

Logic and Resolution Path of Conflicts in Community Transformation from the Perspective of Spatial Production Theory: Based on Three Case Studies

Guoyi Lv, Yong Deng, Chunmei Huang

School of Law and Public Administration, Yibin University, Yibin, Sichuan, China

Abstract: *This paper, using Henri Lefebvre's theory of "the production of space" as a framework, explores the underlying generative logic and resolution paths through an in-depth analysis of three cases of conflicts arising from the transformation of resettlement communities. The study finds that the root cause of community spatial conflict lies in the rupture between the spatial representation led by planners and the representative space formed by residents based on local knowledge. This rupture manifests as a three-fold generative logic: the misalignment of cultural cognition is the breeding ground for conflict; the imbalance of spatial power is the driving force behind the intensification of conflict; and the lack of a dialogue mechanism ultimately leads to the outbreak of conflict. Based on this, this paper proposes to construct a dialogical governance model, whose core resolution paths include: embedding culturally sensitive assessments at the planning stage to prevent meaning conflicts; strengthening the meaning translation and negotiation functions of social workers to bridge the cognitive gap; and promoting an open and process-oriented governance framework to leave institutional space for residents' creative practices, thereby transforming spatial conflict into an opportunity for the benign reproduction of the community.*

Keywords: Space production; Community transformation; Dialogic governance.

1. INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

With the deepening of urbanization in China, the renovation of community public spaces has become an important measure to improve residents' quality of life and promote the city's intrinsic development. However, many renovation projects often fall into the single logic of optimizing technical functions, neglecting the complex attributes of space as a carrier of social relations and a container of cultural meaning. This neglect is particularly prominent in resettlement communities composed of rural migrants. The long-standing daily habits, local knowledge, and cultural symbol cognition of residents often create irreconcilable tensions with the ideal spaces designed by project teams based on standardized and universal concepts, sometimes even leading to intense spatial conflicts.

Existing research often explores these conflicts from the perspective of management techniques such as insufficient participation and poor communication, failing to delve into the underlying essential contradictions regarding spatial meaning and power. Therefore, this paper introduces Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production as its core analytical framework. Through in-depth analysis of typical cases occurring in the redevelopment of three resettlement communities in City C, this paper explores the deep-seated logic behind community spatial conflicts and how to construct effective governance pathways to resolve conflicts and promote the healthy reproduction of community space.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS: LEFEBVRE'S TRIPARTITE DIALECTICS OF SPACE

In **The Production of Space**, Lefebvre transcended the traditional view of space as a static container, pioneering the proposition that space is a product of social production. His triadic dialectic of space provides strong theoretical support for deconstructing the production process of community space. Spatial practice refers to the spatial organization of a specific society, namely the daily routines and networks through which people perceive, use, and create space. Corresponding to the dimension of perception, it is the observable physical flow and form. In the community field, it manifests as the specific activity trajectories of residents' daily commutes, leisure walks, and neighborhood interactions. Spatial representation refers to the conceptualized, dominant space, conceived and defined by experts, planners, and technocrats through knowledge, symbols, and codes. Corresponding to the

dimension of conception, it is usually closely linked to power and knowledge systems, aiming to dominate and control spatial practice. In the case study of this article, it is embodied in the project team's planning drawings, renovation plans, and policy documents. Representational space refers to space directly lived through its associated images and symbols; it is space passively experienced and actively created by residents and users. Corresponding to the dimension of life, it is filled with complex social symbols, personal memories, and everyday experiences. In the community, it is the spiritual world in which residents give their homes, squares and paths specific emotional and cultural meanings [1].

Lefebvre emphasized that these three dimensions are not isolated from each other, but together constitute the production process of space in dynamic tension [2]. In community renovation projects, spatial practice, spatial representation, and representative space correspond to the specific actions in the project, the expected effects envisioned by the project team, and the actual feelings of residents based on their own life experience and cultural background after the renovation is completed. The root of the conflict lies in the rupture between spatial representation and representative space [3]. When planners try to impose their envisioned spatial meaning on the community, residents will defend or redefine their living space through their own spatial practices, thus triggering a power struggle about "whose space, whose definition".

3. CASE STUDY: THE GENETIC LOGIC OF COMMUNITY SPATIAL CONFLICT

This case study involves three communities that I encountered during my involvement in community renovation in City C. After nearly a year of follow-up and understanding, the following is a brief description of the renovation process in these three communities.

In the process of building a zero-carbon community, Community A democratically selected firefly-shaped solar lights. However, the yellow and red tones and clustered design were interpreted by some elderly residents as resembling incense and candles used in religious ceremonies, sparking a dispute. Compromises proposed by social workers failed due to adherence to cultural taboos, aesthetic differences, and cost constraints, and the lights were temporarily removed. Two months later, residents spontaneously moved the lights to the top of a flower stand, a move that was widely approved by the community.

Community leaders applied for a small fund to transform an abandoned vacant lot into a garden, intending to erect a marble monument bearing the garden's name. However, the monument's material, shape, and the newly filled, soft soil evoked associations with tombstones, sparking collective opposition from elderly residents. Despite social workers explaining its public nature, the residents persisted in their complaints and ultimately spontaneously destroyed the monument.

Community leaders collaborated with designers to renovate the garden, laying gray flagstone walkways with embedded ground lights. The design was intended to be modern and minimalist, but elderly residents interpreted the gray path as a path to the underworld, and the dim light from the ground lights as will-o'-the-wisps, questioning whether the social workers were cursing them. Ultimately, after attempts to adjust the lighting scheme failed, the lights were turned off.

Based on spatial production theory, an in-depth analysis of three case studies reveals a clear three-fold logic in the generation of conflicts during resettlement community redevelopment: deep-seated cultural misalignment forms the fertile ground for conflict; structural imbalances in spatial power become the driving force behind conflict escalation; and the widespread lack of effective dialogue mechanisms ultimately leads to the outbreak and stalemate of conflict. These three dimensions intertwine to form a complete framework for understanding community spatial conflicts.

3.1 Cultural Cognitive Misalignment: the Rupture and Opposition of Spatial Meaning

The most direct manifestation of spatial conflict is a deep-seated misalignment of cultural cognition. This misalignment stems from the fundamental opposition between two symbolic systems: the technical rationality upheld by planners and the local knowledge possessed by residents. The planners' professional symbolic system produces spatial representations of romance, belonging, and modernity, while the residents' life symbolic system, based on their cultural schemas, interprets life's meanings as ritual, death, and misfortune. This rupture between the two constitutes the deep-seated driving force behind spatial contradictions. These conflicts demonstrate that the construction of spatial meaning is constrained by specific cultural backgrounds and life experiences. When the

planners' professional discourse and the residents' local knowledge cannot effectively connect, the same physical space is endowed with diametrically opposed cultural meanings. This deep-seated symbolic conflict becomes the driving force behind spatial contradictions.

3.2 Spatial Power Imbalance: Monopoly and Resistance to the Right to Define

The reason why cultural misalignment evolves into open conflict lies in the structural imbalance of power in the spatial production process. Specifically, this manifests as the tension between planners' monopoly on the right to define space and residents' resistance in their struggle for a voice. In all three cases, although residents participated to some extent, the final criteria for judging what constitutes aesthetics and rationality were still dominated by the planners, who possessed professional knowledge and administrative resources. This implicit power structure often marginalizes residents' representational spaces, preventing them from gaining equal legitimacy. Therefore, the residents in the cases launched resistance through different forms of spatial practice, but the essence of their resistance was a struggle for the right to define space—an attempt to regain a voice over their living spaces through their own spatial practices.

3.3 Lack of Dialogue Mechanism

Cultural cognitive dissonance and spatial power imbalance are the structural roots of community spatial conflicts, while the lack of effective dialogue mechanisms is a key factor igniting potential conflicts into open confrontations. The existing community governance system lacks institutionalized arrangements for the effective translation and negotiation of spatial representation and representational space, preventing conflicts from being resolved in their nascent stages. First, the absence of a pre-assessment mechanism makes it difficult to detect cultural cognitive dissonance in a timely manner. In the design phase of all three cases, there was a lack of formal procedures for assessing the cultural sensitivity of spatial symbols. The public announcement of the plans only focused on functional and aesthetic aspects, failing to proactively guide residents to discuss possible cultural associations. Second, the failure of the in-process negotiation mechanism led to the escalation of conflicts. When conflicts occurred, the social workers' handling failed to address the core of the meaning conflict; the complete failure of communication even triggered violent confrontations. This indicates that the existing conflict resolution mechanisms lack a competent mediator role in meaning translation and cannot build a bridge between professional discourse and everyday discourse. Finally, the insufficient institutional accommodation of creative solutions makes it difficult to transform conflicts into constructive outcomes. The spontaneous creative solutions developed by residents in lighting renovation cases are largely accidental and lack an institutional channel for proactively absorbing, encouraging, and promoting such grassroots wisdom. This lack of institutional flexibility makes it difficult for most spatial conflicts to be creatively transformed, instead easily leading to a dilemma of confrontation and compromise.

4. SOLUTION PATH: TOWARDS DIALOGUE-BASED COMMUNITY SPACE GOVERNANCE

Based on the generation logic of community spatial conflicts, in order to effectively resolve conflicts and guide community space to develop in a positive direction, it is urgent to build a dialogical governance model. The core of this model is to break the one-dimensional logic in the spatial production process and promote the effective interaction and mutual transformation between spatial representation and representational space through institutionalized dialogue platforms and consultation mechanisms [4]. Specifically, this governance model can be systematically promoted from the following three dimensions.

4.1 Planning for Front-end Embedded Cultural Sensitivity Assessment

Community space renovation must not stop at superficial functional needs surveys, but must delve into the meaning of spatial symbols for forward-looking intervention. In the initial design phase, professional perspectives from disciplines such as cultural anthropology and folklore should be systematically introduced, establishing a regular cultural sensitivity assessment mechanism, shifting from one-way information dissemination to two-way meaning negotiation. Through focus groups, in-depth interviews, and community workshops, the potential cultural associations evoked by design elements should be proactively understood. Especially in resettlement communities with a high proportion of elderly residents, it is necessary to maintain sufficient respect and sensitivity to traditional cultural factors such as taboos regarding life and death and feng shui concepts. The essence is to integrate residents' local knowledge into the decision-making system for spatial production, enabling the

identification and emphasis on cultural elements in daily life. By establishing such an institutionalized prevention mechanism, not only can spatial conflicts caused by misinterpretation of symbols be effectively avoided, but a foundation of mutual trust among multiple stakeholders can also be cultivated from the initial planning stage, creating a favorable dialogue atmosphere for the subsequent spatial production process.

4.2 Strengthen the Meaning Translation Function of Social Workers

The structural imbalance of spatial power highlights the necessity of establishing a translation mechanism between professional and everyday discourse. In this process, social workers should transcend the traditional roles of project implementers or conflict mediators, transforming themselves into professional translators of spatial meaning and facilitators of the negotiation process. To this end, social workers need the ability to seamlessly switch between these two discourse systems. On the one hand, they must transform the abstract, technical spatial representational language of planners into everyday language that residents can perceive and understand. On the other hand, they must encode residents' emotional and contextualized spatial demands into governance language that planners and managers can understand and respond to. Simultaneously, social workers should also become discoverers and promoters of creative solutions. In the case study, the residents' spontaneous relocation of light fixtures to the flower stand cleverly combined official aesthetic demands with residents' aversion to certain things. Social workers should possess the ability to identify and amplify this kind of grassroots wisdom, transforming it into formal spatial solutions through institutionalized channels, guiding spatial production from confrontation to co-creation.

4.3 Promote Open Process Governance

The lack of dialogue mechanisms necessitates a rethinking of the temporal dimension and institutional flexibility of community governance. Community governance should view spatial transformation as a continuous, unfinished process, leaving ample institutional space for unforeseen creative practices. This open governance is first reflected in a shift in working methods, encouraging a "small-scale trial-and-error - rapid feedback - continuous iteration" model. Second, it requires establishing an institutional mechanism to accommodate residents' spontaneous creative practices. A mature dialogical governance system should proactively anticipate and encourage grassroots innovation, incorporating residents' reasonable ideas into formal spatial solutions through rapid response mechanisms. Finally, open governance requires all participating entities to maintain a degree of cultural sensitivity and institutional flexibility, recognizing the limitations of professional knowledge, respecting the value of local knowledge, and being willing to adjust established spatial production scripts based on residents' actual feedback. This open mindset can not only resolve potential conflicts but also transform them into opportunities for the positive reproduction of community space, ultimately achieving co-construction, co-governance, and shared spatial production.

5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Based on Lefebvre's theory of spatial production, this paper reveals that the deep-seated logic of spatial conflict in resettlement community transformation stems from a triple contradiction: cultural cognitive misalignment, spatial power imbalance, and a lack of dialogue mechanisms. The rupture between the spatial representation envisioned by planners and the representative space of residents' lives is essentially a resistance triggered by the oppression of the local life world by modern technological rationality. Accordingly, this paper proposes a dialogical governance approach, aiming to transform antagonistic spatial struggles into creative spatial reproduction through culturally sensitive assessment, social work meaning translation, and open process governance, thereby achieving the repair of social relations and the reshaping of community identity in spatial production. This paper focuses on resettlement communities with high cultural homogeneity, where the symbolic nature of conflict is particularly pronounced. Future research could further explore the different manifestations of spatial conflict in more heterogeneous communities across dimensions such as class, age, and occupation, to enrich the understanding of the complexity of urban spatial politics. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the dialogical governance model urgently needs to be tested and optimized in a wider range of practical fields, especially how to empower the negotiation and translation of community meaning with digital technology, which will become a research direction worthy of in-depth exploration.

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