was that the planning process had to be restarted from scratch after changes in the overarching policy; in the course of this, the project team changed completely. Chu Weide was now the only person in the project who had been part of the previous team. Thus, he had more experience with the locality, knew the counterparts in government better, and to my perception, also identified with the project more than Han Ruishan did. Out of this constellation, conflicts of authority arose between Han Ruishan and Chu Weide. [108]

Other team members brought technical specialization to the project: While Gao Yuanchao, like Chu Weide and Han Ruishan, was a spatial planner and core member of the team, colleagues with specializations in infrastructure (市政) and landscape planning participated occasionally.

A project team was always overseen by an office leader and one of the company owners. In the case of the Wanderlust project, the office leader was Fan Jianhong; Teacher Wei took the position of the responsible boss (主管老总). He was present in the project team much more than was usual because he took a particular interest in the township and the project. Moreover, all the team members were still relatively young and inexperienced and therefore needed additional guidance (interview Chu Weide).

The hierarchy also followed the age structure of the persons involved: While Teacher Wei was in his early 40s, Fan Jianhong, the leader of the office, was in his mid-thirties, and Han Ruishan around thirty. In his mid-20s, Chu Weide had already been at the company for a few years and before had worked at an engineering company. The others had left university only two or three years ago.

Those youngest planners did the heavy lifting in putting together the planning material: Gao Yuanchao compiled the maps for the general plan and the regional plan, he designed elements for the streetscapes of Wanderlust town; he and Yan Weining compiled the technical plans for infrastructure. In contrast, Han Ruishan and Chu Weide focused on regional analysis, development concepts, and the town's spatial layout. In general, at the company, it was observable that the further employees rose in the hierarchy, the more removed was their daily work from the core contents of planning education, which were technical and design-related. This division of work may explain in part Ming Lili's frustrations: Layouting spatial plans does not leave much space for creativity and conceptual thinking; it is mostly routine work at the desktop. As she put it, the steps and content of the work stay the same, no matter what sort of plan and in which locality.

Xie Tian's (2010) three roles in architecture find reflection in the division of work both within the Wanderlust project team and among my interlocutors in general: There are those with a mostly technical outlook which matches the official framing of the profession (professionals); those who are mostly interested in the atmosphere and appearance of a space

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[108] Gender played a role in this conflict: In the interview, Chu Weide told me that after all, local government felt more comfortable talking to him because they were all male; among both the planning team and their counterparts at the township government, Han Ruishan (apart from myself) was the only woman.

(artists); and those who through their approach to planning engage broader societal trends (intellectuals). Some planners focused on the technical aspects of spatial planning. In the Wanderlust planning team, this was Gao Yuanchao. Those who had chosen spatial planning as their discipline at university because of its proximity to architecture often liked to work on local atmospheres, liveability, and design. Both Han Ruishan and Teacher Wei mostly subscribed to this understanding of spatial planning. A third group of spatial planners closely followed the current discourse on policy and planning approaches, engaged in research, and experimented with the implementation of trending topics and approaches. They also took a strong interest in spatial planning's overlaps with other social sciences and tried to extend planning knowledge and spatial planning's relevance for society. For example, Chu Weide from the Wanderlust planning team was highly interested in the economic sides to local development and in public participation.

However, the separation between the three perspectives is not as fixed as in Xie Tian's (2010) account. For example, even though Teacher Wei's strongest interest and greatest capabilities were in design and architecture, he strove to address economic and social aspects into the planning considerations. And even though Han Ruishan took most pleasure in working with pen and paper on visual designs, she experimented with writing a concept on the foci of natural resource development in Wanderlust. Thus, despite their specializations, everyone made an effort to stay up to date with the other areas of work. In discussions on spatial plans, there was an understanding that all three sides of spatial planning were needed: sound technical work, attention to the appearance of public space, and social and economic contributions to local development.

7.4.2   How to make a career in planning

Huang (2012: 102) describes 'a widening gap between what planners are taught to do in school and what they are legitimate to do.' Whereas the older generations of planners already have built careers upon zoning plans and spatial designs, the younger generation must succeed based on analytical skills and socioeconomic knowledge that were not content with the curricula they studied at university. Ming Lili and senior planners (interviews Teacher Yuan, Teacher Wei) confirmed this by telling me that planners had to be trained on the job for at least two years after graduating from university. After five years at the company, it was possible to rise to the status of a mid-level employee; only then could one take responsibility for a project (FN #85).

The youngest generation of spatial planners is also under the heaviest pressure: The number of students graduating from education in spatial planning has expanded considerably, so there is much competition. They do not make the decisions but still are paid according

to the number of projects they participate in and according to the project's success and quality.[109] The youngest planners at New Town Company work the longest hours and do the technical work. Therefore, on a trip to Wanderlust township, Gao Yuanchao and Yan Weining were contemplating switching into engineering or going back to university to do a master's degree (FN #85). The latter course would provide them with a specialization and thus greatly enhance their career opportunities. However, the number of master students was strictly limited, so they were doubtful about whether they would have this chance.

Chu Weide took this course: Towards the end of my fieldwork, he started to study again as a master student of Teacher Wei. Chu Weide was hoping to learn more about local development, local economy, and how to strengthen the material effects of spatial planning. In his first semester, he had started reading up on economic geography and regional development. As his role model for choosing this course, Chu Weide cited the example of Gong Zhetai, an office leader at the company. Gong Zhetai had studied economic geography, and as Chu Weide put it, his design capacities were not particularly strong (FN #52). Nevertheless, he was regarded as the company's high achiever because his regional analyses and research contributions were very successful and because he did a good job at management and communication (interviews Chu Weide, Sun Beihai).

Gong Zhetai was indeed an impressive figure: Still in his twenties, he was the leader of the company office specializing in research and general planning. The team here was very interdisciplinary: Gong Zhetai and Jiang Wenxue had studied economic geography; new recruits came from landscape design and from agriculture and rural development. Gong Zhetai participated in national research projects and regularly did research on trending topics in the planning profession. His team and his own work were cited as exemplary at staff meetings; internal discussions on their plans drew the largest audiences in the company assessment meetings.

When I asked Sun Beihai, one of the owners of New Town Company, how to make a career at the company, he told me that '专业知识，只是你在某些专业方面比较厉害。' ('Professional knowledge. You only need to be relatively strong in some professional aspects.' Interview Sun Beihai) So how come someone without a formal education in spatial planning has outstanding success in exactly this profession? Gong Zhetai, of course, is talented and as a student of one of China's top universities, he has certainly enjoyed a much better education than most of his colleagues. As Teacher Yuan explains in a rant against current approaches in planning education:

> 我们国内的这个教育还是有问题。他们老师觉得规划就是去画事，画房子，（B: 嗯，）不是这样的，画房子是一种结果。它是需要一个全面的分析和论证才生成得了那个房子的。大部分是定清的、加定量，这才是真正的研究分析。(Interview Teacher Yuan)

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[109] At New Town Company, there were both a formal hierarchy between different positions as well as a payment system that rewarded success and performance (FN #33, #38).

Education in our country has a problem. The teachers assume that planning is just drawing things, drawing houses. (LM: mhm) It is not like this; drawing houses is a kind of result. It needs a comprehensive analysis and argumentation; only then can these houses come into being. The most significant part has to be clarifications, adding fixed measures, then it is real research and analysis. (own translation)

Gong Zhetai has acquired this analytical capacity by studying economic geography; he also has an understanding of economic development and regional dynamics. These are capabilities which – as Han Ruishan and many others explained – those trained as spatial planners have to acquire and learn only after they have started working. Somebody's success and career at their job are not only determined by the discipline they studied, but also by many other factors. However, I think it is remarkable that the most successful person at the company has not studied in the profession – while so many planners told me that new recruits from planning departments at university have to be trained on the jobs for two years or so before they have the basic set of skills.

The three owners of the company with whom I was most closely acquainted, in contrast, had received classical planning education: Teacher Wei, Teacher Yuan, and Sun Beihai. All of them were in their late thirties or forties,[110] so they had entered the planning market at a radically different time (interviews Teacher Wei, Teacher Yuan): Around the year 2000, spatial planning education did not produce enough planners to manage the growth of cities. What was needed at this time was construction regulations for large areas of greenfield development. Thus, their entry into the profession had happened under less competitive pressure; moreover, at the time, the skills taught at university also fit the requirements for planning practice much better than is the case with the young planners today.

All three senior planners remain committed to the technical aspect of spatial planning: Teacher Yuan's most cherished project is the reconstruction of a town, Hillside township, in the Sichuan earthquake zone. She gave this town the characteristics of the local ethnic minority; today, it is a popular tourism destination. In contrast, Sun Beihai found his specialization in transport planning and engineering; he takes the greatest interest in planning a functional layout for streets, parking lots, or railway stations. Teacher Wei is undoubtedly the most prominent among the company owners and enjoys a particularly high level of respect among the staff. His strength and greatest interest are in making aesthetic construction plans, in giving places a liveable atmosphere. Thus, while Gong Zhetai takes an active interest in socioeconomics, Teacher Wei's focus is on aesthetics and design. Teacher Wei has won a high status in the profession and Gong Zhetai counts as a rising star. In contrast, Luo Zhicheng, who has a similar interest in aesthetics and design as Teacher Wei and is from the same generation as Gong Zhetai, does not seem to succeed in making a career.

The young generation of planners is under considerable pressure because there is fierce competition for the chance to rise to mid-level positions and because the education they receive does not fit to present requirements in the profession. Younger planners are assigned

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[110] And all three taught at university in parallel to their work in New Town Company.

the classical tasks of compiling maps and plans as well as doing some design; simultaneously, they have to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for the leadership of projects and for building a career. Among such capabilities are analytical skills, knowledge of social sciences and economics, and communication strategies for the discussions with politicians. These experiences probably explain part of Ming Lili's frustration and boredom; Han Ruishan, in contrast, had already successfully passed that phase and exhibited pride in the knowledge she acquired.[111]

The different circumstances under which different generations of planners entered the profession reflects, once again, the transformation in spatial planning that Feng (2016: 128-152) describes in terms of old and new rules of appropriateness: Planning used to be a technical discipline which drew up the plans that politicians imagined. Now spatial planners aim for contributions to local development, professional expertise, and their position imparted by the legal framework. From all these factors, planners also draw authority. However, as I have argued, these new roles are not reflected yet in education, and it is mostly the younger generation of planners who strive for the analytical capabilities needed.

7.5   Planning between technical profession and government

Spatial planners work as service providers for local government. Nevertheless, there are considerable frictions between local governments and planners at the township and village levels. Feng Yong, who now works as a rural planner (乡村规划师) in a county near Chengdu city but has worked at a planning company before, described it like this:

> 我选择这个工作，其实原因有两个，一个是从本身感觉这个专业的角度上发展，因为以前做这个规划，因为我是本身学城市规划的。嗯，我以前做这个项目的时候就发现就是，这地方上的这些政府为什么对你的规划改来改去改来改去的啊？感觉到最后改的来自己都惨不忍睹的感觉，觉得这个东西还能拿得出手吗？ [...]
> 所以我就说过来，就是了解一下，因为包括以后假如说再出来做设计到地方政府，我跟他沟通起来，他就——就感觉要好沟通一点。因为我问的问题，他认为是很实质的问题，他就认为你很明白这个，很懂这个事，他就愿意更多交流。比如说你问的噢，'你们什么什么什么的，' 他就很敷衍，现在很敷衍你。'人口是多少、经济发展水平是什么'。其实他不会把真正的核心的问题告诉你。(Interview Feng Yong)

> *Actually, I chose this job for two reasons. One is because I personally would like to develop [my] professional perspective. Because, I have done planning before, I studied urban planning. Um, when I worked in such projects before, what I discovered was, why do these local governments keep changing your plans? You feel like, in the end, they changed it in a way that you yourself feel like it is too horrible to look at; you wonder whether this thing is still presentable?. [...] This is to say, I decided to come here in order to understand better – just suppose I later go back to do design for local governments again and I have [these] discussions with them again, they*

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[111] Success, of course, is closely coupled with finding meaning in the job one does. And this is tricky in this profession, since – as I explained – many students choose spatial planning for its presumable relationship to fine arts. Ming Lili's disillusionment is understandable from also from this perspective.

just – I just want to communicate a bit better. Because if they feel that my questions are substan-
tial, if they feel you really understand this, you really understand it, then they will want to talk
to you more. [But] for example, if you [just] ask, 'your something, something, something,' then
they will just go through the motions with you, now they will do just enough to satisfy you. 'So
much is the population, these are the development goals.' They actually will not tell you the real
core problems. (own translation)[112]

Chengdu municipality has a pilot project for rural planners: People with professional experience in spatial planning are employed by municipal government and dispatched to township and village governments to assist with spatial development policy.[113] Rural planners consult local governments in their communications with spatial planners, explain local circumstances to planning teams, communicate with the responsible bureaus at the county or municipal level, and generally help implement spatial policy.

This pilot project addresses an issue that I regularly encountered during my fieldwork and which has already figured prominently in the data presented so far in this dissertation: The communication between professional planners and local governments, who are their clients, is often ridden by tensions and misunderstandings.

In the Wanderlust planning project, there was some mismatch between the local government's objectives in making the general plan and the planners' focus. In conversation with me, Deputy Mayor Wang said that for the local government, the central expectation of making this general plan was to make arrangements for the infrastructure project: Whole villages were to be resettled in this context and many standards had to be implemented. Spatial planning was the first step in building new settlements. Local government needed spatial planners' expertise to understand the regulations connected to the infrastructure project and to adapt these regulations to the local situation (interview Deputy Mayor Wang). However, the spatial planners expended most of their energy on the planning of the central town. The focus lay on the renewal of the old town, spatial arrangements for local industries, a park, some waterways next to the town center, and the street network in the new districts of the town. As far as I could see, they barely discussed the rural areas, the extended rural settlements, and the new rural infrastructure centers; for these regions of the plans, they usually straightforwardly applied the relevant zoning standards.[114]

Feng Yong cites this as one possible explanation for this mismatch and for the frustration he expressed at the beginning of this section: Spatial planners are so focused on their ideas for local development and so immersed in technical planning discourse that they lose sight of the needs of local government (interview Feng Yong). Han Ruishan's stance on such

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[112] The other reason for choosing the job as a rural planner, he explained, was that he preferred the more regular working hours.

[113] The data for the following account stems from a conversation with the rural planner responsible for Wanderlust township (FN #93), from the interview with Feng Yong, as well as from information material from the Chengdu planning exhibition and the rural planner brochure (Bureau of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality 2016).

[114] This, of course, was also due to the fact that for the individual settlements, separate construction plans were to be made. This, however, took place after my fieldwork had ended.

frustration is a bit fatalistic. It can be summed up as follows: We make plans, but we do not have any control over whether or not they will be implemented – so I simply do not worry about this (interview Han Ruishan). Gong Zhetai, in contrast, is more pessimistic and angered about this. In his opinion, planning too often only does the governments' bidding – even though the younger generations have their own opinions (FN #95).

In the following, I depict two phenomena which contribute explanations to this widespread frustration: First, planners differentiate very clearly between the technical work at planning institutes and planning companies (技术) and the administration of spatial planning (管理, lit. management), with the latter being somewhat looked down upon or not even properly acknowledged. Second, spatial planning in rural areas is new for both local governments at the township and village level as well as for the profession of spatial planning; there are communicative problems between the two parties. Therefore, one of the tasks of rural planners is to support this communication between planners and governments. This is why I will present the rural planners project in Chengdu municipality in some detail. I thereby provide a detailed empirical account of the mismatch which Feng Yong describes at the beginning of this section.

7.5.1 Technical work vs. management work

My interlocutors differentiated very clearly between the technical side of planning work (技术) and planning administration (管理). This differentiation stands in contrast to the definition of spatial planning I had formulated before my fieldwork: I had defined spatial planning as political, administrative, and technical. Based on this definition, I looked for empirical data both in the profession of spatial planning and administration.[115] Even though politics, administration, and technical planning are three possible careers for persons who studied spatial planning, my interlocutors conceptualized the profession of spatial planning as predominantly technical and clearly differentiated from planning administration and even more clearly from political careers. At the same time, planners do work in administration or consider it as a possible alternative career.

In my conversation with Mr Zhao, who leads an office at one of the planning bureaus in Chengdu, I asked him how he had gotten this job (interview Mr Zhao). His answer was evasive and distanced: '工作需要嘛 (laughs, insecure) 工作需要嘛，然后就调动到这边来工作，从事规划管理' (Oh, requirements at work, requirements at work, so I [was] transferred here to work, to do planning management,' interview Mr Zhao). Asked whether, at the time, he had wanted this job, he answered even more evasively that he had half-wanted it: '叫一半是，一半不是，这个不好说' ('This cannot be easily put into words, maybe half yes, half no,' interview Mr Zhao).

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[115] This dissertation also makes the point that the three aspects come together in a coherent empirical field. This is one of the decisive differences of my empirical approach vis-à-vis Feng Xin (2016).

This shift from a planning institute to planning administration meant a shift in the contents of work from 技术 (technics) to 管理 (management). I encountered this differentiation frequently: 技术 (technics) stands for making spatial plans, consulting of local governments, and working with technical standards, whereas 管理 (management) denotes the work in planning administration; these are seen as career paths with very different tasks and requirements (also Melcher 2017).

Administration, i.e., a ministry or bureau, is the counterpart for planning companies and planning institutes for making contracts, process management, collecting data, discussing plans, convening meetings, etc.. Work in the administration also includes the formulation of technical standards, the assessment of spatial plans, and the review of construction plans on whether or not they comply with relevant regulation. Finally, the planning administration is responsible for issuing or refusing certificates for construction projects after assessing whether their blueprints comply with local planning. The work in a planning ministry or bureau, at least at higher levels of the administrative hierarchy, is often done by planners. In Mr Zhao's office, most employees had studied planning, even though he emphasizes that the necessary capabilities are not necessarily in the technical realm (interview Mr Zhao). There are two different routes to a position in planning administration: the regular recruitment process of state administration and a transfer – like Mr Zhao – from a planning institute.

Teacher Yuan, for example, would have had the option to go to administration instead of participating in the funding of New Town Company. However, she, and others among my interlocutors, were very clear that they would not want to work in management (interviews Feng Yong, Teacher Yuan). Teacher Yuan cited the reasons for this most clearly: The work in administration is rather monotonous, the contents of the work are mostly communication (to which she prefers the technical side of planning), and it is complicated to make a career there. Thus, Teacher Yuan instead wants to be a technical expert; this is easier and more interesting. Besides, like in a government position, there is the opportunity to make a significant contribution to society, so there is meaning in being a planning expert and you receive people's respect (interview Teacher Yuan).[116] Feng Yong also argues that in his current position as an employed expert, he is more independent than in an administrative position.

In textbooks for students and planning practitioners (e.g., Wu/ Li 2010; Li 2014; Tang, et al. 2012; Gao/ Xing/ Wang 2004) as well as in my reading of the professional planning discourse in journals and articles, I found that the tasks and methods of planning management are discussed little. Moreover, a rural planner told me that he learned about how implementation works and what likely problems occur only by working for government (FN #93). Thus, there is very little systematic knowledge about how the administrative side of spatial

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[116] Teacher Yuan also mentioned that for her as a woman it would be especially difficult to have a career in public administration.

planning works among planners – this might contribute to the distanced attitude towards administrative positions.

7.5.2   Rural planners filling a communicative gap

Around the year 2010, Chengdu municipality established a project to dispatch professional planners to rural governments to consult and support the development of rural areas. At this time, spatial planning for rural areas was a very new phenomenon: Since 2003, under the heading of 城乡一体化 (Integration of urban and rural areas), spatial planning started to be undertaken in rural contexts in Sichuan as well; this experienced a big push in the context of the reconstruction after the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008 (Bureau of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality, 2016 or earlier). At the time of my fieldwork, spatial planning was still a relatively new phenomenon in villages and townships. However, since the implementation of the new planning law in 2008, it was also compulsory for these government levels to make general plans and construction plans before issuing construction permits. Many of my interlocutors commented that rural and township governments often did not have any prior experience with spatial planning; therefore, they needed a lot of explanation and guidance about the processes, the capacities, and the regulations of spatial planning (e.g., interviews Chu Weide, Han Ruishan).

Deputy Mayor Wang of Wanderlust township is an example to the contrary: He had worked at the planning bureau of Reverence county before he had been assigned to Wanderlust township as a Deputy Mayor. Both he and the planning team agreed that his understanding of spatial planning was substantial. Deputy Mayor Wang, Chu Weide, and Han Ruishan also stated unanimously that Deputy Mayor Wang's presence in the project was beneficial because he supported the communication process: He would explain the logics and techniques of spatial planning to the Party secretary, also the rationality of even doing spatial planning and the meaning of the regulations of higher-level planning administration (interviews Deputy Mayor Wang, Chu Weide, Han Ruishan). Han Ruishan (interview Han Ruishan) emphasized that Deputy Mayor Wang would help them to explain that, in some cases, they had to follow specific regulations and that there was no room for negotiation.

By 2010, the problems with existing approaches had been recognized. The brochure on the rural planners program, edited by the Chengdu municipal planning bureau, formulates them thus:

> 但目前，广大农村存在着规划基础薄弱，技术和管理力量欠缺的问题。为了夯实农村规划基础、充实力量、壮大队伍，成都在全国首创实施乡村规划师制度。 (Bureau of Planning and Management of Chengdu Municipality, 2016 or earlier: p. 2)

> *But presently, in the majority of villages, there exist the problems of a weak basis in [spatial] planning and deficiencies in both technical and management strength; [therefore], to create a solid foundation for rural planning, to replenish the capacities and to form a big contingent [of*

qualified personnel], Chengdu has established the country's first rural planners system. (own translation).[117]

In this project, the municipal planning bureau employed spatial planners with working experience in spatial planning and sent them to rural governments in order to assist them with making spatial policy, with the communications with planning companies, as well as in their interactions with higher-level planning administrations (interview Feng Yong, FN #93).

The brochure from the planning exhibition quoted above rhetorically asks, 'why would I want to be a rural planner.' The answer cites stimulating challenges – unknown territory in terms of the planning contents and methods, what sort of development to aim for –,the positive contribution one can make to development, and the high requirements to be accepted as a rural planner. Chengdu municipality is advertised as the perfect place to do this job because of its longstanding work on integrating city and countryside and its long rural tradition. The rural planner's tasks are described as advising local government and accompanying and representing the local government at hearings at the planning administration; the rural planner also assesses and writes reports about spatial plans made for the locality.

Mr Chen was the rural planner of Wanderlust and two neighboring townships (FN #93). His account and my conversation with his colleague Feng Yong (interview Feng Yong) shed light on the communication difficulties between planners and rural governments. Both rural planners describe the difficulties in communication between local governments and planning companies in the following terms: Both parties did not speak the same language. Governments often did not see the point of making a plan or would rather not accept the binding standards, while spatial planners did not know which questions to ask to make planning meaningful to the local leadership. Partly due to these experiences and because they got to know many facets of spatial planning and implementation that they had not had prior experience with, they also saw their positions as highly meaningful.[118]

When describing their work's contents, Mr Chen talked mostly about communications that he facilitated. He especially emphasized that local government needed a spatial plan as an argumentative basis vis-à-vis population, to explain and legitimize the adverse effects that the implementation of spatial planning might have on the local population. Additionally, Mr Chen talked about communication between population, government, and planners during a planning process and how he was able to help planners understand the intricacies and obstacles in planning implementation. He also represented the needs of local governments and population at the county or municipal planning bureaus since he was there regularly

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[117] This quotation stems from a brochure on the rural planner project set up by Chengdu municipality; the brochure was displayed on a computer terminal in the Chengdu planning exhibition.

[118] Both commuted to the regions they were assigned to. This may be seen as symptomatic for hierarchies and differences between city and rural areas: even rural planners choose to live in the city, even at the cost of a commuting distance of several hours; experts for development and local construction come from the central city, not from the locality.

and had good contacts. He also had the task of writing reports and assessments about each plan made for the locality.

This is echoed by Feng Yong, who especially emphasized translating government's requirements and objectives into planning terminology and pointing out important aspects of the local spatial constellation to planners. In contrast to Mr Chen, he emphasized consulting local government: He would explain planning standards and regulations as well as the meaning and the long-term ideas of spatial plans to local governments. In return, he would phrase local situations, policies, and objectives to the planners in planning terminology (interview Feng Yong).

Feng Yong also talked about how he had expected that being a rural planner meant acting as a technical expert for planning matters. Instead, he was increasingly assigned tasks which are only loosely connected to spatial planning (规划沾边): attracting investment in enterprises and capital, dealing with illegal construction or with violations of land administration regulation, and many tasks that require coordination with other bureaus. However, the government also asked for his advice from a planning perspective: 'How should we deal with these issues, which standards do we have to fulfill in that regard?' ('那个评判那些东西怎么处理，那些东西要达到什么标准,' interview Feng Yong).

The areas in which the rural planners said they experienced new facets of spatial planning are in management and implementation. Both had studied spatial planning and had worked in the technical area of the profession before. These descriptions of blank spots in their previous planning knowledge resonate with the differentiation between technics and management, which I described above. Persons who have been educated in spatial planning may take jobs in making plans or in the management and implementation of plans on the side of government and administration. However, especially at the administrative level of the township and village, few persons can translate between government and planners. In Wanderlust, Deputy Mayor Wang took on this task, sometimes also the rural planner. At higher administrative levels, staff is often recruited from the respective planning institutes, and they have then experience with both sides. Nevertheless, to my experience, only through the relatively recent rural planner program, this communicative challenge is explicitly addressed at the local level.[119]

7.6   Roles of planners

Xie Tian (2010) and Feng (2016) define the concept of role as the link between a person's identity or subjectivity and the setting in which they embody this identity. Such roles are shaped both by a person's understanding of their identity (as a spatial planner) and by their

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[119] However, Feng Yong also complained that the trainings which rural planners receive regularly were almost exclusively about technical aspects instead of covering the communicative tasks that rural planners really have to fulfill.

counterparts' expectations. In this regard, Feng (2016) lists as possible roles which planners may take vis-à-vis their government clients the *handmaiden of power*, the *initiative knower*, and the *active initiator*;[120] Xie Tian (2010) lists, as architects' roles in society, the *technical professional*, the *artist*, and the *intellectual.*

During my fieldwork, this question about planners' role was often framed as the question of which contribution spatial planning makes to the development of a locality. This was discussed at an internal assessment meeting at New Town Company, on the occasion of Gong Zhetai's planning methods for a few villages on the outskirts of Chengdu city (FN #7). Following the newest plans for expanding the city, these villages were now located just at the administrative and political border between urban and rural land and, thus, in the direct vicinity of urban areas. As determined by the plans of higher administrative levels, their future development is to remain rural and retain agricultural land for farming. Nevertheless, the settlements need spatial plans for land use and construction, even though, as Gong Zhetai said, the village governments saw planning merely as a legal requirement and did not expect any actual benefits for local development.

In the presentation, Gong Zhetai emphasized that each individual village's conditions had to be taken into account; he gave detailed analyses of the problems the villages faced in their development. A discussion of similar examples in Guangzhou and Zhejiang (two provinces of China known for their high levels of rural development and industrialization) took up a substantial part of the presentation, focusing on the categories and zoning principles that land use planning uses there. Based on these examples, Gong Zhetai proposed a systematic for land use planning which included diverse categories for mixing residential with various commercial land-use types. Another part of the plan was a list of concrete projects which the local government could directly implement.

The ensuing discussion mostly revolved around how to plan development for rural settlements. It resembled more an academic discussion than a critique of the plan: Which factors one could count and plan on, which aspects could not be predicted because there was not enough precedence; how should villages develop, should housing be provided, or would it be better to let people construct their own houses. The planner leading the meeting offered a long comment on the question of what a planner can or cannot do: In his view, this presentation provided an excellent analysis of all sorts of problems in the area, but a spatial plan was not, and could not be, able to solve these problems. Especially rural local governments would expect planning to solve all sorts of development problems. In reality, so he continued, planning was '97% control and maybe 2-3% guidance' (FN #7). Since spatial planning could not solve development problems, even though many governments expected it to do so, he

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[120] In her background chapter, Feng (2016: 125f) also derives organizational role expectations for planners from the set-up of the planning system and the state organization: planners should be 'law-defenders': They focus on implementing the legal framework, over the interests of local government, if in doubt; they should be 'scientific technicians': as holders of professional knowledge, they 'give scientific justifications" for spatial plans and help balancing different contents and problems; and they should be 'representatives of the poor': represent the views of the local population and of those who otherwise wouldn't be heard.

strongly recommended leaving the analysis of problems that the plan could not solve out of presentations.

In this, the senior planner took a rather strict stance on a question that I regularly encountered or asked: Can planning contribute to local development – and if so, in which ways? Most planners to whom I put this question believed that spatial planning could substantially contribute to local development. Such contributions might consist of providing the material setting for a particular course of development, i.e., the infrastructure and the design of a locality's appearance (interview Teacher Yuan) or of consulting governments so that they include long-term considerations (interview Feng Yong) or public interests such as protection of the environment (interview Han Ruishan) in their decision-making.

Conversely, planners' frustrations with their job often stemmed from a sense that the structures in which they worked or the political constellations hindered them from making substantive contributions. For example, Jiang Wenxue, a planner who had just recently changed from a planning institute to New Town Company, described how plans were often made under high time pressure. Often, there was no time and space to properly do the necessary research to offer a plan that addressed the local issues and could solve problems. In her account, this was connected to the frequent experience that within only a few years, a plan would be discarded and a new plan would be made. In her words: While the one plan had not yet been passed into law, the next plan was already being worked on. Even though she did not say so explicitly, she seemed to have the impression that the plans' contents, suggestions, and proposed projects were disregarded by governments (FN #87). Gong Zhetai made a similar point: Planning too often would do governments' bidding. While the previous generation of spatial planners had been happy to do so, he and his generation held opinions different from those of government. In his words, planners of his generation strove for progress and, therefore, did not want only to draw plans for governments' ideas (FN#95).

This contrast between contents and potential of a plan and the assessment of spatial planning's actual contributions – or the lack of contributions –leads to the question of what planners want and can achieve. Here, planners face the tension between providing legally required technical support to preconceived projects and developing their own project ideas based on their socio-economic analyses.[121]

In the following, I demonstrate that each of the roles which Feng (2016) and Xie Tian (2010) describe is reflected in planners' work or – at least – in their aspirations.

7.6.1   Handmaiden of power

If planners are confined to merely drawing up the spatial layouts for governments' projects, they act in the role of *handmaiden of power* (Feng 2016: 192-199). The above-cited senior planner's statement that planning had primarily a controlling function, less a guiding

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[121] This tension is further complicated by the business-side to planning described above.

one, is another interpretation of this role: Spatial planning draws up the spatial layouts of the projects envisaged by government. In doing so, however, the planners must make sure that higher-level administrations' guidelines and regulations are observed – in this sense, planning has a controlling function vis-à-vis their client. However, once a plan has passed, it is binding for future construction and investment in the planned area. In this sense, even when spatial planners produce plans strictly according to governments' ideas, planning still provides quality control. These plans, moreover, will be binding for the same government's construction projects and permits.

Spatial plans are also frequently made to serve as argumentative support for local governments in their interactions with higher-level administrations. This has been the case in the general plan made for Wanderlust township. Among its many other purposes, this plan was to be utilized in local government's bargaining for larger land quotas in the upcoming land-use planning phase (interviews Deputy Mayor Wang, Chu Weide, Han Ruishan).

Another example comes from a discussion of location selection plans (选址规划, chapter 5.6.2) for regional infrastructures. Such plans formulate the needs and interests of those townships affected by regional infrastructure projects, for example, regional roads. Location selection plans are made by local governments affected by a project, in this example, a regional road. After a higher-level government has drawn up this project's plan, a different planning company is commissioned with checking for conflicts from the respective locality's perspective. These local plans would then be added to the regional project's plans, thus documenting that each locality had been considered.

In an internal assessment meeting for such plans at New Town Company (FN #21), the discussion focused on two townships in which the road clearly did not take the most straightforward way around the town. In one case, the route actually could not have been planned any longer; the planning team explained this with the fact that at the time, road construction received substantial subsidies. While from the planners' professional perspective, the planned route was not adequate, local governments had insisted on these routes. This left the planning team in a dilemma: Their job was to provide expert advice and formally confirm the plans' soundness. However, their professional opinion had been discarded. Senior planners suggested that the project team make it explicit that the planners would recommend other routes. This, however, was not possible since parts of the roads were already under construction. Therefore, the senior planners decided to use the fact that construction had already started as an argument for the planned route in the assessment meeting. In this discussion, planners had a very plain view of local governments' positions and did not necessarily endorse those. Nevertheless, the ensuing discussions pragmatically focused on finding arguments for those positions.

Any project which has spatial components has to be accompanied by a spatial plan; this is the principle of 'planning first' (规划先行, chapter 5.6.2). As Teacher Wei put it, spatial planning is the link between an expansive local government and its more restrictive central

counterpart. Planning is also important to local politicians as the (legal and conceptual) basis for all other projects, whether they like it or not. He also said that some politicians had learned to appreciate planning, but many simply put up with it. They had to do so because a) local government lacks the knowledge and expertise to draw up plans, and b) they need permission for this plan to proceed with anything else (interview Teacher Wei, FN #56). In this regard, plans for projects and plans as arguments for local government's interests fulfill essential functions for standardization, quality control, and consulting of local government.[122] Thus, even though I agree with Feng's (2016) identification of handmaiden of power as one of the roles of spatial planners and with her description of it, I think the term has too much of a negative ring. I would instead call it 'contribution to spatial policy-making.'

7.6.2   Initiative knower

The role of *initiative knower* (Feng 2016: 199-204) describes a positioning in which planners contribute their professional knowledge and overview to projects and development directions prescribed by government. Han Ruishan once formulated this position in a conversation about planners' position vis-à-vis local governments (FN #71). When I asked her about the objectives of planners, her immediate answer was '为他们服务' (provide service to them [government]). She then added that the planners would also contribute some of their own thoughts and ideas; moreover, the government was often thinking too simple, so the planners had to judge (判断) the government's thoughts and ideas. With this, she was saying that planners have to review ideas of the government critically. They also had to assess which parts of these ideas are advisable and what is not. For example, this is the case in development concepts such as tourism plans. Here, planners' task is to suggest and formulate concrete concepts based on local government's inputs, field visits, and their own analysis.

My interlocutors filled this role with much more enthusiasm and effort than they would act as *handmaidens of power.* For example, in the Wanderlust planning project, an exhibition and production park for the local handicraft industry grew out of a discussion between planners and government about the difficulty of providing space to this important group of businesses. The handicraft industry's current premises were too cramped, but any change in this situation would go against restrictions on industrial land use. Starting from this dilemma and acting as *initiative knowers,* the planners developed the idea of a new park elsewhere in the town, which would allow enough space and also offered good marketing opportunities. The team had numerous discussions on the design of this park, its pavilions, waterways, and streets.

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[122] However, many of my interlocutors were unhappy with such planning projects, because they would be resigned to passivity (被动) and not much esteem could be generated with such projects.

This design was mostly done by Han Ruishan and Teacher Wei, who were the two high-est-ranking persons in the team. This stands in contrast to the planning of relocation settle-ments and the necessary infrastructure, i.e., those aspects of the plan that were mostly about implementing policy and applying technical standards as a *handmaiden of power*. The ap-proach and general layout were discussed only once among the planners. Then, the task was handed over to Gao Yuanchao, the most junior planner on the team. Most planning projects that I witnessed included at least some elements in which planners did not only do design or draw spatial layouts but where they could bring their analytical expertise into play. Thus, the role of *initiative knower* was one that the planners routinely took on and were very com-fortable with.

7.6.3   Active initiator

I have rarely seen planners of New Town Company take on the role of *active initiator*. In this role, planners would initiate whole projects for the locality or introduce new steps in processes, such as public participation (Feng 2016: 204-212). In Wanderlust township, the planning team did suggest marketing measures for the handicraft industry – however, the measures they suggested were outside the realm of spatial planning. The lack of such an active role was one of the aspects planners complained about.[123] Planners repeatedly at-tributed their frustration about not being able to contribute to not having the control over whether or not governments would implement the projects envisaged in spatial plans (in-terviews Feng Yong, Han Ruishan, cf. chapter 7.5). Even if they suggested and formulated their own contribution or idea in a plan, they often found that local government would not follow up and implement this idea.

Teacher Yuan's most prestigious project, the reconstruction of Hillside town after the earthquake of 2008, however, was different (interview Teacher Yuan): The plans she created for tourism development were fully implemented. According to her, it is the plans' merit to have set the locality on a new and successful development path. Teacher Yuan contextual-ized this by explaining the preconditions to her plan being implemented so fully: After the earthquake, there was a blank slate. Everything had to be reconstructed, and many people had to be relocated. At the time, much financial aid flowed into the region, so there was enough capital to realize the project. The reconstruction was complex, and both visibility and pressure to succeed were high. Thus, politicians had to rely on experts. The underlying narrative, which is also present in Feng's (2016) formulation of the role of *active initiator*, is that if spatial planners had better control over which projects are chosen for realization and how they are designed, they could make an important contribution to development.

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[123] One factor for why I did not witness instances of *active initiator* might be that while Feng (2016) conducted interviews with persons at the top of the planning profession, New Town Company does not (yet) rank among the first level of planning entities, rather, it is in the upper middle field in Chengdu municipality. The planners I accompanied in their projects were also still relatively young. Thus, they would not have the authority and status to introduce their own initiatives to local governments.

7.6.4   Technicians – artists – intellectuals

While the direct clients of spatial planners are local governments, the contributions many planners want to make are towards society as a whole, economic development, and the construction of the living environment. Teacher Yuan had told me the story about the reconstruction of Hillside town as one reaction to my question of whether spatial planning contributes to development (发展, interview Teacher Yuan). As an additional answer to the same question, she also pointed out that planners had made the blueprints for the urban growth of the 2000s and thus decisively contributed to the construction of the physical setting in which contemporary life takes place. Contemporarily, the strong interest of planners such as Chu Weide or Gong Zhetai in economic development suggests the motivation to make a social contribution beyond the provision of spatial layouts for construction and infrastructure.

Xie Tian's (2010) analysis of roles in architecture provides a conceptualization of which roles vis-à-vis society at large members of a profession may aspire to.[124] She differentiates between *architects as technicians* (she denominates it as 'professional architects' 职业建筑家, but the way she describes it is taking on technical tasks); *architects as artists*, focusing on the expression of their subjectivity; and *architects as intellectuals*, commenting on society and intervening in public space. In spatial planning in Sichuan, *technicians'* role subsumes the roles of *handmaiden of power* and *active initiator* conceptualized by Feng (2016): planners provide the spatial layouts and the technical and legal expertise to projects.

There are, however, different implications to Xie Tian's (2010) concept of *technician.* It describes a contribution to society and the space we live in rather than a service to government. For example, Sun Beihai was mostly interested in solving engineering problems such as connecting a bus station and a parking lot to the main road without causing even more traffic congestion (FN #6, #86). In our frequent discussions, he particularly enjoyed comparing principles of zoning and distributing social infrastructures across urban space to reach the most efficient outcomes (e.g., FN #15). Similarly, Teacher Yuan's approach to Hillside township was a very technical one. As Teacher Yuan retells her planning procedure, the successful plan allows the town to prosper. This success, so she tells it, can be attributed to a sound analysis of local resources and a plan matching the preferences of local government (interview Teacher Yuan). In sum, both Sun Beihai and Teacher Yuan frame their approaches as a technical contribution to society, improving the lives of the people affected.

Spatial planning surely is not about creative self-expression, as Xie Tian (2010) describes the role of architects as *artists.* However, for many of my interlocutors, aesthetics had their own independent value. Teacher Wei, for example, would always be most interested in the design aspects of projects; his focus lay on questions such as: Which distribution of buildings

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[124] Feng's (2016) conceptualization of three roles does not support a description of planners' aspirations for contributing to society and development, since these roles only point to planners' interactions with local governments.

in Wanderlust creates an area where pedestrians like to linger and which is not just composed of squares and straight lines? If high-rise buildings are to be constructed right across the street from the historical town of River township, how can a transition be designed which avoids that the old town appears crushed under the much taller structures? Similarly, Luo Zhicheng spent most efforts in his projects on the design of streetscapes and facades. He also cared immensely about the atmosphere in the places he planned and would depict them in graphical renderings of bustling market places and nightlife in tourism towns. In the context of rural development, there were many concepts and plans for touristic development of towns or villages to be made – especially in such plans, Luo Zhicheng's and others' fondness for aesthetics found some expression.[125]

Planners' role as *intellectuals* is somewhat limited by their close relationship to the state. Gong Zhetai criticized this in the statement I cited above: he and his generation had different opinions from those of government; they strove for progress and therefore did not want only to draw plans for governments' ideas (FN #95.). Moreover, planners' role as *intellectuals* is limited by other factors: At New Town Company, planning happened under so much time pressure that there was not much room for intellectual considerations. This, I was frequently told, was a rather usual situation and not specific to New Town Company. Nevertheless, in the internal review meetings at New Town Company, senior planners would often veer into the contemplation about what sorts of spaces are liveable and which measures might be necessary to create such spaces.

The role of the *intellectual*, as Xie Tian describes it, goes beyond Feng's concept of *active initiator*. As *active initiator*s, planners apply the concepts and methods already present in the professional discourse; as *intellectuals*, they ask which kinds of localities should be constructed for the future. Such discussions went on frequently at the company and were an integral part of the formulation of new policy (e.g., FN #34, #51, chapter 6.4). Also, the planning discipline's academic discourse frequently takes the form of discussing different plans and whether with these plans, amenable living conditions can be provided; I have seen this at planning conferences (London 2017, Berlin 2018) and planning textbooks (cf. Melcher 2017). These discussions on what makes a good plan or a good locality usually occur in more academic settings. They are more abstract and generalized than the day-to-day work at a middle-level planning company such as New Town Company. However, most persons who teach at university in parallel also engage in practical planning. Thus, they bridge the roles of intellectuals and planning practitioners.

In the Wanderlust project, there was a considerable drive to contribute to the town's development: In an aesthetic sense, the objective was to conserve and refurbish its historic center (interview Han Ruishan). Also, Teacher Wei emphasized how Wanderlust gave him a feeling of a bustling Sichuanese market town, a sense he wanted to preserve. Therefore, he

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[125] I have described above how spatial planning is chosen as a discipline by many for its relatedness to architecture; and the element which relates spatial planning to architecture is its concern about how to form a space. This is in character an aesthetic question and one which is discussed in spatial planning all over the world.

did not want to let the center of Wanderlust town develop into a town only for tourists but wanted to maintain its everyday significance (FN #20). Furthermore, Chu Weide was highly interested in questions of achieving economic sustainability for the surrounding areas (FN #20, #36). For these latter two questions, the planning profession in China does not yet have answers ready. In these aspects, therefore, planners take experimental approaches to feel their way to a solution to the respective question. This can be framed as acting in the roles of *intellectuals.*

The other roles of spatial planners described above can be recognized in the various stages of the Wanderlust project, too: As *handmaidens of power*, the planning team supported the government by providing a state-of-the-art plan. This plan would help lobby for additional land-use quotas while also asserting regulation for landscape protection and construction restrictions. As *technicians*, they planned the road network and other infrastructures. As *initiative knower*s, the planners suggested the park for the local handicraft industry. As mentioned, they only played a very limited role as *active initiator*s.

7.7   Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I argued that to understand why spatial plans take the forms they do, an inquiry of the administrative system is not sufficient. The professional experts making plans and the contexts in which they work also need to be considered. For this reason, this chapter investigated the roles of spatial planners based on Xie Tian's (2010) and Feng's (2016) conceptualizations of roles in architecture and spatial planning, respectively.

I have first shown that spatial planning in China can indeed be considered a profession, even though it is shaped to a certain degree by the state. Spatial planning is a well-established academic discipline, even though many of its internal discourses are connected closely to the development agenda set by government. Apart from their professional knowledge and expertise on spatial development, practitioners of the profession also derive certain independence from being free actors on a market and their compulsory commitment to planning regulation. Moreover, their partial responsibility for implementing higher-level standards and policies also gives planners a certain independence from the local governments that are their contractual partners.

Many of my interlocutors explicitly welcomed the planning system's marketization precisely because of this additional independence from governments. However, marketization also means that both companies and individual planners have to compete in an increasingly tight market. For this reason, New Town Company invests in employing planners with a wide range of technical capabilities and with varying specializations. The company also allows its employees opportunities for research and professional exchange. Through this, the owners hope to achieve a first-grade license and thus to increase the company's professional status. Individual planners, however, often have to bend to strict requirements for efficiency

because of workloads and high competition. At the same time, their university education only imperfectly equips them for planning practice, and there are many capabilities that they have to acquire on the job.

In this chapter, I further demonstrated that these pressures notwithstanding, many of my interlocutors want to contribute to localities' future development. Thus, they might hope to impact local economic development, the spatial layout and physical infrastructure of a place, or its style of architecture and general atmosphere. However, I also portrayed planners' frustrations about plans not being implemented or governments not listening to their professional expertise.

As in the empirical chapter on planning administration, I have shown – from the other perspective this time – how there are a conceptual gap and considerable communication difficulties between persons working in the administration of spatial planning and persons working as professional planners. The rural planners pilot project in Chengdu municipality aims to mend this problematic. It deploys professional planners directly to rural governments in order to support planning and other spatial policy. The rural planners whom I talked to in my research confirmed this gap between administration and professional planners.

Feng's (2016) and Xie Tian's (2010) typologies of roles of planners or architects have proven to be highly useful heuristics. Specifically, my data supports Feng's (2016) depiction of planners alternating between the roles of *handmaiden of power*, *initiative knower*, and *active initiator* in their interactions with governments. Xie Tian's (2010) conceptualization of architecture as a discipline with its own internal discourses and differentiations adds an insightful perspective to Feng's account of spatial planning. It enabled me to show that planners intend to contribute to society through their work and are not only focused on their services to government and on the earnings from their projects. Therefore, the planners I interacted with allude to the roles as described by Feng (2016) and Xie Tian (2010); my observations as well confirm Feng's and Xie's accounts. However, neither author considered that planning and architecture are organized in markets and that this shapes how planners fill their roles to a significant extent.

The overarching framework for this dissertation is which *orders of worth* play a role in spatial planning. The roles described by Feng and Xie Tian address aspects of spatial planning different from my conceptualization of five *orders of worth*: The roles identified and described by Feng (2016) come into being in the interaction between governments and spatial planners, and they are about the instrumental roles planners take on. This is different from *orders of worth* in that the latter describe shared ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness between planners, politicians, and administrative staff. In contrast, roles in Feng's conceptualization describe the position and the attitude planners take on when interacting with local government.

The formulation I derived from Xie Tian (2010) of spatial planners engaging in technical work, in aesthetics, or in social commentary, is connected closer to my conceptualization of *orders of worth*. Nonetheless, there is a considerable difference: These roles relate to personal interpretations of professional practice and to the toolboxes used for achieving professional objectives; *orders of worth*, in contrast, are the descriptions of both professional and societal objectives. Moreover, Xie Tian (2010) sees architects as choosing between the roles instead of aiming to integrate them. Both aspects are at odds with my conceptualization of negotiation and bridging between *orders of worth* in the planning process. The next chapter therefore looks at the planning profession again. It analyses the data on the planning profession to describe the five orders of worth that stand at the center of this dissertation.

8 Analytical Interlude: *Orders of worth* among spatial planners

The previous chapter has presented an account of how the planning profession in my empirical field is set up: Providing the technical expertise for a branch of administration and policy-making, planners work in close relationship to the state. Nevertheless, they are afforded certain independence both by planning regulation and market arrangements. The chapter has also demonstrated how, despite considerable pressures, planners aim to make a contribution beyond the compilation of planning documents both to society and spatial policy. In the present analytical interlude, I revisit the data on the planning profession in order to provide an account of how the five *orders of worth* appear among planners.

The previous analytical interlude (chapter 6) has shown how from the perspective of planning administration and government, the *order* of 'planning as regulation and public provision' stands at the focus, while there also is an appreciation of the contribution and the expertise that is valued in 'planning as a craft.' 'Planning as a business' introduces a cost-benefit-logic into the interactions between government and planners. 'Planning for development and growth' and 'planning for ecology and civilization' describe broader objectives to which spatial planning is to contribute. These two sets of objectives sometimes overlap; however, they also sometimes incorporate different logics, such as top-down regulation and restriction of 'ecology and civilization' versus local expansionist aspirations in 'development and growth.'

Orders of worth are socially shared attributions of worthiness and ideal imaginations. In any given situation, persons may either routinely follow a prevalent order or choose to state a diverging view or criticism in reference to another *order.* Therefore, references to *orders of worth* are most evident in argumentation and disagreement. Many such instances of argumentation have been recounted in chapter 7 on the planning profession. Moreover, the Powerpoint presentations used to explain and discuss spatial plans in themselves are constructed as arguments to convince supervisory bodies of administration. From such material, I have derived the five *orders of worth* described in this dissertation in an inductive and iterative process.

Chapter 6 has presented the *orders of worth* as they can be found in planning administration and government. In the present interlude, I turn to the contents which *orders* have in the planning profession. As will be seen, while emphases and depth of understanding of single *orders* may diverge between governments and professional planners, the contents of each of the five *orders* are by and large the same in both spheres. First, however, a vignette of an internal discussion of the Wanderlust project at New Town Company demonstrates

the presence of each *order of worth*, with the somewhat conspicuous absence of the order of 'planning as a business':[126]

This meeting went on for almost three hours. Not only was this unusually long for such meetings; five owners of the company and two office leaders taking part as well testifies to the prominence of this session (FN #29, documentation of the session by the planning team, Powerpoint presentation prepared for the meeting). The project team presented a rough input for discussion, which was different from the final presentation sketched out in the introduction to this dissertation. The input focused on four issues: On the strategic side, a) the analyses which inform the plan and the rationale of the general plan (总体规划思路) and b) the resulting definition of character and functions of the town (城镇性质、职能) were put up for feedback. Regarding actual zoning plans, c) a draft for the rural areas surrounding the central town and d) one draft for the central town were presented.

Explanations and discussion revolved mostly around the strategic aspects. One important topic in the project team's explanation was the status to which the town was to grow since different per capita standards in the provision of social services and infrastructures apply to settlements with different statuses. The other focus of the presentation was on economic strategy, explaining that the local government wanted to support the local handicraft industry to limit investment in tourism so that the town's atmosphere could be preserved.

In the following discussion, all senior staff, in turn, gave their comments. There was very strong criticism of the analyses, pointing out that some claims were not substantiated by quantitative analyses. With regard to the contents of strategic orientation, there were controversial discussions about whether the projected growth in population, the limitation of tourism, and the focus on the handicraft industry were realistic. Another idea for a wholesale trade base was summarily dismissed. The statements on environmental protection, in contrast, were commented positively from many sides, in particular a scheme for the strict protection of water quality, which according to the various comments effectively addressed the current importance of water resources. Around the table, planners expressed support for the formulation of thorough and strict water protection measures because, as they put it, especially the protection of water resources was becoming a big problem currently.

In the discussion of the drafts of spatial plans, criticism of the plan for the township area was encompassing and crushing: it was simply said that there is nothing to say since this was not developed enough. The zoning plan for the central town was criticized mainly with regard to the layout of streets: it was mentioned that from the graphic presentation, it was not recognizable which streets were to be the main thoroughfares through the town and which ones were only access roads for residential blocks. A stretch of green space between the old and new areas of the town was criticized by some as unnecessary or as an obstacle

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[126] From the perspective of 'planning as a business,' the Wanderlust project was a blatant *fall from grace* for the company (chapters 5.3, 7.4): The company had agreed to go through the whole planning process a second time free of charge after higher-level political decisions had fundamentally altered some central factors in local development outlook and priorities. Thus, the Wanderlust project already was losing a lot of money; but because of the good connections to both township and county governments, everybody agreed on doing a good job on this.

for traffic, while others thought it a nice idea. There was also the criticism that the pattern of roads and blocks in the new district of the town might be done in a more interesting way.

Accordingly, the project team's internal documentation of opinions and discussions of the meeting emphasized technical aspects and noted down mainly statements in which concrete instructions were given. In reporting the concrete implications of the discussion on technical and policy aspects, commentary was selected according to its relevance to 'planning as a craft' and 'planning as regulation and public provision.'

At that stage of the planning process, these two *orders of worth* mattered most because the central challenge right now lay on compiling a good product that would pass the assessment. However, the various ideas and comments on strategic outlook, population growth, and economic opportunities, while translated into a technical language both in the project chat and in the meeting, also speak to the *order of worth* of 'development and growth.' In the emphasis on the protection of natural resources in both the presentation and the discussion, the orders of 'planning as regulation and public provision' and 'planning for ecology and civilization' intersect. This latter *order of worth* stands in tension with 'development and growth'; this tension is also addressed in the discussion of investment into tourism.

The four *orders of worth* (except 'planning as a business') are equally present in the input the project team had prepared for the meeting. Of all the commentary and criticism offered, none questions the relevance of either *order*, which can be formulated as follows:

- preparing a plan that is up to professional standards in the order of 'planning as a craft';
- providing sound regulation and a good basis for public provision as well as staying in line with higher-level regulation, thus strengthening government control of the territory in 'planning as regulation and public provision';
- supporting existing local industries and developing the tourist industry so as to ensure 'development and growth';
- devising detailed and dependable measures to protect the environment and heritage as postulated by 'planning for ecology and civilization.'

Rather than putting the essential relevance of any of the *orders* in question, the discussion revolved around similar categories as I use to describe *orders of worth.* For example, the discussion of the plan's technical qualities can be understood as revolving around attribution of *worthiness*; *tools and methods* were implied in the question of whether developing the local handicraft industry could contribute significantly to development. Conflicts between *orders of worth* were addressed, for example, in the statement that on the one hand, tourism development might negatively impact the liveability of the town. However, on the other hand, you could not hinder tourists from visiting, if the town has been constructed nicely. Personal *state of worth* was not negotiated explicitly in such meetings; however, the more senior planners gave comments while younger planners' work was being evaluated.

As a general plan, covering infrastructure-related, economic, environmental, and historical factors considerations, the plan for Wanderlust township provides an excellent starting point into the analysis of *orders of worth* as they present themselves in the working routines and practices at a mid-level planning company in Sichuan. As in the previous interlude, the discussion on the following pages builds on both the preceding vignette and on data and arguments brought forward in the chapter on the planning profession (chapter 7). This interlude is an analytical investigation in its own right, not a conclusive reflection of the chapter's findings on the planning profession.

Like in the previous interlude, the analysis moves through the *orders of worth* in the order in which I initially presented them – 'planning as a craft,' 'planning as regulation and public provision,' 'planning as a business,' 'planning for development and growth,' and 'planning for ecology and civilization.' In contrast to the open and iterative process of identifying the five *orders of worth* and connecting them to instances in the data, each section of this chapter will be rigidly structured by the categories of description which have been defined theoretically (chapter 3.4.1): *Common good*, *measure of worth*, *tools and mechanisms*, *state of worth*, and *fall from grace*. While chapter 6 described the *orders of worth* from the perspective of government, this interlude covers the same analytical structure but from the planning profession's perspective. I thereby demonstrate one of the core assumptions in the theory: While emphasis and depth of understanding of single *orders of worth* may vary between persons (here: groups of actors), there exists a common understanding of the validity and the general contents of each *order of worth.*

8.1   Planning as a craft

This *order* posits that professional expertise is an essential dimension of spatial planning and that planning is a craft that needs to be acquired by practical training. Planning can be framed as a craft because status and skills in the profession are acquired not only through study but also through practice. I use the term 'craft' (*Handwerk*, 工匠) to describe this *order* because the capabilities necessary to make a good plan, I was told repeatedly, cannot be acquired only from university; they must also be trained and honed on the job. For this reason, new employees at New Town Company start with elementary tasks; they are gradually introduced to the various practical tasks in spatial planning.

A set of skills defines a good planner: analytical capacity, understanding of regional socioeconomic dynamics, the technical tools of planning, and a sense of aesthetics. I have already shown that governments and politicians pay the opinions of professional planners respect and thus acknowledge the *order* of 'planning as a craft.' However, this order's concrete characterizations need to be derived from data from within the planning profession.

In each interview with professional planners, I would ask what characterized a good plan. When I put this question to Teacher Yuan, she thought for a while before she deliberately did not answer based on questions of design (interview Teacher Yuan). Rather she

stated that this was not like mathematics, where there would be precisely one right answer to a task. She then took my notebook and started writing and explaining the four requirements, which, in her opinion, would make sure that a plan was good. A good plan would:

1) be based on a comprehensive analysis of the needs for development has been done (调研充分、发展需求作了全面分析);

2) fit to the facts of development (符合发展实际) – it would not propose any unrealistic things but have an honest look at what could be achieved;

3) base decisions on scientific analysis of evidence and research (科学论证分析、研究、定性 + 定量) – very often, plans are just drawing up according to regulatory standards. It is the watershed between a good and a bad planning company on whether they do a scientific analysis in order to support planning decisions;

4) demonstrate that it is forward-looking and fits [future] development needs (前瞻证，符合发展需求).

What is notably missing in Teacher Yuan's list of how you make sure to achieve a good planning outcome are design, layout plans, and the spatial capabilities that planners learn at university. According to her preamble that there cannot be one correct solution to a planning problem, designs and spatial layouts are up to discussion and have to be carefully adapted to local conditions. They need to come after analysis and after consideration of the concrete needs of the locality.

In three of the four items she lists, 'needs' or 'facts' of development (发展需求 and 发展实际) appear. With this focus on analysis and suitability to the very concrete needs of a locality's present situation and future trajectory, Teacher Yuan also distinguishes her perspective from a more traditional design-oriented approach to spatial planning. She made it clear that a good plan should aim beyond spatial design and contribute to a locality's future development. Accordingly, professional success, especially among the younger generations, depends increasingly on analytical capability than on proficiency in design (chapter 7.4). Nevertheless, drawing plans and the corresponding design language still figure prominently in the toolbox of spatial planners.

The character of the *order of worth* 'planning as a craft' has been changing. The *common good* of spatial planning has remained the consultation of governments to achieve physical environments that fit society's needs. However, the other categories to describe this *order* have been shifting as spatial planning has grown in political status, has increasingly marketized and gained some independence, and has incorporated questions of regional development and analysis. This means that there was a certain tension to be observed between different approaches to spatial planning at the time of my field research. None of my interlocutors would have stated that they are more interested in design than in analysis or discussion about the correct approaches to development. Nevertheless, there was tension between generations of planners. On the following pages, my aim is not to differentiate between new and old approaches but to depict the territory between the opposing poles.

In the previous interlude, the ***common good*** of spatial 'planning as a craft' was defined as the contribution of independent, mostly technical expertise to spatial policy-making. Teacher Yuan, in the quote above, adds that such contributions have to fit the concrete circumstances of the locality, i.e., that they must not be generic. To this, Han Ruishan added the aesthetic side from the purview of the Wanderlust project:

Han Ruishan:我们真希望我们能够做到这样的一些角色： 不单单说我画个图就完了。就是说，我们当然能够希望就是可能影响到那个 XXX [incomprehensible]还是产业上、能够引导你往更好的方面去发展。

LM: 嗯那你自己希望有什么印象？

Han Ruishan:其实，感觉上就是能够改变它 [Wanderlust, LM] 现在的那种状态吧。因为现在感觉说我们做了研究，就是觉得整个 Wanderlust 有，你有优势、你有特色、有——但是你就是感觉没有把这种特色充分的把它表现出来，就是显得你整个城镇都特别的平淡[…] 就等于是，嗯，你本身是一个很漂亮的女孩，但是呢，就是因为你没有把你打扮出来，（LM laughs) 对对对，就这个意思的。我就希望能够把你充分展现出来的。

(interview Han Ruishan)

Han Ruishan: *We hope to fill such a role: Not simply saying I draw up a map, and that's it. Of course, we hope to maybe influence this XXX [incomprehensible] or the industry to lead you to develop towards a better direction.*

LM: *What sort of influence do you yourself hope to have?*

Han Ruishan: *Actually, talking about [my] feeling, it is to change its [Wanderlust's, LM] current appearance. Because right now, from the research we were doing, I just have the feeling that in the whole Wanderlust, there are strengths, there are characteristics, there are ---- but you just feel like these characteristics are not fully coming to expression, just like your whole town is very commonplace. […] It is just like, ahem, you are a pretty girl, but, just because you haven't dressed yourself up, (LM laughs) yes yes yes, just like this. I hope to develop you fully.*

[own translation]

In this depiction of what she hopes that the Wanderlust general plan contributes, Han Ruishan states that she wants to improve Wanderlust's appearance (状态). She adds that Wanderlust is facing a huge opportunity with the county's regional economic strategy and population growth to be expected from the infrastructure project. Planning could contribute a good appearance and help the township make the most out of this opportunity. Thus, Han Ruishan here expresses her hope to contribute to the town's development, and she wants to do this by bringing her own knowledge, concepts, and strategies into the plan.

These are three different voices about what makes a spatial plan worthy, and all three are firmly rooted within the purview of the discipline of planning. A good plan, thereby, effectively provides consultancy to local government; it is based on thorough analysis and deliberation of adequate measures fit to the locality. It also contains a set of technical and aesthetic interventions that help the locality achieve its development objectives. How to make such contributions, i.e., making a good plan, is the skillset that planners have. There is agreement among my interlocutors that it is a good thing that spatial planning has an increasingly central role in local policy-making, precisely because of the sense that spatial

planning can positively contribute. Thus, the *common good* of 'planning as a craft' is the participation and effective contribution of spatial planning in policy-making.

Among the many **measures of worth** in the *order* of 'planning as a craft,' there were two minimum standards at New Town Company that every plan had to fulfill. One was that spatial plans had to be reasonable (合理). For example, the criticism of not being reasonable was leveled against the green space at the center of Wanderlust town at the internal review meeting (FN #29, also FN #47). Reasonable, in this context, meant that a construction project or a spatial layout had to be in proportion to the size, status, and wealth of a locality; it had to be practical and functional, and the project design had to take more than just one factor into account.

The other central *measure of worth* at New Town Company was whether the plan provided at least some independent expertise and advice to local governments. Plans drawn up only after the rest of the project had been planned out were highly unpopular (e.g., FN #74.), precisely because spatial planning expertise could no longer be brought in. In this regard, Gong Zhetai, the young talent at New Town Company, described one of the changes in 'planning as a craft' rather bluntly when he told me about the difference between his and the previous generation. While older planners were happy to serve the government's wishes, he and his generation had their own view (意见). Hoping for social progress, he and planners like him would not want to simply draw the plans which governments imagine; instead, they wanted to contribute their professional expertise (FN #95).

Requirements and *measures of worth* are changing. Teacher Yuan told me about how she started her career in the early 2000s, in the times of rapid urban growth. Planning had to lay the foundations for the construction of sizeable greenfield developments – this might have fit the needs of the time, but she is not sure whether all these plans were really well-done:

其实实际上我的年龄是一个比较幸运的年龄。就是我正好工作的时候就建成了中国的制造时；我不敢说那么大的话，至少是建成的成都，他怎么快速的去发展的，知道吗？而且我参与到其中去。我不敢说我们所有做的东西都是对的。但是我们所有做的东西一定是顺应那个时代的要求做的。(interview Teacher Yuan)

Actually, my age is a rather lucky age. This means, just as I [started to] work, this just became the time of China's making; I don't dare to make very big statements, but at least it was the construction of Chengdu, it went into such fast development, do you know? And I went in and took part. I don't dare to say that all the things we did [constructed] were correct. But everything we did conformed to the needs of the times. (own translation)

Thus, Teacher Yuan worries that what had been a good spatial plan at the time might not be considered worthy in the present day. Planners criticize plans for such urban construction of former years for not sufficiently considering local detail. Thus, when talking about the changes in the planning profession, Luo Zhicheng talked about how in earlier times, rural planning would do four or five villages at a time, following the same logic for the whole group. He emphasized that it was good that the state of the art had improved since

then (FN #46). Similarly, Gong Zhetai noted approvingly that at the national planning convention of the year 2016 in Shenyang the plans for smaller, more detailed (微观) projects received much more attention than those large-scale development projects which mirrored the older approaches (FN #71). This aspect resonates with Teacher Yuan's list of requirements for a good plan: The details must be well-adapted to the local situation.

Tools and mechanisms of spatial planning are experiencing this same change from a design-oriented approach to an approach that focuses on consultancy and regional and economic analysis before developing the spatial design based on this analysis. As described in chapter 7.4.2, there is sharp criticism of the current spatial planning curricula that focus on architectural design drawing skills for much of the undergraduate education (interviews Han Ruishan, Teacher Yuan). These skills, however, still prove to be relevant for zoning plans, such as the new districts in Wanderlust township, as well as the designs of historic town centers. Mapping and the drawing of spatial plans is also a relevant tool for both the plans for specific infrastructures (专项规划), which must be included in a general plan as well as for regional and strategic analyses.

In regional and strategic analyses, planners look at the main transport routes to which the locality is connected, the specializations of surrounding localities, and other opportunities to focus development strategy. This has been attempted but criticized as insufficient in the internal discussion of the Wanderlust general plan presented above. In planning for rural spaces in Sichuan, influencing factors were often related to tourism, such as scenic sites and historical heritage in the locality, connections to established tourism destinations, and big cities from where visitors might come. Based on such analysis, a locality's strategic position (定位) was formulated, often as a slogan of only a few characters or a short sentence.[127] In the presentations of spatial plans, this strategic position would be the anchor point for zoning the territory, for the regulation and preliminary designs of construction, and for concrete interventions.

Therefore, while the longer-established tools of spatial planning, the actual drawing of designs and maps, are still relevant, analytical tools and a stronger focus on well-founded formulations of strategy have been added. As the criticisms of planning education make clear, especially these newer aspects are considered insufficiently covered in current planning education.

The *state of worth* of individual planners is assessed by the most prestigious projects they have participated in. To begin with, as Chu Weide says, you do not really dare to call yourself a planner if you have not participated in a general planning project yet:

> 你要么没有做过总规，你不能 —— 你不敢，你不好意思，在外面说你是做规划的。你是没有 —— 你是不会那个什么的。 (interview Chu Weide)

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[127] For the sake of anonymization, no examples can be given.

If you have not made a general plan, you cannot – you don't dare to, you're embarrassed to say that you are doing planning. You don't have – you cannot do that certain something. [own translation]

The Wanderlust project was the first general planning project in which Chu Weide participated. In the passage preceding the quotation above, Chu Weide emphasizes how much he personally has benefitted from the Wanderlust planning project and that his understanding of spatial planning had grown considerably. He recounts how he continuously felt like having to exceed his capabilities, how he tried to the best of his faculty, and was taken along by the others (作成). This element of practical learning in planning projects led me to call this *order of worth* 'planning as a craft.'

Indeed, status among spatial planners was mostly assessed based on experience and based on the most prestigious projects a planner had participated in. In the previous chapter, Teacher Yuan's earthquake reconstruction project of Hillside township has already been introduced (chapters 7.6.2. and 7.6.3). During my first days at the company, I was asked by a younger planner, quietly, somewhere in the corridor, whether I had already been to Hillside township. She explained that Hillside town had been constructed under the authorship of Teacher Yuan and was considered very successful (FN #4). In our interview, then, Teacher Yuan's pride of this project was palpable. Similarly, Teacher Wei was also pointed out as having had great successes with his urban designs.

Chu Weide's statement also emphasizes that general planning is the 'master discipline' of spatial planning. I have witnessed at New Town Company how younger planners start their work with specific technical tasks in specialized plans, such as preparing maps and layouts for concept plans. From there, they are taken through increasingly general tasks and kinds of plans, until, later in a career, planners do less practical planning work and more guidance and review to the plans their subordinates formulate. Thus, more generalized and systemic knowledge, which comes with manifold experience in the profession, brings higher status.

Again, a change in 'planning as a craft' can be observed: While most older planners build their reputation on excellent designs, Teacher Yuan's status is – in part – derived from the fact that Hillside township developed after reconstruction according to her plans. Among the younger planners, those with the best-developed analytical skills, like Gong Zhetai, have the highest reputation. Accordingly, when Chu Weide enrolled in a master's program, his objective was to strengthen his understanding of regional and economic dynamics rather than his skills in design and zoning (chapter 7.4).

The traits of a ***fall from grace*** can be inferred from Teacher Yuan's list of a good plan's characteristics with which this section started and from her doubts about the plans from the period of rapid urban growth in the 2000s. Such plans would not be based on a solid, scientific analysis of data about the locality; they would not consider which resources and needs a locality has, nor the future development trajectory and what might be needed for this; the plans would be of rough resolution and generic content. In short, this would be a spatial plan

that exclusively focuses on construction and design, without basing these designs on an investigation about what is needed in this place, at this point in time, and in the perceptible future.

8.2   Planning as regulation and public provision

In the review meeting about the preliminary version of the Wanderlust general plan at New Town Company introduced at the beginning of this chapter (FN #29, and other documentation), one of four questions to the senior planners was for feedback on the spatial layout for the general township area (镇域), i.e., for the rural areas surrounding the central town of the township. Feedback here was harsh, pointing out that there was nothing to say until the plan was drawn up more concretely. In the presentation for the expert hearing, this part of the general plan had indeed grown from one spatial layout to encompass twenty of the more than sixty slides of the overall Powerpoint presentation, put together mainly by the two youngest planners on the team, Yan Weining and Gao Yuanchao.

Current rural policy forms a constitutive backdrop to the plan for the rural areas of Wanderlust township. One of these policies is a drive towards restructuring settlements in Sichuan's countryside; farms that used to be scattered over the countryside are now to be assembled into village settlements to free up construction land.[128] This policy also aims at a more effective provision of public services for the rural population.[129] In Wanderlust township, relocation was also made necessary due to the infrastructure project. While many relocated households would be moved to the central town, some also were to move to the central villages in the township area.

In the previous interlude, 'planning as regulation and public provision' has been characterized as aiming for effective government control, oversight of the territory, and standardization of infrastructure and public service levels. In this vein, the focus of the plan for the township area is on regulation and public provision: it defines the locations and sizes of the new central villages and it differentiates between graded types of settlements: Central villages provide social services and infrastructures to the smaller villages. For both types, overview tables of per capita standards for relevant infrastructures and facilities are provided based on relevant law; a map demonstrates how the distribution of central settlements puts much of the township area within accessible distance of public services. Thematic plans cover the distribution of networked infrastructures such as the transport network, land use, water and wastewater facilities, and exit routes in case of a natural disaster. Again, for most of these infrastructures, the relevant legal norms and standards are cited.

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[128] Select farm buildings are usually marked up for preservation and use as tourism locations in order to preserve a sense of how the countryside used to be.

[129] The development objectives of urbanization and the integration of rural and urban areas (城乡一体化) also constitute important policy contexts. One might argue that from the perspective of 'planning as regulation and public provision,' condensed settlements are certainly easier to govern and to control than scattered individual farms.

This format is usual for the statutory planning of rural administrative territory, and here, the ordering and regulating effects which come with the provision of social services are visible. The plans are based on a survey about the infrastructures which exist in the countryside as well as on a calculation about future population figures. Then, higher-level governments' standards for public provision are applied to the area, thus establishing coherence.

The **common good** of spatial 'planning as regulation and public provision' has already been formulated in the previous interlude as an ordering of the territory, establishing cohesion. The state thereby is enabled to implement its policy objectives over the territory and provide adequate distribution of public provision. The current goals and aims of such policy are defined by the policies on urbanization and rural and urban integration (城乡一体化).

As **measures of worth**, the adherence to higher-level policy and the feasibility of spatial plans were cited. From the perspective of spatial planners, this meant, on the one hand, that spatial plans have to pass assessment; a higher worth can be achieved by demonstrating coherence with higher-level policy. This argument is part of many of the Powerpoint presentations. Planners' work will also achieve higher worth in this *order of worth* if they consider the conditions that impact a plan's implementation. Thus, one of my interlocutors described the *measures of worth* for a spatial plan as follows: Implementation should be feasible (有实施可行性) and it should be possible for the government to uphold this plan for a long time instead of reworking it after only a few years (FN #97). Indeed, this aspect is a point of tension between professional planners and the institutional set-up in which they work: As discussed in chapter 7.5, there is a sense of frustration about their work's results failing to materialize.

Additionally, as Deputy Mayor Wang explained to me (interview Deputy Mayor Wang, also chapter 7.5.2), in their intermediating role between local government and higher-level administration, planners' worth is apparent in the capability to explain to politicians the purpose of planning and the relevant regulation. Competent spatial planners propose ways of bridging conflicting regulations or of finding compromises between restrictive regulation and local governments' objectives. Based on their experience in interactions with higher-level planning administration and assessment processes, planning organizations of high worthiness and status provide valuable support and consultation to local governments. With this support, legitimate and permissible policy objectives can be formulated.[130]

In the Wanderlust project, formulation of regulation, which was presented as one of the central **tools and mechanisms** in 'planning as regulation and public provision,' applies on the one hand in the sense that a general plan in itself is a legal document and therefore regulation, which needs to be detailed enough. On the other hand, as has been described at the beginning of this chapter in the context of the internal meeting, this plan includes comprehensive zoning for strict implementation of protection of water quality and detailed attributions of heritage protection standards to historical structures in the central town. In

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[130] These observations were substantiated and concretized in conversations with Gao Xiaoxue, TU Berlin.

such instances, spatial planning defines which (externally prescribed) standards of protection and preservation apply to which parts of a territory.

The planning for the township area, as demonstrated above, was mostly about the correct application of a complex set of technical standards. For this reason, the senior planners at the internal meeting did not comment on the draft version of the plan for the township area: Interesting is not so much the spatial distribution of construction areas, but how this distribution fulfills the various standards for the provision of infrastructure and public services.

The **state of worth** of spatial planners in the order of 'planning as regulation and public provision' is, in part, determined by their formal rank (资质) in the planning system, which they are awarded by planning administration. Another important marker of *state of worth* is the degree to which a planner understands and implements regulation, expressed in the ease with which their plans pass assessment by higher administrative levels.

This explains why so much was at stake at an internal review at New Town Company for another project. In this project, the local government was very indeterminate about what they wanted from the plan and simultaneously had ideas that ran against higher-level policies (FN #47). Here, the planner leading the meeting emphasized that the project team had to take on responsibility (负责) vis-à-vis government: They should be clear and outspoken about the legal and political implications of local government's wishes. At the meeting, technical tricks had been discussed to tweak the numbers and thereby fulfill standards, but without reaching the legal threshold. Thus, the planner responsible for the project was told that the company would not hand this plan over to the government because it violated standards.

Not passing the assessment process constitutes a ***fall from grace*** so severe that it was not considered an option at New Town Company. A spatial plan would be polished and renegotiated to the point that the owners of the company were confident that they could bring it through this assessment. For the project cited above, this meant that the project team had to go through internal revision three times before they were permitted to go to the expert hearing.

8.3   Planning as a business

At the internal review hearing for the Wanderlust project, business or revenue was not discussed. Even though this project was losing money, everyone agreed on further investing effort into this project. For other plans, however, this aspect might come up, usually in the form of the senior planners telling the project team not to put any more effort into a project since they had already worked enough for their money (for example FN #6).

In the context of 'spatial planning as a business,' planners are committed to furthering their company's business, to maintaining a reasonable relation between remuneration and workload, and additionally to the objectives described in the orders of 'planning as a craft'

and 'planning as regulation and public provision': collecting professional acclaim as well as not risking their planning license by violating regulation.

Teacher Wei explained to me his view on the comparative market status and purpose of New Town Company: Among the competition, state-owned planning institutes play in a different league than New Town Company; however, very inexpensive planning companies also cannot compete with New Town Company (also chapter 7.3).

这种价格最低的公司往往是很差的公司，他们自己并不清楚怎么做。然后他们就可能会按照地方政府的一些 —— 因为地方政府，毕竟他不专业。[...] 然后呢，那些公司呢？它因为在底层，它不没有一个很好的 XX [incomprehensible]，然后也不能和这种上面的政策很好的衔接。因此可能就会做出一些很糟糕的事情，也会有这样的一个。所以、我们就是介于两者 [事业单位和底层规划公司, LM] 之间，我们在求一个平衡。[...] 所以，我们组建这个公司，它的目的就不是为了—— [不, LM] 完全是为了盈利，而是说我也希望借助这个公司的这么多的事情在不断的把我们的这个规划方面的一些研究积累。

(interview Teacher Wei)

Such inexpensive companies are very deficient companies. They themselves do not know precisely how to do things. Thus they might simply [plan] according to the local government's ----- because after all, local government does not have the expertise. [...] And then, what do these companies do? Because they are low-level, they do not have very good XXX [incomprehensible] and they also cannot connect to policies from above very well. Therefore it might be that they produce a few pretty lousy things; such things happen. Consequently, we are between those two [between planning institutes and low-level companies, LM], we pursue a balance. [...] Therefore, this company which we founded, its objective is not just to ---- it's [not, LM] entirely for the profit, this means, I also hope to continuously accumulate some research in the area of planning with the support of so many facets of this company. [own translation]

Teacher Wei expresses here that even though the company's purpose is to make money, other *measures of worth* apply as well.[131] However, professional planners do planning to make a living as members of the middle class and the company has to be profitable. Therefore, the profitability of a project and the necessary investments in terms of time are important in assessing a project's worthiness. As I have shown in the previous empirical chapter, my interlocutors either took the professional field's market shape as self-evident, even though it has not been in place for a long time, or they even welcomed this arrangement. They argued that this arrangement gave them the freedom to refuse a project and that in a market arrangement, planners and governments encountered each other as equal contract partners.

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[131] To put these comments into perspective: Teacher Wei had much lower economic stakes in the company than the other owners, since much of his planning activity also took place at university and because his personal formal status in the planning profession was especially high. My impression was that the other owners of the company were, on the one hand, much more involved at the company, and on the other hand, attributed economic viability a higher priority. But among them, as well, profit was clearly not the sole criterium of taking decisions.

One – very negatively evaluated – alternative scenario was described as working on command, without additional compensation or even though one would rather have free time than additional salary (interviews Jiang Wenxue, Huang Tianming and Ming Lili).[132]

The ***common good*** of 'planning as a business,' as I have argued in the previous interlude, is an efficient ratio between the price paid for a plan and the work done by the planners; efficiency is also brought about by competition, which motivates planners to give their best efforts. The services of spatial planners are supplied to local governments on a market where companies with better renown and higher technical capabilities are more expensive. In the quotation above, Teacher Wei criticizes situations in which a planning contract is concluded purely based on the least costly offer. He argued that in such cases, the quality of the plan could be expected to be insufficient. New Town Company offers better work but is also more expensive.

Accordingly, for planners and governments, the ***measure of worth*** is the ratio between price and product quality. From the governments' point of view, a plan is worthy in this *order of worth* if it is inexpensive, whereas, for professional planners, the opposite is true: The worth of a project is measured by the profit made.

The quality of a plan is derived from other *orders of worth.* In the quotation above, Teacher Wei criticizes planning work in which a spatial layout is drawn up purely according to the local government's wishes. His reason for this is that such a plan is not worthy from a professional standpoint and would not pass the assessment, thereby constituting a *fall from grace* in both *orders* of 'planning as a craft' and 'planning as regulation and public provision.' The quality of the plan and the analyses, independent consultation, dependable implementation of regulation, and the certainty that this plan will pass assessment legitimate the higher price that New Town Company charges.

On the part of professional planners, ***tools and mechanisms*** comprise success in acquiring new projects through competitions, tenders, or through existing networks. Techniques and skills of presentation matter, as does a certain degree of pandering to the political leadership's aspirations. Thus, in preparation for the submission of a tourism development plan (FN #58, chapter 7.3), it was decided that one of the employees of the renowned partner company was to give the pitch since he had previously demonstrated excellent rhetorical skills (FN #58). In the course of a planning project, efficiency mattered to achieve a profit; if a project proved too labor-intensive, sometimes decisions were taken to wrap up work on this project and move on.

The company as a whole also strove for efficiency and productivity. This aspect of 'planning as a business' is represented by New Town Company's efforts to build a structure in

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[132] However, it was also emphasized to me that an absolute marketization (市场化) or opening (开放) of the field would not be advisable, since after all, with local topographic maps and detailed information about localities, sensitive data was involved which should not come into the hands of foreign companies (interviews Huang Tianming, Teacher Yuan). In addition, the licensing system by government also constitutes a limitation of marketization of the system.

which employees do their best (FN #61). At a staff meeting, the revised regulations for employee performance requirements and the payment structure were presented. It was mentioned there that since the company had only existed for a few years, these regulations were still subject to optimization and that in other companies, of course, different rules applied. In the first input to this session, one of the company's owners mostly talked about necessary improvements in performance. His central point was that the company's objective was production (生产) and that reliable output needed to be ensured. Therefore, shortcomings in quantity or quality were not acceptable. Into this statement, he mixed a slight threat about the company taking action if some problems persisted, explicitly criticizing gaps in some employees' knowledge and capabilities. He also mentioned that leisure activities within the company are organized for the sake of productivity.

The general objective of changes to how the company is structured, as stated by the owners, was to increase production and efficiency (生产 and 效率). In this meeting, different areas of company performance were assessed, and central weaknesses were highlighted. One owner remarked that career depended on personal skills and qualifications, which were in employees' personal responsibility. It was made clear that positions higher up in the hierarchy were limited and would be awarded in competitive procedures. These are strictly market-shaped mechanisms to ascertain that employees perform to the best of their capabilities.

These management techniques stand in stark contrast both to Teacher Yuan talking about how, in the 1990s, she used to spend parts of her working days at a planning institute playing Majiang since there was not much work to do (interview Teacher Yuan). They are also in contrast to the frequent complaints about the command-structures at planning institutes where employees had had no choice but to comply with the tasks they were given (FN #87, interview Teacher Yuan).

In the order of 'planning as a business,' **state of worth** is assessed by income and revenue, i.e., by profitability and market position. For New Town Company, profitability in 2016 was not as good as it used to be. This, however, was due to the market situation: Many companies were struggling and some were going out of business. In this context, New Town Company was still doing good enough (interview Sun Beihai, also FN #58, #80).

Just as the prices a company charges for projects reflect its professional *state of worth*, the income of individual planners at New Town Company was a combination of their professional *state of worth* and their business performance. A higher formal status in the company comes with an increase in income. Planners also receive a fraction of each project's revenue according to their contribution; even for each map they compile, there is a specific compensation (FN #33). Thus, productivity was rewarded financially and led to a higher *state of worth.*

Therefore, the **fall from grace** for an individual planner would be to work to one's best effort without generating enough income, either because their efficiency and productivity were too low or because one failed to be promoted. This was explained to me in a chat-

conversation late one evening: The person was under pressure at New Town Company and was frustrated that there are no possibilities for making a promising career. They complained about being exhausted and would like to rebel against those working conditions. This person would sometimes work from 9 am to midnight, sometimes longer, seven days in a row, to finish a plan for a project that was not even lucrative (FN #33). Similarly, for planning companies and institutes, incurring a loss would be a *fall from grace.*

8.4 Planning for development and growth

In the internal review meeting for the Wanderlust plan with which this chapter started (FN #29 and additional documentation), an aspect in the description of the general rationale for the plan was the development of industry (产业发展). Here, the plan proposed assessments and interventions in all three sectors of the economy, i.e., agriculture, industry, and services. The analysis of the three sectors was as follows:

- Agriculture was still mainly structured traditionally, yet comparatively productive. Since elsewhere in the county, large agribusinesses were being established, the suggestion was to preserve the current mode of production under the strategic heading of traditional agriculture with local characteristics.

- Industry lacked a clear structure: There were many different kinds of small and spatially dispersed enterprises, which did not produce at a high level of quality (门类杂、分布散、规模小、低端), the only partial exception being the local handicraft industry. However, both government and business had already taken some measures, but the outcomes were yet unclear.

- Services were backward (带后), in the sense that the tourism industry did by far not compare to other tourism destinations in the region. The resources for tourism, which the town had to offer, were not sufficiently utilized.

Accordingly, the planners suggested economic specialization and establishing a functional centrality for the broader region among the strategic considerations.[133] However, spatial planning does not formulate economic policy but contributes to economic policy by adapting spatial structures and zoning to the respective industries' needs. The general plan for Wanderlust, therefore, translated the strategic position into zoning and construction: A regional trade base was to be established next to the local industrial zone, and in addition, an exhibition and production area for the handicraft industry was to be built. For tourism, planning's contribution concentrated on improving the townscape and implementing effective protection of historic structures so that the town's characteristics would become more convenient to experience. The population of Wanderlust town had been projected – or mandated – by higher-level plans to grow. For this reason, the planners saw stable economic

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[133] But also the protection of historical heritage and of natural resources.

development as especially necessary in order to offer jobs, income, and thereby a reason to live in Wanderlust.

The feedback from senior planners at this meeting was that, indeed, the economy must grow in pace with the population. However, they added that the analysis for industry and business had to be done better. Ideas for alternative factors or strategies were proposed, primarily pointing out regional factors such as the neighboring counties' economic strategy or an important regional road. The planner leading the meeting, however, concluded this discussion with the remark that planning cannot solve all problems in the realm of industry and development ('产业发展方面，规划不能完全解决所有问题'), that maybe the township should turn to the county government for support through policies.

Like in the plan for Wanderlust, economic development, GDP growth, and construction area growth were central considerations and objectives in most planning projects. As ***common good***, in the rural areas in which I did my research, the policies for urbanization, for the integration of urban and rural areas (城乡一体化) and for poverty reduction (脱贫 or 扶贫) posit core ideas, even though among the planners, they were never mentioned explicitly. The objectives of the economic sections of plans were always the generation of more and more stable channels of formal income, the modernization of economic structure, and a definition of local specializations based on existing strengths and resources.

The objective for Wanderlust town, more specifically, was to attract new residents; consequently, there needed to be enough sources of income. The major local branches of trade had to be strengthened and needed better and more generous spatial arrangements. This was also one of the core interests of Party Secretary Liu. Besides, tourism was to be supported because this town had excellent conditions for this purpose – there were other tourism destinations nearby, and its townscape held many historical structures. Moreover, the township government intended to lobby actively for more construction land. None of these objectives needed any further justification. The underlying vision was that of a more modern, more orderly, bigger, and wealthier small town that preserved its historical characteristics.

As ***measures of worth*** for development, planners looked at the economic structure, income levels, and a locality's overall appearance. Also, planners would assess localities as to the strengths and resources that could generate growth and development. In this context, Han Ruishan said of Wanderlust township that it has strengths (优势). This can be contrasted to Luo Zhicheng's assessment of Terracotta township, for which he had formulated a tourism concept: He told me that actually, there was nothing special to this place (FN #82., also chapter 6.3).

As it was the case in the internal review meeting for the Wanderlust project, a plan or development concept will be assessed with regard to how specific and complete its analyses are, whether ideas and objectives are realistic (in contrast to targets which are set too high only in order to please politicians), and whether spatial planning methods can solve the problems addressed. However, experienced planners argued also that planning should not

aim to create development and growth but should instead identify and solve individual and more technical planning problems in an incremental fashion (FN #88).

Teacher Yuan, in contrast, answered my question to whether planning is important for local development with a clear 'Of course, do you still need to ask this' ('当然重要了，还用问嘛。' interview Teacher Yuan). She gave the example of her plan for Hillside township in the reconstruction after the earthquake (interview Teacher Yuan, chapters 7.6.2. and 7.6.3). Before reconstruction, this town had just been one tattered, dusty street and had lived from resource extraction. By now, it had turned into a popular tourist destination. Tourism is considered a green industry, and thus, the living environment in the town had greatly improved. Moreover, people's jobs were easier now because they did not have to live of physical labor but were mostly working in the tourism sector and their income had multiplied. Therefore, Teacher Yuan was confident to state that if I asked her whether planning had a use for a town, then based on this story she would say, it makes a categorical difference ('你要问我规划，对于一个镇就有没有作用，那我就以那个来说，就完全不一样了。' Interview Teacher Yuan). However, she qualified this statement by emphasizing that planning had not brought about this transformation but had only helped the locality to make use of the opportunity which presented itself: the blank slate after the earthquake and the availability of funding from the relief funds.

What were the ***tools and mechanisms*** which Teacher Yuan had employed to make planning contribute to the development of Hillside township? The first step was the thorough reformulation and transformation (彻底转变) of the strategic positioning (定位) of the township from an industrial (工业) to a tourism town (旅游的小镇, interview Teacher Yuan). Then, money was invested in giving the newly constructed tourism quarter a unified appearance that displayed the locality's history and culture. There were also other activities to dig up (挖出) characteristics and histories of local ethnic minority cultures. Besides, the riverside was upgraded.[134]

To reformulate the strategic position of Wanderlust township, the presentation of the rationale of the general plan at the internal meeting named four significant obstacles to development in the township; for each obstacle, a strategic area in which to apply measures was identified and a strategy was sketched out. Based on this, concrete planning measures for addressing this problem were proposed. One of these problems was the direction of future development of industry and business under the heading of 'economic structure' (产业格局 or 业态). In the case of production (second sector), the proposed strategies were the standardization of products (标准化), providing a platform for marketing (平台化), increasing added value to local products (高附加值, e.g., through better design), and the establishment of brands (品牌化). To the implementation of these measures, spatial planning would contribute a tactical combination of land-use policy with industrial development (用地、产

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[134] Yet, tourism is also often a development strategy of last resort: Huang Tianming told me that in planning for rural towns, he reverts often to tourism as a strategic position, since the larger policies of concentrating production do not leave many other options (FN #45).

业发展策略). Nevertheless, as stated above, the planner leading the meeting cautioned the project team that planning could not solve all the issues connected to industrial development.

The two vignettes of Hillside township and the preliminary presentation of the Wanderlust general plan both demonstrate that spatial planning's tools for development and growth are mostly of a supporting kind: the provision of a suitable spatial layout, which also leaves space for future needs; guidance and analysis for economic policy; active support for the development of tourism industry through planning the conservation of historical structures and through landscaping; and, as in the case of the Wanderlust project, providing argumentative support for the lobbying for additional land-use quotas.

The *state of worth* of the profession of spatial planning was by many interlocutors assessed with view on whether planning contributes to development. There was a certain pride among some of my interlocutors of planning's contribution to development (interviews Chu Weide, Han Ruishan). Among older planners, there was also pride in having contributed and participated in the urban construction of the 2000s: Many interlocutors told me how they personally or spatial planning as a profession played a formative role in Chengdu's growth during this time (interviews Teacher Yuan, Mr Zhao).

However, support for economic development is not what planners have been educated to do or what the planning system is designed for, and some were highly critical of the actual contribution that planning can make (FN #45, #51). Thus, Huang Tianming stated that even though he spends a considerable proportion of his work on formulating economic strategies, he thinks that his knowledge and education in this respect are rather unsystematic (FN #45). Also, as demonstrated in the discussion of *tools and mechanisms*, with zoning and design of construction, spatial planning does not have effective means to implement those strategies. Nevertheless, expertise in economic dynamics and in regional economic analysis increasingly bring about high status.

Poor localities or localities without any resources upon which a development strategy could build constitute a ***fall from grace*** in this *order of worth*. The same applies to unrealistic economic concepts or regional economic analyses that do not fully consider all critical factors.

8.5   Planning for ecology and civilization

Rarely explicitly, but often between the lines, the question of what characterizes a place where people like to live was present in a planning process. The order of spatial 'planning for ecology and civilization' developed a high relevance in reaction to the growth-oriented planning models prevalent and to the high speed of construction and growth in the 2000s that has altered many places beyond recognition and left many towns and villages looking identical (千镇一面). Mr Zhao, a planner working at a senior position in administration, made this point in great breadth. Addressing values (价值观) of spatial planning, which I had set as one of the main topics for the interview, he said that for thirty years, from about

1980 until just before 2010, China had been on a road of high-speed expansion and development:

在过去的 30 年，肯定是这种高速扩张。包括编规划，从编规划开始。从领导到技术人员，可能脑中都想的是怎么去增加规模，增加发展的空间，怎么为下一步的发展做出有利的部署。(interview Mr Zhao)

In the last 30 years, it definitely was that kind of fast expansion. Including the formulation of spatial plans, it started with the formulation of spatial plans. From the [political] leaders to the technical personnel, in their heads, they were probably only thinking how to go about increasing scope, increasing the space for development, and producing a good set-up for the next step of development. [own translation]

Part of this trend was that planning focused on the materialization of political leaders' visions and that there was a strong focus on land sales and real estate development to strengthen local economic indicators. However, particularly since the year 2013, the central government promoted new policy objectives, and planning practice has been changing. Mr Zhao is getting somewhat emotional at this point:

我们国家的规划现在普遍转向，嗯，第一个提法叫'以人为本'。其实我一直个人觉得这个提法是错误的：规划，本来就该以人为本嘛。[…] 第二，我们从传统的扩张性规划啊，转向于这种,嗯,更加 [writes] 精细化，存量性的规划。(interview Mr Zhao)

Now there is a general change in the direction of planning in our country. The first slogan is 'people-centered.' Actually, I personally have always felt that there is a mistake in this slogan: planning at its core should be people-centered. [...] Secondly, we have changed from the traditional expansive planning to that, aehm, [writes] more meticulous and careful, reserve-oriented planning. [own translation]

He explained that this meant a turn away from the very wide streets, from industrial parks with a low intensity of land use, and other such phenomena. The people-centered approach would look to the needs of people living in the area. For example, extremely high construction densities in residential areas might be reduced and the allocation of disproportionately large tracts of land to industrial districts might be discontinued (interview Mr Zhao).It was precisely from criticism of roughly grained, generic approaches to planning that Wu Liangyong developed the concepts of ecology and civilization (生态文明, cf. Wu Weijia in Wu/ Wu 2014: 57), from which the denomination of this *order of worth* has been derived. Even though the spatial planners I encountered during my fieldwork did not engage these exact concepts, preserving the environment and historical heritage and creating places full of vitality (活力) frequently played a role in discussions about plans.

As **common good** or the ideal description of how the world should be ordered, the order of 'planning as ecology and civilization' is mostly a counter-image to much-criticized expansive planning approaches of earlier years. Such older expansive schemes are criticized for their monotonous spatial outcomes and for not sufficiently considering the needs of the peo-

ple using these spaces. 'Ecology and civilization' also provides a counter-image to over-crowded, noisy, polluted cities where people are continually under time pressure. In this imagination, both the natural environment and natural resources and people from the city can regenerate. People living in these places, while maybe less sophisticated, enjoy a more rooted way of life. In this regard, professional planners subscribe to the ideal image as represented in the rural planners brochure presented in the discussion of 'planning for ecology and civilization' from the government's perspective in chapter 6.5.

Such pure versions of 'planning for ecology and civilization,' however, were not relevant in the everyday work at New Town Company. Too many other objectives also had to be serviced, not least business requirements, local political leadership's ideas, and the need for development and growth in Chengdu municipality's less affluent hinterlands. Nevertheless, protection of the environment was deemed important enough to be named the first strategic objective in the planners' presentation at the mid-term discussion with Wanderlust government shortly after the internal meeting at the company.

As a **_measure of worth_**, complete implementation of the ideals of ecology and civilization were not realistic. For example, the internal meeting for the Wanderlust project addressed questions such as whether the protective regulation was sufficient given the local needs and context; whether the measures left scope for economic development; and whether both analysis and regulation were sufficiently fine-grained and specific.

The Wanderlust plan contained a protection plan for the historic core of the town. Here, _measures of worth_ are formulated in the assessment of the historic core of the town: On the one hand, the streets and alleys were relatively well-preserved and had a pleasant scale; on the other hand, and negatively evaluated, there was traffic chaos in which people and cars did not have their separate spaces. At the same time, this preservation plan also received high praise at the company since adequate protection or renovation were identified on a building-by-building scale.

As **_tools and mechanisms,_** the strategic plan for Wanderlust central town envisaged a combination of restoring historical structures (历史文化保护和更新) and accentuation of local stylistic characteristics (地方风貌特色) with a pursuit of preserving the arrangements of local daily life (本土生活秩序保持). The explicit objective was to avoid producing a generic tourism destination and instead recreate a bustling Sichuanese market town.

On a more concrete level of preservation, the protection plan mapped out which streets in the town were of the highest historical interest. For these streets and alleyways, the plan took stock of the existing buildings one by one, classifying them as to their capacity (潜力), i.e., the potential for restoring a historic appearance.[135] From this map, the planners distilled an operational plan for the near, medium, and long-term, specifying which areas to renovate

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[135] This ‚capacity' was a compound indicator composed of historical/cultural value of the building, state or private ownership, whether it was used as residential building or for business, and the height of the buildings.

at which point of time and for which purpose. This plan demonstrates what Mr Zhao described at the beginning of this section as a more meticulous and careful (细化) approach to spatial planning.

However, an analysis of textbooks on small-town planning has shown that approaches to spatial planning that aim to protect living environments and preserve heritage are not consolidated yet (Melcher 2017). Unlike growth or regulation, there is no fixed set of measures which are implemented relatively uniformly. Instead, approaches are developed and applied in a trial-and-error fashion. The widespread criticism of local development catered exclusively to tourists and forgot the local population constitutes one example of such incremental learning.[136] Thus, even though much effort went into conceptualizing the protection of both heritage and natural resources in the Wanderlust project, the *tools and mechanisms* are much more exploratory than those utilized to pursue economic development or implement higher-level regulation.

In the assessment of **state of worth** among spatial planners in the order of 'ecology and civilization,' expertise in culture, history, or environment counted less than a sense of the aesthetic qualities of spaces in which liveability, environment, or history and culture were to be protected. In the different plans and concepts for tourism development, it is visible that creativity was helpful. Thus, regarding *state of worth*, *measures of worth*, and **falls from grace**, what counts is the presence of historical, people-centered, or environmental considerations and wholehearted exploration of possible approaches. As illustrated at the beginning of this section, *falls from grace* are materialized in many projects of previous years, which applied broad-brush approaches to large areas of land and had little regard for people, environment, and local heritage.

8.6   Conclusion

The analysis above shows how *orders of worth* play out in the work and reasoning of professional planners. For the general plan for Wanderlust township and the internal discussion of this project at New Town Company, the *orders of worth* can be summarized as follows: All *orders* but 'planning as a business' have been implied in the internal review meeting for the Wanderlust plan (introduction to chapter 8). The generation of economic growth and the attraction of new residents ('planning for development and growth') are core challenges for the Wanderlust plan. Senior planners criticized both the concepts proposed in this regard as insufficiently rooted in concrete analysis and the problem definitions as off-topic since spatial planning methods could not solve many of the issues identified. 'Ecology and civilization' has also been shown as of high relevance since the township is rich in natural resources and historical heritage, seen as worthy of protection. The town, with its well-

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[136] Development of and planning for tourism, however, is a frequently used approach to integrate the objectives of protection and growth. Nevertheless, in the order of 'planning for development and growth,' this more often than not is a measure of last resort, if regulation and local circumstances prevent any other development strategy.

preserved traditional core, was perceived to be especially liveable. To further strengthen these characteristics, the plan envisaged both restrictive regulation and a very fine-grained scheme for protection. The order of 'planning as a business' did not come up for the simple reason that the project incurred losses and thus was a severe *fall from grace* from a business perspective. However, the protracted planning process, which caused the financial loss, at the same time made the project especially worthy in the *orders* of 'planning as a craft' and 'planning as regulation and public provision.' According to Teacher Wei, in the long-lasting exchange with Wanderlust government, a plan had been produced that provided professional consultation and input to local policy; it was both fine-grained and well-adapted to the local circumstances ('planning as a craft'). The plan carefully considered all relevant technical standards, secured a consistent cover of the territory with infrastructure and public services, and provided sufficient detail so that the township could easily implement the regulation ('planning as regulation and public provision') (interview Teacher Wei).

In the plan for Wanderlust township, the project team accommodated these different *common good*s by designating physical space to each: Thus, there were areas for business development, areas for preserving historical buildings, and environmental protection zones. Equally, technical standards and regulations prescribe areas to be set aside for various public constructions; these had been strictly adhered to. 'Planning as a craft,' in turn, is reflected in the rationalities of structuring the territory.

However, while the different *orders of worth* were accommodated side by side over the territory, there still are conflicts: While regulation aims for standardization and the reproduction of recognizable patterns, both 'planning as a craft' and 'planning for ecology and civilization' place a high value on locally specific measures and approaches to planning. Development and growth in the entire region were heavily restricted by the higher-level regulation aiming to protect and preserve landscape, nature, and regional heritage. Thus, no *order of worth* is all-dominant in this constellation.

All this demonstrates that the considerations, arguments, and contents of spatial planners' work can indeed be analyzed through the lens of *orders of worth.* Using this theory has helped me to sort through and highlight the complex constellation of attributions of worthiness and common goods that planners accommodate in formulating a spatial plan. Moreover, I demonstrated that my interlocutors were indeed invested in each of the *orders of worth*, even though their priorities differed according to professional and individual dispositions.

In conjunction with the other analytical interlude, it becomes apparent that in spatial planning, professional planners and government officials share an understanding and recognition of the same set of *orders of worth.* Differences between the groups of actors lie in priorizations of objectives and the *tools and mechanisms* at the respective disposal. For example, spatial planners are heavily invested in the essential worthiness of 'ecology and civilization.' For local government, this is mostly of instrumental value as it can support local economic development. However, higher government and administration levels place great

store in protection, as is demonstrated by development restrictions through zoning, regulation, and the land-use administration system. Thus, local governments, especially in the peripheral small towns whose planning this research focuses on, have to navigate development restrictions to pursue economic development. At the same time, planners are assigned part of the responsibility to implement these restrictions.

Each of the *orders of worth* is heavily structured by state regulation: Government development discourse sets the agenda of what is discussed in the planning profession and defines the demands and tasks of spatial planners. 'Regulation and public provision' are, of course, the core realm of the state. The market organization of spatial planning has also been set up and structured by the state. Higher-level governments thereby gave professional planning some authority to advise local governments and to restrain potential expansionist aspirations. Moreover, the framing and the *tools and mechanisms* of both 'development and growth' and 'ecology and civilization' have directly grown out of the government structures and policies of the Chinese state.[137]

The role of policy and state structure is an ambivalent one: While, in case of doubt or conflict, the pursuit of political benefit and a decision for what is presumably politically wanted overrules other considerations, each of the *orders of worth* has its institutional place in central policy. This overlap between central political preferences and planning practice, on the one hand, is to be expected because spatial planning is a branch of policy-making. On the other hand, this observation calls for critical investigation: It seems unlikely that societal objectives and ideal imaginations directly mirror a political agenda.

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[137] Demonstrating the degree to which that is the case, however, is beyond the scope of the present analysis, since empirical data and analysis would have to target more central government organizations.

9   Conclusion and outlook

Huang Tianming was a planner from a planning institute with whom I met regularly for discussion and exchange. In his mid-thirties, father to a small child, he already headed the section specialized in towns and rural areas in the institute where he worked. Towards the end of my fieldwork, we went out and had hotpot with another friend of his. This friend was in Chengdu only for a visit, since he was currently doing his Ph.D. in the US (FN #98). At some point, Huang Tianming commented that he felt like following us others' example and start a Ph.D. because he was fed up with his current work. Asked why this was the case, he told us about a project he had worked on: His planning team had developed a very innovative, technically refined general plan. The proposed solution was based on a comparative discussion of alternative spatial structures; he was proud of this plan and of its sophisticated approach. Moreover, in the internal assessment at his institute, this plan had received excellent feedback. However, the local political leader had summarily dismissed their concept, simply because he did not see his pet project, a cultural center (文化馆), fully realized.

Huang Tianming's friend backed him up by saying that in China, spatial planning is just serving the government (给政府服务), and he meant this somewhat derogatory. However, Huang Tianming replied that he wants to serve the government – but in this case, they would not let him, the solution he had proposed had not been given proper consideration. He elaborated that it was problematic if a political leader does not have any technical understanding. If this were the case, the leadership would complicate the job of administration and planners, because then they would not take advice. He also complained that the system was too hierarchical, leading local levels to serve higher government levels rather than making policy that fits local needs.

Huang Tianming recounts a *fall from grace*, in which political strategy overruled technical sophistication and – most likely – a plan that balanced regulatory, development-related, and preservation requirements. Moreover, the degree of his frustration suggests that this was not the first time that something like this happened. Thus, this vignette seems to suggest that maybe, after all, the literature on local policy-making, which I introduced in the introduction to this dissertation, is right: Local decision making follows a logic of political benefit. Nevertheless, the vignette above also demonstrates that Huang Tianming wants to do a good job and that such a dismissal as he recounts may happen, but is not the rule.

This dissertation demonstrates that spatial plans are formulated in an interplay between politicians, administrative staff, and professional planners. Moreover, common normative orientations appear in the positions and contributions of those three groups of actors in the planning process. It was easily possible to formulate each *order of worth* from both the perspectives of local government and spatial planners; the analysis demonstrates that the different voices talk to the same values and ideas. Thus, I have established a set of ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness shared by the different groups of persons involved in

spatial planning in rural Sichuan. These *orders of worth* provide justifications for the contents of a spatial plan and for differing opinions in the course of a planning process.

On the following pages, I will first go back to the arguments which form the basis of this dissertation and retrace how research design and analysis have confirmed these arguments. I then sum up the empirical findings about spatial planning before presenting the analytical results in a condensed form and discuss the merits and problems of my research design and use of theory.

9.1   Summary of research design

The vignette above demonstrates two of the core argumentative bases of this dissertation: First, planning is complex; the objectives and ideal imaginations of persons involved in planning have to be taken seriously. And second, policy decision making is not entirely about politics; we have to consider both the other persons involved and the substantive contents of the respective policy. Starting from these two arguments, this dissertation contributes an account of a set of *orders of worth* providing normative orientations to the literature on both spatial planning and local policy-making in China.

First, in light of the complex nature of problems with which spatial planning deals, there is never one optimal technical solution that satisfies all needs. Existing English-language research on spatial planning in China points to many significant problems both in the planning system and in the approaches to planning. However, it does not convey a sense of what spatial planners want to achieve with their work. I criticize this literature for its implicit value assumptions since an understanding of spatial planning formed in Western contexts is used as a yardstick to evaluate the Chinese system of spatial planning. Instead, I argue, it is imperative to look at the objectives of those involved in the planning process, before pointing to interests that may have been overlooked in the plan or making suggestions on how the apparatus or approach may be improved. The vignette above demonstrates this: Huang Tianming and the company where he works at have ideas about what would make a good plan; they negotiate this with local governments and administrations. The situation he recounts is a case in which the planning process's result was less than optimal. Nevertheless, it shows that a planning process involves negotiation and contestation over various objectives, some of which are informed by attributions of worthiness. A research approach that only assesses the outcome of the planning process will not have seen these negotiations.

In my research, I have looked at planning practice, i.e., at the processes and working routines of spatial planning. I have asked how planners define which problems their work is supposed to solve and how they discuss plans and concepts both amongst themselves and with their clients, local governments. Through this perspective, I have shown that objectives, approaches, and social contributions of spatial planning are far from being singular and clear-cut. I have also shown that the persons involved in spatial planning know this and

engage this complexity. I have demonstrated the administrative process and the actors involved in making a spatial plan, thereby showing that spatial plans are the product of many voices and many different institutional influences. I have also presented the different roles in which spatial planners see themselves, the organizational setting in which they work, and the business and career requirements that they face. Thus, I provide a depiction of the planning profession and the complexities and aspirations that form the context of spatial planners' work, thereby complicating the criticisms of spatial planning in the literature.

Second, I also criticized the existing literature on local policy-making and local governments in China for focusing exclusively on the dynamics of political power, influence, and particular benefit. These narratives largely discount the possibility that policy, in its substantive content, aims to contribute to a common or public purpose. My argument in this regard is twofold: on the one hand, I make the point that it is worthwhile to take policies and positions at their face value, instead of exclusively asking about the interest and agenda behind them; on the other hand, I argue that policy is only made and decided solely by the political leadership of one county or township or administrative body. Instead, administrative staff and professionals, in this case spatial planners, inform the policy on many different counts; they have the technical and legal knowledge, which is necessary for the formulation of policy. Therefore, any policy decision is not just an outcome of political bargaining, but also the product of the work of administrative staff and technical experts in consultation of and under the leadership of political officials. Hence, in the vignette above, Huang Tianming's frustration: He sees himself as a professional who could provide valuable advice to the local political leader. From this account, it also becomes clear that he is not always overruled.

I have empirically shown that planners' expertise is not always, but often accepted by the political leadership; the administration provides procedural and legal support, coordinates decisions with higher-level regulation, and contributes experience in the respective field of policy-making. I make this point by describing the assessment processes through which any spatial plan has to pass, which include political assessment and an assessment from other bureaus at the locality and by higher levels of planning administration. Also, my mapping of the process in which a spatial plan is formulated in collaboration between local government and spatial planners demonstrates this fact.

To support my arguments, this dissertation identifies and describes a set of *orders of worth*, i.e., ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness, which influence spatial planning. For this, I used an adaptation of B&Th's (1991/2006) *Sociology of Conventions*, which formulates six *polities/ common worlds* between which persons switch, and which serve as argumentative backdrops in justifying any decision. I have used the metatheoretical architecture of this theory and empirically describe five *orders of worth*:

- 'Spatial planning as a craft': Spatial planning provides necessary professional standards and specialized expertise to spatial policy formulation;

- ▪ 'Spatial planning as regulation and public provision': As a branch of public administration, planning serves to consolidate both state control of the territory and the capacity of the state to provide public services throughout this territory;
- ▪ 'Spatial planning as a business': Local governments contract plan-making out to profit-oriented planning companies or institutes;
- ▪ 'Spatial planning for development and growth': Economic development as a core objective of local policy-making;
- ▪ 'Spatial planning for ecology and civilization': Protection of environment, of historical heritage, and the creation of liveable spaces as essential objectives of spatial policy and regulation.

I have identified these *orders of worth* by focusing on the arguments and positions raised in planning documents, policies, and discussions in planning processes I accompanied. Each of these *orders of worth* introduces objectives and leading ideas to a planning process, each leads to the problematization of specific issues – possibly at the expense of other problems. In this, the *orders of worth* are not necessarily, but often mutually contradictory and leave the persons involved in spatial planning to discuss the various objectives and either find solutions that bridge orders of worth or decide on priorities.

I have demonstrated that all groups of actors in the field of spatial planning in Sichuan have an understanding of these *orders of worth* and – in principle – to accept the legitimacy of each *order of worth*. Because these *orders of worth* are commonly recognized as legitimate normative orientations, they are used as references for supporting arguments in favor or against any position and are therefore easy to identify and describe empirically.

The descriptions of the *orders of worth* in two analytical interludes provide a formulation of the different objectives which the persons involved in a planning process engage. Analysis has taken the form of an open-ended process of coding and categorizing my empirical data, alternating between inductive identification and demarcation of *orders of worth* and deductive search for instances of the descriptive categories within the *orders of worth* in my data. This analysis needed to be based on a solid understanding of the empirical field. For this reason, empirical descriptions of the state system of spatial planning (chapter 5) and of spatial planning as a profession (chapter 7) alternate with these analytical interludes in order to provide in-depth accounts of the empirical field in addition to an analysis of the *orders of worth* which are active in the field.

9.2   Empirical findings: Spatial planning in rural Sichuan

9.2.1   What is planning?

In the introduction to this dissertation, I defined spatial planning as what planners do and – analogously – a spatial plan as the product of what spatial planners do. After the

empirical mappings of the spatial planning system in chapter 5 and the profession of spatial planning in chapter 7, a more concrete characterization can be offered:[138] Spatial planning is at once an area of policy-making and administration and a profession, with its own academic discipline. As an area of policy-making, spatial planning develops spatial development strategies, thereby ordering the territory of the local state; this includes considerations about development outlook and regulation of construction and distribution of infrastructure and economic activity. The associated administration for spatial planning facilitates the formulation of spatial plans and contributes some expertise; it ensures implementation, both vis-à-vis lower levels of government and vis-à-vis concrete construction projects or in the form of public investment.

The core tasks of spatial planning are services for local governments since spatial plans have to be formulated by companies or institutes that hold the respective licenses; therefore, plan-making has to be contracted out in most cases. Therefore, the formulation of spatial plans is a business. There is also an academic discipline of spatial planning, with specialized journals, conferences, and research projects. This discipline informs planning practice, and there are many personal connections between planning practice and academia. Many spatial planners have received an education in this discipline; however, this education is criticized for being based heavily on architecture curricula. For this reason, spatial planners receive much of their training on the job.

The profession and professional practice of spatial planning are changing: analytical capabilities are becoming more critical and detailed concepts are valued much more, in contrast to the broad-brush designs of earlier years. The position of spatial planners as independent experts has been strengthened both because of the commercialization of spatial planning and because they have the expertise on the legal frameworks that plans have to adhere to. Therefore, as Feng (2016) has also described, the status of spatial planners is transforming from technicians who draw up plans according to the ideas of a politician to independent experts who consult governments and who carry part of the responsibility for the implementation of higher-level regulation in a local spatial plan.

Spatial planning covers a wide range of contents: It includes analytical tasks, such as assessments of regional geography and socio-economic dynamics, as well as the formulation of concepts for economic development. On the technical side, the traditional core of spatial planning are zoning plans, concrete construction designs, and layouts of the distribution of public infrastructure. Finally, as a branch of administration and regulation, spatial plans in some aspects constitute binding legal documents. Spatial planners apply relevant technical standards and higher-level plans to the territory and translate policy onto an area; this also includes the formulation of technical standards and regulation.

Probably because of its heavy involvement in policy-making and formulation of regulation, the planning profession is strictly regulated. Both individual planners and planning

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[138] This holds only true for my specific empirical field, i.e., for spatial planning in rural Sichuan.

companies or institutes have to obtain certificates. Planning institutes and companies can formulate legally binding plans only according to the license level they have.

9.2.2   The administrative system of spatial planning

The mapping of the administrative system of spatial planning in chapter 5 substantiates my argument that to understand the meaning and content of policy, not only politics but also administration and the sources of technical expertise have to be taken into account. This is especially true for spatial planning since it is situated so blatantly at the intersection between politics, technical administration and implementation, and a profession.

As conceptual framing for my account of the administrative setting in which spatial planning takes place, I introduced the *Fragmented Authoritarianism Framework* (e.g., Lieberthal/ Oksenberg 1988; Lieberthal/ Lampton (eds.) 1992; Mertha 2009; Brødsgaard (ed.) 2017). This framework describes the vertical and horizontal lines of power that characterize the Chinese system of government and administration. Research in this framework has demonstrated that coordination across the boundaries of branches of administration is barely formalized. Therefore, many decisions result from negotiations and bureaucratic bargaining; project planning and decision-making processes are often indeterminate and open-ended.

Instead of looking at coordination between branches of administration, I applied this framework to elucidate the structures and processes within one vertical line of administration, i.e., the planning ministries and bureaus. I identified three groups of actors: politicians, administrative staff, and professional planners, with the focus of this chapter lying on the first two groups. I demonstrated that a general plan at the township level is formulated in interaction between local government, higher-level planning administration, and planning company before it goes into an assessment process with other administrative branches and is finally passed into local law. Through this process, regulation is increasingly concretized, the lower the administrative level, with the higher levels in many cases setting benchmarks, corridors, or objectives. Thereby I demonstrated that while the regulatory framework is kept in very technical phrasing, the boundary between technical and political aspects is blurred: What arrives at the local level as technical standard has been a political decision at higher levels.

There is a clear boundary between administrative staff and politicians: Administrative staff are those who – in contrast to politicians – have fixed positions at one administrative body at one locality. They are responsible for the organization of planning processes, from collecting data and documents to the convening of assessment meetings. In their self-conception, the administrative staff I talked to emphasized that it is their job to ensure compliance with higher-level regulation and to implement spatial plans. I found that this group of actors is barely covered in the literature on policy-making in China. While there is a clear

boundary between politicians, administrative staff, and planners, this boundary is also porous. Both political and administrative positions are open for spatial planners, and administrative staff may change to a political career path.

Despite my initial assumption that in the administration of spatial planning, coordination with other branches of administration and areas of policy-making would be of central importance, I found only limited instances of horizontal policy coordination: At the beginning of a planning process, policy documents and data are collected from other bureaus, but there is no substantial communication; during the planning process, the involvement of the political leadership ensures that the broader policy context is not lost from view. At the end of a planning process, the products are assessed by both technical and political representatives of other bureaus. This positioning of assessment and influence at the end of a planning process gives the other bureaus a certain degree of veto power over a spatial plan, but no formative influence over its concepts and contents. The scarcity of instances of communication between branches of the administration confirms the diagnosis of fragmentation of the administrative and political system in the theoretical framework. However, I did not witness substantive bureaucratic bargaining or other forms of political negotiation in spatial planning.

9.2.3   The profession of spatial planning

In order to do justice to this multifaceted character of spatial planning being political, administrative-technical, and professional-technical at once, the second empirical chapter (chapter 7) focuses on the roles that spatial planners take on in their jobs. This chapter's core and purpose are to demonstrate the diversity of skills, bodies of knowledge, and professional roles that planners navigate in their jobs and thereby to specify in more detail the pressures and influences that shape the products of spatial planning. This supports my argument that technical professionals make a central contribution to the formulation of policies and regulation, in this case, of spatial plans.

This chapter demonstrates how spatial planners shift between providing technical support, acting as more or less critical and independent consultants, and being businesspeople in their jobs, while still looking to the question of how they can contribute to society. These varying contributions of spatial planners support the argument that to understand the concepts and contents of spatial plans, it is not enough to look at the politicians involved in the formulation of plans. The demonstration of various roles of planners also complicates the accounts the literature on spatial planning by demonstrating that the planning profession does not only serve the aspirations to expansive growth of local governments (e.g., Wu 2015), and that it also does not only unreflectively apply construction standards at the expense of local tradition or lifestyles (e.g., Curien 2014).

As a conceptual frame, this chapter utilizes the theorizing about professional roles of spatial planners, respectively of architects, by Feng (2016) and Xie Tian (2010). Both suggest

that the professional groups they investigate have a choice between different roles, which vary in the degree to which they provide independent and critical expertise. Roles are conceptualized here as the varying ways in which persons fill a position so as to do justice not only to outside expectations but also to their aspirations and society-oriented motivations. Overall, Feng's (2016) definition of roles – planners caught between doing technical tasks according to the government's bidding or setting the agendas of spatial plans – has provided a productive heuristic for this chapter. However, she has concentrated exclusively on spatial planners' roles vis-à-vis government and, therefore, has overseen the business and intellectual dimensions of being a spatial planner.

The chapter first made the point that it is legitimate to label spatial planning as a profession. It has a formalized education system in which theoretical, codified knowledge is imparted; there is an academic discipline of spatial planning which guides practice and provides innovation; and there is a lively professional discourse. However, it is also true that spatial planning – in light of its involvement in regulation and legislation – is subject to heavy state regulation, both in terms of licensing and the definition of the core bodies of knowledge. While Xie Tian (2010) and Feng (2016) deny spatial planning the label 'profession' because of this heavy state influence, I continue to use the term. The reasons are that, pragmatically, 'profession' is the best term that I could find, and that spatial planning increasingly is afforded a position of independent expertise in the policy-formulation process. Moreover, I maintain that planning being involved in policy-making, and China being a strong authoritarian state, state influence on the profession is inevitable and, therefore, cannot be used as the sole decisive criterium.

The formulation of spatial plans today is largely commercialized, while until the 1990s, it was still a task of the administrative apparatus. For this reason, business-related considerations of efficiency and profitability are now a part of the planning rationale. The planners I spoke to strongly supported commercialization because it afforded them more freedom in allocating their time and labor force and because they felt that they were free to walk away from projects. This strengthened their status as independent experts.

New entrants to the profession are trained on the job, and senior planners take on mostly advisory, management, and supervisory tasks. However, conditions for having success in the planning profession have changed over recent years. Older generations of planners have been able to make a career mainly based on their capabilities in design. In contrast, among younger planners, what counts is analytical competence, an understanding of economic dynamics, and a sensitivity to environmental protection, historic preservation, and liveability. However, planning education is still primarily geared towards the design aspects of spatial planning and receives much criticism for that.

There are considerable communication problems between professional planners and local governments, which leads to much frustration on both sides. I explained this problem with the strong conceptual differentiation between technical and management work; spatial

planners' expertise is targeted purely to the technical side of spatial planning, i.e., the formulation of plans, and there is little understanding for or even knowledge about administrative procedures or needs. This is especially acute in rural contexts, where spatial planning is a new task of policy-making and where administrations are small, poorly financed, and not highly professionalized.

My empirical engagement with the processes, the administrative system, and the professional practice of spatial planning demonstrates that there is a recognition among spatial planners of the problems within the field and the problems that planning cannot solve. There is a search for tools and processes to address these problems and improve this system. Nevertheless, from my perspective as a foreign outsider with some professional training, I encountered some blind spots in planning practice and in how planners talked about their work, which I would like to raise at this point:

- Spatial planning, in its contents, concepts, and objectives, is highly interdisciplinary; it has the potential to facilitate communication between administrative branches and areas of policy-making. Also, a planning process could provide an arena for discussion and personal exchange between the administrative bodies. However, as I have demonstrated, communication between branches of the administration during a planning process remains superficial; I also found that spatial planners' communication skills do not receive any explicit recognition or systematic training.

- Planning discourse in China focusses on the practical methods of spatial planning: What is a good approach to this problem? What are the concrete working steps in order to achieve a particular outcome? Only rarely, the structure of the planning system and the implementation of plans are discussed, and even less did I encounter theorization of spatial planning. Such theorization might ask questions such as: What is our role in society? To which groups of actors do we relate in which way? With what sorts of problems are we confronted, and what are our overarching objectives in addressing these problems? I think that much of the frustration of spatial planners and the expectation that spatial planning can solve many problems at once came from the lack of space and of impulse to critically reflect on the planning profession's role and status in the social and political fabric.

9.3   Analytical findings: *Orders of worth* in spatial planning

This dissertation's core argument is that – besides political calculation and the pursuit of interests – ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness do matter in the formulation of spatial plans in rural Sichuan. In order to prove this, I have applied an adaptation of *Sociology of Conventions* (Boltanski/ Thévenot 1991/2006, short B&Th). In this framework, there are multiple, commonly accepted *polities/common worlds* that persons refer to when they need to justify their actions or positions or bring forward criticism. Each *polity/ common*

world is equally valid. Persons either routinely follow the polity/ common world established for a certain situation or reflexively switch between orders in case of uncertainty or disagreement. Depending on the concrete circumstances, separate *orders of worth* can mutually contradict or support each other.

As part of their theory, B&Th identify and describe six *polities/ common worlds* as well as how they mutually support or conflict. However, because this has been developed for the French context, I have only adopted the framework's overall structure. I have complemented it with considerations from the *Institutional Logics Perspective* (Thornton/ Ocasio/ Lounsbury 2012) to justify my empirical identification and description of *orders of worth* at the meso-level, i.e., in the empirical field of spatial planning in rural Sichuan.

As they are conceptualized in *Sociology of Conventions, orders of worth* are frames of reference for justification and evaluation, at whose center stands a *common good*, i.e., an essential idea about how the world should be. *Orders of worth* differ in terms of what counts as relevant, by which characteristics phenomena or persons are evaluated, and consequently, in the internal differentiations between good and suboptimal. What makes this framework especially adequate to my research interest is the fundamental conceptualization of a set of alternative *orders of worth*, each of which equally legitimate and valid as the others.

9.3.1   Five *orders of worth* in spatial planning

Analysis has focused on the identification and empirical description of five *orders of worth*. Their presentation has been rigidly structured by the categories of

- *Common good:* What is the core value and ideal imagination of how the world works in this *order of worth*?
- *Measure of worth:* According to which characteristics and criteria are better and not-so-good measured in this *order of worth*?
- *Tools and mechanisms:* Which chains of causality bring about a better result in this *order of worth*, and which tools do spatial planning and/ or policy have to contribute to such a better result in this *order of worth*?
- *State of worth:* How is the social position of persons assessed in this *order of worth*? How can people improve their status?
- *Fall from grace:* From the perspective of this *order of worth*, what is a bad outcome, what sorts of plans, constellations, or persons are deemed to be unworthy or in need of improvement?

The presentation of the results of analysis is distributed over two analytical interludes, each of which presents the full set of *orders of worth*:

- **'Spatial planning as a craft'** describes the technical proficiency and the skills that spatial planners bring to a planning project. This *order of worth* contains the conviction

that relevant professional expertise is needed to make solid policy. It also includes the planning profession's measurements about what constitutes a good plan and what characterizes a good planner.

- **'Spatial planning as regulation and public provision'** covers the state's rights and responsibilities concerning spatial policy. It contains the twin-objective of full control over the respective administrative territory and effective supply of state services, public facilities, and infrastructures following political priorities. Spatial planning contributes to this objective by providing spatial analysis, regulatory tools, and plans for extending infrastructure over space.

- **'Spatial planning as a business'** describes the pursuit of a beneficial relationship between costs and benefits both on the sides of local governments and spatial planners. In the course of the commercialization of spatial planning, planners and governments are now – among other forms of relationship – also in a contract-based relationship of a service provider and a client, with the planners trying to establish lasting business relationships with governments while not putting more effort (cost) into a plan than the revenue (benefit) would merit.

- **'Spatial planning for development and growth'** contains the pursuit of wealth and development for the locality. Among the tools and indicators are growth of construction area, real estate investment, and population. In this context, spatial planning often provides argumentation and framing for projects and growth aspirations envisaged by local leadership, but also orders space so that today's construction does not impede future development and contributes to the formulation of development strategies. Planning, in turn, profits from growth: Growth brings construction activity, and the basis for any construction has to be a spatial plan.

- **'Spatial planning for ecology and civilization'** addresses the needs to protect the environment, landscape, local heritage and tradition, and to bring about liveable settlements. In many respects, this is done through restrictive regulation by higher administrative governments at the expense of the opportunities of development and growth on the part of local government; but also by planners and in local-level governments, not just the instrumental but also the essential worth of protection and preservation received ample recognition.

In the context of all these *orders of worth*, planned and effectively regulated spatial development is better than informal construction or lack of implementation of planning. In the order of 'planning as a craft,' this would lead to chaos and inefficiency in the use of space. In the order of 'regulation and public provision,' lack of effective implementation of planning regulation, construction leads to disorder and insecurity; provision of public facilities will be unsystematic and not equitable. All of this leads to a loss of state control over space. If no plans are being made, then the business of spatial planning is unviable. From the perspective of development and growth, unplanned construction will lead to inefficient spatial structures

which hamper economic productivity and the wealth on the given territory; while from the standpoint of ecology and civilization, lack of planning leads to deficient or absent regulation and, therefore, construction at the expense of the environment, heritage, and liveability. Vice versa, as the descriptions of the *orders of worth* in the analytical interludes have demonstrated, each of these *orders of worth* constitutes a legitimate normative orientation in the process of formulating spatial plans as well as regulation of planning and construction.

9.3.2   Boundaries of analysis

Analysis has not gone all the way of showing how *orders of worth* are practically relevant in spatial planning. I have also not paid systematic attention to constellations of collusion or conflict between *orders of worth*, which would have necessitated another round of analysis. Instead, I chose to focus on the identification and description of *orders of worth*. This decision stems from my conviction that it is imperative not to bring value orientations from outside, i.e., from planning theory or from my personal background, to the field but to identify them empirically; for this reason, I have invested the analytical effort solely into this question. I have also focused on the characterization of orders in the confidence that the descriptions will demonstrate the practical relevance of *orders of worth* and how persons position themselves with respect to the *orders of worth.*

Since I did not try to provide a systematic analysis of the practical relevance of the *orders of worth*, I also cannot measure how important *orders of worth* are compared to the pursuit of political benefits and interests. However, I have presented many instances of discussion and exchange between spatial planners and politicians in the initial phase of conceptualizing a spatial plan and have never encountered a situation that was as drastic as what Huang Tianming recounts in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. Instead, for example in the Wanderlust planning process, planners would try to accommodate politicians' wishes and ideas in their conceptualizations. Politicians would consider the advice of planners on their pet projects. Such a close interweaving of interest and ideal imaginations seems logical to me: interests, after all, will be informed by the values a person holds; moreover, local governments are the clients of spatial planners and therefore, of course, make decisions about how the product, the spatial plan, will look like. All of this happens in a heavily regulated setting; the regulatory framework emphasizes each of the *orders of worth.*

A blind spot of my analysis is to be traced back to the theoretical framework: Only at a late point in the analysis did I realize that certain inconsistencies could be explained by an ongoing change in the *measures of worth* and in how *state of worth* is attributed in the planning profession. B&Th do not mention the possibility of *polities/ common worlds* changing over time, and I had not taken this possibility into account. Especially for contexts undergoing rapid change, this possibility needs to be theorized.

My analysis is a snapshot of a moment in time for a particular branch of policy-making in a small part of Sichuan: I cannot make any statements about generalizability over time,

space, or issue area. The orders I have identified and described in this dissertation are the ones that are most striking and relevant in my body of data. However, this set of *orders of worth* is by no means complete. Moreover, the *orders of worth* I have presented still ask for validation from both Chinese literature in the planning profession and other realms of spatial planning. Out of pragmatic considerations, I did not systematically map instances of conflict or collusion between *orders of worth*. Therefore, the *orders of worth* that I identified and described do not compare to B&Th's work in neither depth nor scope.

9.3.3 Assessment of research design and theoretical framework

It was a risky undertaking to adopt the meta-theoretical structure of B&Th's *Sociology of Conventions* to spatial planning in Sichuan. Much of the existing research suggested that normative orientations are barely involved in spatial planning; for this reason, my research objective and approach were far off the beaten track and might easily have gone wrong. It was a highly ambitious plan to replicate – if at a smaller scale and with less depth – B&Th's analysis in the frame of one dissertation. I have sketched above the results and argued that I see the initial assumption that ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness play a role in spatial planning in rural Sichuan confirmed. Moreover, the theoretical framework has proven highly apt to the purposes I needed it for: It provided pragmatic access to a complex constellation of objectives and to demonstrating that each group of actors engages each separate *order of worth*. Thereby, it effectively supported me in adding an account of a variety of ideal orientations to the literature on spatial planning and local policy-making in China.

With the explicit conceptualization that there is no objectively correct ordering of evaluations, the framework accommodates the proposition that decisions in spatial planning have to be taken based on prioritization in the face of complexity and orientation towards the future. Persons have a choice to either routinely follow the *order of worth,* which by convention prevails in a situation, or critically assess the situation from the perspective of another *order of worth.* This conceptualization makes it possible to accommodate scenarios in which persons involved are of different opinions, none of which is right or wrong: They are negotiating different priorities, each of which is equally legitimate.

My reformulation and adaptation have taken B&Th's framework a long way from its original purpose: The authors formulated this as a theory of critique to explain what happens in exceptional cases of conflict or disagreement. They envisaged their framework to elucidate and contextualize different positions, thereby illustrating how various *common worlds* are reflected in the final agreement. In contrast, this dissertation applied the framework's basic structure to policy decision-making processes, which – by design – posit conflicting positions as normality.

I maintain that this framework provided a very productive lens to tell a story about ideal imaginations in China's local policy-making. It led me to focus on the substances of policy

formulations and to ask for commonly shared perspectives. However, asking about the commonly shared value basis that legitimates positions and arguments has naturally blinded me to the instrumental, power- and interest-oriented reasonings behind those arguments. To a certain degree, this was countered by the narratives employing more established perspectives in the empirical chapters (chapters 5 and 7). It is also a weakness that I have accepted from the beginning of this project because there is ample literature that covers these dimensions of local policy-making in China (e.g., Teets/ Hurst (eds.) 2015; Hillmann 2014). My openly stated disinterest in games of power and interest has also made access to the field easy.

A gap in the theory is that the state has a formative influence on each of the orders of worth that I describe. B&Th introduce the concept of *beings* that are of relevance in some *polities/ common worlds* but not in others. Moreover, in their conceptualization, the use or threat of violence interrupt the mechanisms through which *polities/ common worlds* work. In my empirical field, however, it does not seem to make sense to treat the state as a being whose relevance is contingent on the respective *order of worth*, precisely because, in policy-making, the state is omnipresent.[139] I am also hesitant to equate all state influence with a threat of violence. Therefore, a further application of my reformulation of B&Th's framework would have to theorize social structures that affect the full set or the majority of *orders of worth* described.

Discussions between planners and politicians did not take place in a perfectly democratic setting, as B&Th envisioned such discussions to be. Due to their political power and status as clients in a contract, politicians' views were usually decisive. Moreover, the planning processes took place under heavy constrictions of time and space. Therefore, as the products of a planning process, spatial plans should by no means be considered the results of an open discussion between equal partners in a setting free of power and other restrictions. Nevertheless, discussions and exchanges in the planning process sometimes were controversial, they were often very open, and planners would bring in their views and defend them vis-à-vis officials. At the planning company, too, good arguments and solid research counted a lot in the discussions despite differentials in status and authority. When persons refer to *orders of worth* to justify or legitimate an action or a position, relevant is not whether they are sincere, but whether this statement is accepted as legitimate by the other persons involved.

It is vexing that I applied a theory of critique to depict that there are sometimes conflicting values – and yet, the overall narrative seems to be of a very harmonious constellation.[140] Thus, while the theoretical framework is highly effective in describing a complex

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[139] B&Th's *polities/ common worlds* are conceptualized in a society-wide and historical scope, while I look at a specific point in time and at the meso-level only. For B&Th's macro perspective, setting the state as contingent makes much more sense than in my empirical setting and my empirical scope.

[140] I hope to have made clear, despite this, that there was a lot of frustration among spatial planners about the pressures at the job, about not being permitted to substantially contribute, or about not having much prospect for career.

constellation of *orders of worth* and thereby demonstrating that value orientations matter in this empirical field, it seems to take the critical, defiant edge of real human beings. Edges are smoothed precisely because there is a value-based explanation for any position or action (and a small residual for actions based on nihilism). After concluding the analysis, I wonder whether this theory – despite my best intentions – is too deterministic and too structural to do justice to the rough edges and elbows that real people have.

9.4   Outlook

The quest for value orientations, ideal imaginations, and attributions of worthiness in policy-making in China is a novel contribution to China studies and can be taken much further. For these purposes, the concept of *orders of worth* has proven valuable for the specific challenges of doing research in China: It allowed me to identify attributions of worthiness in the empirical material instead of deducing them from literature and theory. In this way, this framework may offer itself to further research on state and society in China.

While I have formulated *orders of worth* specifically for my empirical field, I would expect that all the *orders of worth* are similarly present in other areas of policy-making. The order of 'planning as a craft,' by definition, is specific to spatial planning. However, it is to be expected that similar orders of professionalism and technical skill exist in other issue areas. A validation and concretization of the framework would certainly generate insightful results on policy discourse and the ideals that guide policy-making in China. Therefore, the theoretical framework, as I formulated it for this dissertation, might also be applied to other contexts of local policy-making in China or of spatial planning in other regions of the world – this might even be done comparatively, so as to achieve a more exact formulation of how normative orientations play a role in policy-making in general.

I have not systematically covered conflicts and collusions of *orders of worth* – doing this would certainly help to explain policy outcomes in rural Sichuan. While both Feng (2016) and I describe how planners have to find a balance between different rules or *orders of worth*, there is no description yet of how these balances are found. Such endeavors would extend the framework as I formulated it in the directions for which Boltanski/ Thévenot (1991/2006) developed the framework.

There also is still much research to be done where local administration's role in governance is concerned. My description of the planning system is specific to rural Sichuan – comparison with other areas in China and other government levels would help assess variation and regularities.

Above all, this dissertation only goes a small step in the direction of uncovering how policy-making is guided by complex constellations of ideal imaginations and attributions of worthiness. While I have shown that there is a complex arrangement of *orders of worth* involved even in technical discussions on policy, much research is still needed to concretize and assess such influences.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Liste der Vorveröffentlichungen

Parts of this dissertation have already been published in the following forms:

Melcher, L. (2017): *Techniques and concepts for shaping the future: assessment of current planning thought through a content analysis of town planning textbooks*, China Perspectives 2017/1: 7-14, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7170.
(Parts of this article have been incorporated into chapter 2 of this dissertation)

Conference paper for the China Workshop 'Iserlohn 2017': *What can I contribute to your project? Reflections on doing ethnographic research in a professional field*, Schwerte, 11./12. Februar 2017.
(An adapted version of this paper is part of chapter 4)

Annex 2: Sample Interview Guideline

Preparations of an interview at a planning bureau

When arranging an interview, I would usually send the person a summary of the issues which interested in advance. I always brought several printed exemplars of the guideline I prepared to the conversation, so that everybody present had an orientation of where we were going in the conversation. Usually however, the conversation would veer widely from the guideline and I simply checked towards the end, whether all issues had been covered.

The guideline for each interview was prepared individually in light of the position of the person I was to interview as well as in light of the issues that interested me most in that specific phase of fieldwork.

The original interview guideline was fully in Chinese, the translation have been added by myself exclusively for the purposes of this annex.

Note to the interviewer / myself: Concentrate on tasks and objectives, internal structure, communication with lower levels and with the provincial government, as well as a little bit communication with other departments.

- 您在规划局的哪一个办公室，你们的任务有什么内容？

  At which office of the planning bureau do you work? What are the contents of your responsibilities?

  - 和其他规划局的分治和办公室的工作关系是什么？

    What are the work relationships to other branches of planning administration and to other offices?

  - 您工作目标是什么？您的任务最重要的内容和责任是什么？

    What are the objectives of your work? What are the most important responsibilities and contents among your tasks?

  - 项目过程一般是怎么安排的？

    How is the process of a [planning] project usually organized?

- 规划局有什么分治和办公室？是不是和国土部门一样有行政岗位和技术岗位？

  Which branches and offices does the planning bureau have? Is it like the land administration in that it has administrative and technical posts?

  - 规划局工作人员有什么不同的地位？

    Which different positions are there for the staff at the planning bureau?

  - 规划局人员有什么专业背景？

    Which professional backgrounds do the staff of the planning bureau have?

  - 地方规划局和规划所的人员是怎么样选择的？

    How are the staff of local planning bureaus and planning offices selected?

- 规划局对地方政策有什么影响？

  Which influences does the planning bureau have on local policy-making?

  - 规划局是不是有一些题目是特别关注和投资的？

    Does the planning bureau invest special attention and resources into certain issue areas?

  - 公路两侧限制建设有什么来源？基础考虑是什么？

    What is the origin of the construction restrictions on two sides of any regional road? On which considerations is [this policy] based?

  - 地方政府在什么方面是应该自己决策？

    In which issues should local government take its own decisions?

  - 规划局和规划院、规划公司有什么交流廊道？

    Which lines of communication are there between the planning bureau, the planning institute [public service entity], and planning companies?

  - 从规划局的角度来讲，条块关系有什么实际贯彻的？

    From the perspective of the planning bureau, how is the system of vertical and horizontal relationships practiced?

- 和其他部门有什么联系和交流安排？

  Which relationships and lines of communication are there with other branches of the administration?

  - 是不是在这个方面挑战还比较多？

    There are challenges in this regard, aren't there?

- 您自己认为，规划局的工作对小镇的发展和治理会带来什么支持？

  In your own opinion, which support can the work of the planning bureau give to the development and governance of small towns?

  - 一个好规划，对您自己而言，是怎么样呢？

    From your personal point of view, what characterizes a good plan?

  - 一个小镇应该怎么样发展？

    How should a small town develop?

  - 您为自己愿意的前程是什么呢，您对自己的发迹有什么打算？

    What are your hopes and plans for your personal future career?

Annex 3:   List of Interviews

File no	Length	Interview partner[*]	Institutional affiliation	Location, setting, other persons present	Main topics of conversation
Interviews with political and administrative staff					
65	01:18	Director Ba	Senior employee of public service institute, participant of the 'empty villages'-project	at his office, in the afternoon -- this was just a meeting with some tea from paper cups; his assistant was present too, sometimes adding in some information	we talked about the tasks of the office, as well as about its institutional affiliation with the ministry and cooperation with other administrative bodies
70	00:57	Mr Zhao	Municipal planning bureau	at his office in the planning bureau, in the afternoon	planning content and political guidelines, standards and what they mean, how standards are implemented and what the planning bureau is really doing; also where development should be going; very little on anything politics-related
71	00:31	Mr Zhu	Deputy director of Humble county planning bureau	in his office in Humble town, the employee responsible for rural planning in the planning bureau was also present	mostly the administrative structure of Humble county
72	00:34	Feng Yong	rural planner for townships in Humble county	in a conference room at the planning bureau of Humble county	the role of a rural planner: facilitate communication between planning company and local government, but also all sorts of other things
76	00:26	Mr Zhang	head of Wanderlust land administration office	in Wanderlust land administration office	the Wanderlust planning project and the issues it is to solve for the township
FN #96	not recorded	Ms Deng	employee at Humble county planning bureau	in the office of her team at the county planning bureau; a colleague, heading another office in the planning bureau, joined us and also answered my questions	What are the tasks of planning administration in a planning process; from the perspective of administration, what characterizes a good spatial plan

[*] All names are pseudonyms

File no	Length	Interview partner[*]	Institutional affiliation	Location, setting, other persons present	Main topics of conversation
FN #81	not recorded	Deputy Mayor Wang	Wanderlust government, had previously worked at the planning department of Reverence county	conference room in the planning bureau of Reverence county, Fan Jianhong from New Town Company was present for large parts of the conversation, sometimes also jumped in	His role in his various jobs, and the administrative structure at the local level

Interviews with professional planners

File no	Length	Interview partner[*]	Institutional affiliation	Location, setting, other persons present	Main topics of conversation
64	00:40	Teacher Wei	Owner of New Town Company and university professor	in his office on campus, with tea	the Wanderlust projects, his own expectations for a planning project, New Town Company
66	01:51	Sun Beihai	Owner of New Town Company	this was one of our more or less regular meetings for discussing German and Chinese planning, and I had the permission to record	administrative structure, also about the inner structures of the company and how to become a successful planner
67	01:17	Chu Weide	employee of New Town Company, later on studying for a master's degree	Shaokao and a beer on campus	the Wanderlust project: interactions with the government, team structures
68	01:28	Teacher Yuan	Owner of New Town Company, teaches at university	Café on Campus	planning administrative structure, her experience, what is important in planning
69	01:47	Huang Tianming and Ming Lili	Planning institute	Teahouse near campus, on a Sunday morning	relationships between planning institute and planning administration as well as relationships between various administrative levels; also about political and administrative positions and tasks
75	00:41	Han Ruishan	New Town Company, project leader of Wanderlust general planning	At New Town Company, in the middle of the afternoon; very efficient conversation, not much additional bonding or small talk	the Wanderlust project: contents, characteristics of the project, communications with the government; why did she choose planning, what does she think is important

Annex 4:   Overview of Fieldnotes

FN #	Topic	File
1	Documentation field trip to Mountain city	Fieldnotes Mountain city
2	Project meeting Mountain city	Fieldnotes Mountain city
3	Reflections and notes on the Mountain city project	Fieldnotes Mountain city
4	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
5	Class on general plans with Teacher Yuan	General fieldnotes I
6	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
7	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
8	Conversation about construction plans and rural development in Germany at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
9	Lunch with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes I
10	Brainstorming for a tourism plan at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
11	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
12	Wanderlust project - first impressions	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
13	First conversation with Teacher Wei	General fieldnotes I
14	Conversation with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes I
15	Dinner with Sun Beihai	General fieldnotes I
16	Dinner with Huang Tianming and Ming Lili	General fieldnotes I
17	Wanderlust project meeting	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
18	River township - going through the ppt	River township
19	Assessment hearing in Reverence county with Luo Zhicheng	River township
20	Wanderlust project meeting with Teacher Wei	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
21	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
22	Conversation about German construction plans with Han Ruishan and a few other planners	General fieldnotes I
23	Trip to River township and Reverence county with Luo Zhicheng	River township
24	Wanderlust project meeting with Teacher Wei	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
25	Day at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
26	Notes on the Wanderlust project	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
27	Wanderlust project meeting with Teacher Wei	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
28	Trip to Wanderlust township, local handicraft industry tour	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
29	Internal meeting at New Town Company: Discussion of the Wanderlust general plan	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
30	Mid-project meeting in Wanderlust township with local government	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
31	Wanderlust project meeting with Teacher Wei	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
32	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
33	Dinner with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes I

FN #	Topic	File
34	Project meeting 'empty villages'	General fieldnotes I
35	Project meeting in Wanderlust township with local government	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
36	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
37	Presentation by Gong Zhetai on '多规合一' and discussion with Teacher Wei	General fieldnotes I
38	Staff meeting (员工大会) at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
39	Wanderlust project: Discussion on the next steps after the technical and expert meeting	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
40	Conversation with Han Ruishan while she is working on some construction plans for Wanderlust	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
41	Conversation about village planning with my desk neighbor at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
42	Dinner with Sun Beihai	General fieldnotes I
43	Notes on the Wanderlust project	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
44	Feedback from Gong Zhetai on my fieldwork report for GEAS	General fieldnotes I
45	Meeting with Huang Tianming and Ming Lili	General fieldnotes I
46	Conversation with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes I
47	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes I
48	Reports from Reverence county	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
49	First time at New Town Company after the summer break	General fieldnotes II
50	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes II
51	Project meeting 'empty villages'	General fieldnotes II
52	Dinner with Chu Weide	General fieldnotes II
53	Gao Yuanchao explains to me the process of the Wanderlust general plan	General fieldnotes II
54	Dinner with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes II
55	Students' dinner of Prof. Cui	General fieldnotes II
56	Notes on the interview with Teacher Wei	General fieldnotes II
57	Rereading my fieldwork report to GEAS	General fieldnotes II
58	Tourism planning project meeting with Teacher Yuan	General fieldnotes II
59	Notes on the interview with Director Ba	General fieldnotes II
60	At New Town Company	General fieldnotes II
61	Staff meeting at New Town Company: Future strategy	General fieldnotes II
62	Dinner with a planner engaging in 多规合一	General fieldnotes II
63	Visit to the Chengdu planning exhibition	General fieldnotes II
64	Dinner with Sun Beihai	General fieldnotes II
65	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes II
66	Conversation with Han Ruishan	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
67	Conversation with Teacher Wei	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
68	Interview with Chu Weide	Fieldnotes Wanderlust project
69	Notes on the interview with Chu Weide	General fieldnotes II
70	Notes on the interview with Teacher Yuan	General fieldnotes II

FN #	Topic	File
71	At New Town Company	General fieldnotes II
72	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes II
73	Dinner with Fan Jianhong	General fieldnotes II
74	Dinner with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes III
75	Discussion with Huang Tianming and Ming Lili	General fieldnotes III
76	Meeting with an acquaintance working in public administration	General fieldnotes III
77	Notes on the interview with Mr Zhao	General fieldnotes III
78	Trip to Humble county, notes on interviews Mr Zhu, Feng Yong	General fieldnotes III
79	Project meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes III
80	Day at Reverence county planning bureau with Fan Jianrong	General fieldnotes III
81	Transcript interview with Deputy Mayor Wang	General fieldnotes III
82	Trip to Resounding county with Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng: Terracotta township tourism concept	General fieldnotes III
83	Day at New Town Company	General fieldnotes III
84	Dinner with Ming Lili	General fieldnotes III
85	Trip to villages in Wanderlust township with Gao Yuanchao and Yan Weining	General fieldnotes III
86	Internal meeting at New Town Company	General fieldnotes III
87	Dinner with Jiang Wenxue	General fieldnotes III
88	Meeting with Prof. Cui	General fieldnotes III
89	Notes on the interview with Han Ruishan	General fieldnotes IV
90	Dinner with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes IV
91	Trip to Resounding county with Jiang Wenxue and Luo Zhicheng: Tiger township tourism plan	General fieldnotes IV
92	Trip to Reverence county and River township with Luo Zhicheng	General fieldnotes IV
93	On my own in Wanderlust township	General fieldnotes IV
94	On my own in Reverence county planning bureau: Documentation of the Interview with Ms Deng	General fieldnotes IV
95	Day at New Town Company	General fieldnotes V
96	Trip to Reverence county with Fan Jianhong's team	General fieldnotes V
97	Dinner with the planner working on 多规合一	General fieldnotes V
98	Dinner with Huang Tianming and Ming Lili	General fieldnotes V
99	Day at the company, my presentation on my results	General fieldnotes V
100	Last day at New Town Company	General fieldnotes V