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Stream: State Paradoxes and the Politics of Small Things at the Urban Fringes.

## **Unlocking the educational dream: Access paths for *chengzhongcun* residents in Guangzhou**

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Cities in the 'Global South' witnessed lopsided growth over the last three decades. Newly developed gated communities are booming construction sites in major cities. Simultaneously, substandard settlements expand daily. This radical spatial expression of inequalities has been reported in various metropolitan areas in developing countries, for example, Lagos, Nanjing, Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, Accra, Santiago and Nairobi (Davis, 2007; Smets & Salman, 2008; Chen, 2012; Weeks, ea. 2013). In the quest for sustainable 'inclusive' cities, scientists, professionals and policy makers report alarming views on the global trend of 'urban splintering' (Graham & Marvin, 2001; UN-Habitat, 2016). Among these is the view that urban service provision increasingly takes place via private means and has not spread evenly across space, favouring wealthy enclaves over low-income areas. It is assumed that space becomes a means to structure new forms of 'centrality' and 'marginality' in which substandard settlements are further disconnected from (good quality) basic urban services, including water & sanitation, healthcare and education (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Mohan, 2002; Grant, 2010).

The urban literature assumes that access to services is directly structured through spatial distribution, ownership and policies. Beyond any doubt, unequal access to services prevails in cities. However, it is unclear through which mechanisms exclusionary practices take place, and how they explain service access for residents in substandard settlements; especially by taking

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into account local characteristics that shape practices of service provision, operation and usage. Informed by Giddens (1984), I conceive the structuration of access as a set of local social practices. Access is actively created by intersecting practices of provision, operation and usage of urban services. As the attention is often directed at provision of services; users also have an active role in structuring access practices. Residents of substandard settlements are not 'passive' actors as they actively shape their own patterns of access. They have particular incentives and disincentives to make certain decisions, however, structured within rules and resources that work both enabling and constraining. The aim of this empirical research on access is to open this black box of practices that structures local usage practices of residents in substandard settlements. In this paper, I focus on education services and residents of Kanglecun in Guangzhou (China).

Chinese cities have undergone an unprecedented social and spatial transformation since the 1978 market reforms, which fundamentally changed the nature of urban service provision in Chinese cities. Cities changed from integrated and compact cities into vast urban fields, characterized by functional specialized enclaves accompanied by newly developed infrastructures and urban services (Douglass, ea. 2012). Amongst other urban functions, for residency this entails gated commodity housing estates (*xiaoqu*) and urbanized rural villages (*chengzhongcun*). As for service provision, the central state decentralized the provision and financing of urban infrastructures and public services to local governments, including education. Municipalities have been able to meet the pressing needs of urban services with remarkable qualities. Besides various money-generating strategies to facilitate urban service provision, gated commodity housing estates play a crucial role in municipal strategies to finance and provide urban services, including healthcare and education (Wu, 2005; Hendrikx & Wissink, 2016). With tight budgets, local governments further decreased public spending by restricting access to urban services for non-local *hukou*<sup>2</sup> holders. This nationwide household registration system affects millions of rural migrants who moved into cities, as local governments are

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<sup>2</sup> The household registration system (*hukou*) registers residents in a specific residential location and also classifies Chinese citizen as rural or urban residents. Although this system was initially set up to strictly control domestic migration (1950s), the system was relaxed in the 1980s. This allowed migrants to 'temporary' live in cities to supply the large scale industrial demands for low-skilled and cheap labour (Chan, 2009).

unwilling to provide access to education, healthcare and social housing. Out of 12.8 million residents, Guangzhou had a population of 4.6 million without a Guangzhou *hukou* in 2012 (Guangzhou Municipality, 2013).

Nonetheless, *chengzhongcun* are depicted as ‘underserved’ enclaves (Wang, 2003; Wu, ea. 2010; He, 2013). These former rural villages have been encroached by urban sprawl and became high density low-income enclaves that attract the largest groups of urban migrants (Liu ea. 2008; Wu ea. 2010). These enclaves are often poorly constructed without formal urban planning permission, overcrowded, and considered as unsafe living environments marked by high crime rates (Wang, ea. 2010). The intensively used space and high residential density go beyond the capacity of basic services, often provided in an unauthorized fashion. This results in that water and sanitation provision is usually inadequate, and kindergartens, schools, and clinics are often poorly provided (Zhang, ea. 2003; Wu, 2004). The rural status of *chengzhongcun* distinguishes these enclaves from other urban areas. Original villagers have the legal right to build housing on their land and the governance system falls outside the urban system (Zhang ea. 2003). This hampers the enforcement of urban planning regulations for housing and urban services, as well as maintaining basic quality restrictions from the municipality (Shin, 2010). *Chengzhongcun* in larger cities also host private migrant schools, however, their educational qualities are substantially lower than government run schools (Wang & Holland, 2011).

Kanglecun is one of Guangzhou’s 138 *chengzhongcun*. The estimated population is 103,962 residents and 95% does not have a Guangzhou *hukou*. The migrants that I interviewed in this case study actively work on their livelihoods and this informs different educational usage paths. Living in a substandard settlement or not, having local *hukou* or not, and, having low- or high expectations of education; the residents show that they are skilled, knowledgeable actors with specific sets of rules and resources that structure their usage behaviour. Although their *hukou* status informs particular ‘procedures’ of educational usage, migrants deal with their status in different ways and consume different types of education. Usage practices also come about in the extent to which migrants have access to resources, and how they mobilize them. On the

one hand, this results from their *hukou* status because it influences their resource-base. On the other hand, their resource-base enables them to circumvent obstacles they face due to their *hukou* status. The rules and resources that migrants have at their disposal shape a context in which migrants form quality perceptions, attitudes and expectations about education. This conception of education exists in relation with other social actors, such as families back in their hometown. Access paths are determined on the individual level and result from the everyday interaction with rules and resources that residents have at their disposal. At the urban fringes, these marginalised individuals actively create education trajectories that are not just informed by categorizations such as *hukou* or living in a substandard settlement. Instead, reading these trajectories amidst their livelihoods enable us to identify the rules and resources that structure their usage practices of education.

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