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A Transformative Analysis in Meta-Governance

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Publication date

2023

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

15th Conference IFo U 2022

Citation (APA)

Su, D., & Liu, J. (2023). Practice of Planning Coordination for Crossborder Spatial Governance in the Yangtze River Delta Region: A Transformative Analysis in Meta-Governance. In *15th Conference IFo U 2022: Internationalizing Education for the Ecological Transition Challenge: New Stakes for Sharing Knowledge and Acting in a Changing World* (pp. 49-58). ENSAP Bordeaux.

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

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PRACTICE OF PLANNING COORDINATION FOR CROSS-BORDER SPATIAL GOVERNANCE IN THE YANGTZE RIVER DELTA REGION: A TRANSFORMATIVE ANALYSIS IN META-GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Nowadays, city clusters have become an important spatial form in the process of global urbanization, characterized by contiguous development across provincial, municipal, and county administrative boundaries, given all-around cross-border circulation of socio-economic factors at the regional scale has become the trend. In order to pursue their own interests, neighboring administrative regions are driven by localism and often deliberately ignore regional level neighborhood issues, especially ecological and environmental issues regarding “public goods”, coupled with weak cross-border spatial governance at the regional level, this has led to prominent negative externalities and constant conflicts in the development of cross-border areas, seriously affecting the developing quality of the region as a whole. This paper attempts to challenge the traditional technical concept of spatial planning, and introduce the meta-governance theory of public administration discipline. The study empirically demonstrates the Yangtze River Delta(YRD), the representative of China’s regional development and pioneer in cross-border ecological governance as an example, and identifies the evolution of the three-stage regional coordination model in the YDR region since the reform and opening up in China, and the successes and failures of planning meta-governance in the cross-border area under different goal-oriented approaches. This paper summarizes a regional planning meta-governance model with Chinese characteristics, to explore the mechanism of spatial planning, as a policy and technical tool for spatial governance, in responding to the ecological governance of cross-border space, and measures how it can effectively play a synergistic role in the regional scale.

Key words

Yangtze River Delta cross-border spatial governance meta-governance regional planning coordinationspatial planning

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1. INTRODUCTION

Under the global sustainable development goals, how to balance economic development and ecological protection in highly urbanized areas is a development problem faced by all countries in the world. After witnessing many environmental problems caused by the rapid economic development and rapid urbanization after the reform and opening up, China is gradually undergoing a governance transformation at the institutional level. In 2007, the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to build an ecological civilization. In 2017, the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the goal of high-quality development. In the past two years, the Party Central Committee and the State Council have successively emphasized that the 14th “Five-Year Plan” period should be based on a new stage of development, implement the new development concept and build a new development pattern. The continuous deepening of social awareness has promoted the new agenda of focusing on the symbiosis of development and protection, and call for a new round of spatial governance system reform and supporting mechanism conversion (ZHANG Junkuo, et al.,2019). Combined with regional resources and environmental carrying capacity and high-quality protection mechanisms. high-quality new urbanization (Fang Chuanglin, 2019) take ecological civilization as the logical starting point for planning reform in the new era, take ecological disease management as the core target for optimizing the territorial space planning system (Zhuang Shaoqin, 2019; Yang Baojun et al., 2019) and promotes spatial governance towards the harmonious collaboration between man and nature.

At the same time, the development of regionalization across provinces, cities and counties represented by urban agglomerations and metropolitan circles has become an important feature in the process of urbanization in the world(Gottmann, 1957; Hall & Pan, 2006). Today, “developing and expanding urban agglomerations and metropolitan circles” and “promoting coordinated regional development” are included in China’s new round of five-year development plans, and improving the system of coordinated regional development become inevitable requirements for building China’s high-quality developed space layout and its support mechanism.

However, due to the “fence effect” across administrative borders, transboundary areas always involve differentiated stakeholders, multi-dimensional temporal and spatial scales, and limited human society’s cognition of complex ecosystems. Therefore, to achieve common regional development goals, cooperation and coordination are often considered the preferred method to solve regional problems (BODIN Ö, 2017).

Over the years, the problem of coordination has always existed, and the issues are highly similar: the contradiction between the administrative subjects is difficult to solve, coordination policies and coordination institutions are facing failure. Especially under the framework of national governance, the institutional goals of focusing on ecological protection are significantly different from those of traditional Chinese economic growth. This makes the spatially integrated ecological environment issues, with externalities in areas that cross administrative boundaries, a “public goods” governance topic. Since the 1980s, spatial planning has played invisible coordination role in solving cross-border space governance problems, such as boundary pollution agglomeration and environmental governance contradictions in the upstream and downstream of rivers. This implies that it is particularly urgent to strengthen the research on regional planning and enrich the knowledge system of regional planning.

In response to regional environmental issues, how has China’s planning and governance structure changed, and what explorations and challenges exist? This paper attempts to jump out of the technical concept of traditional spatial planning, from the perspective of planning meta-governance, combined with policy and planning text analysis, as well as inspections and interviews with local governments, and then analyzes typical regional cases in China, and explores cross-border regional planning and space collaborative governance for the purpose of environment conservation.

2. THE GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE OF PLANNING COLLABORATION

For the governance structure, existing research has constructed a corresponding explanatory framework, that is, with the three elements of institutions, functions and management tools, deconstructing the internal structure from the institutional system of governance to the internal structure of governance efficiency (Figure 1).

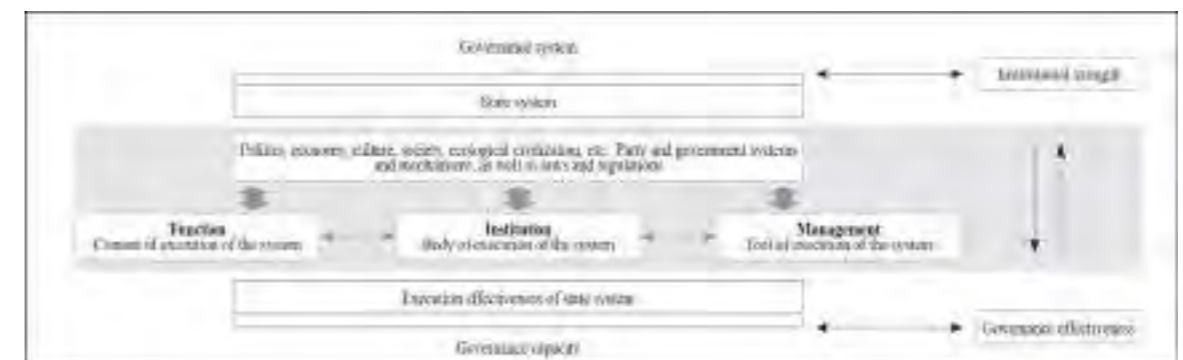


Figure 1 Analysis Model of “National Governance Structure”

Source Su D.& Liu J 2021

In order to further dissect the planning governance mechanism, this paper introduces the meta-governance theory. In the mid-1990s, the concept of meta-governance, ‘governance of governance’, first appeared in public administration and political science research, and has become a theory that has received considerable attention in the governance literature in recent years Gjaltema, 2020. Foreign scholars’ research on meta-governance theory has been relatively mature, and in recent years, it has begun to appear in the fields of space governance and urban emergency management.

But scholars argue that the meaning of meta-governance and how it actually works are still vague Bell and Hindmoor 2009 Torfing and Triantafillou 2011 . Meta-governance theory is often referred to only in very general terms (Jessop, 1998; Kooiman, Jentoft, 2009; Sørensen, Torfing, 2009), and its lack of operationalization in governance practice has created obstacles for further theoretical development (Gjaltema, 2020).

The connotation of meta-governance mainly has two aspects. First, it emphasizes the main role of the “axis”. Since the parties to the governance have different positions and positions and different interest considerations in the process of negotiation and collaboration, it is likely that the common governance goals cannot be achieved, which becomes the main source of governance failure. In order to coordinate the positions and interests of different organizations and make them tend to a common goal, a starting point and axis of “governance” is needed, and the state/local government should play the role of coordinating the interests of all parties and ensuring the orderly governance process. “Meta-governor” means that the government should become the “coordinator” and “convener” in urban and regional governance, rather than the “regulator” and “discipline” (Li Xiaofei, 2021). Meta-governance refers to a practice in the public sector that needs to overcome the failures of traditional governance through the use of different tools, methods, and strategies to coordinate one or more modes of governance by integrating the three systems of hierarchy, network, and market (Gjaltema, 2020). Second, it emphasizes the coordination role of the “platform”, that is, the meta-governance subject formulates specific agendas and rules for dialogue and negotiation for each governance subject, becoming a “balancer” in the game of social interests, and achieving common governance through dialogue, coordination and executive supervision.

Since the 21st century, in the context of the continuous reshaping of spatial planning systems at home and abroad, existing research has revealed the importance of planning combined with the meta-governance process, so that spatial planning can operate in a new governance network and penetrate deep into the governance system at all levels. middle. Building a local spatial governance network featuring multiple participation, overall coordination, interaction and cooperation, and equal sharing will not only prevent local governments from “crowding out” spatial governance, but will instead help enhance their “meta-governance” capabilities (Li Xiaofei, 2021). As a result, spatial planning is to some extent an expression of both traditional government “management” and a new type of “governance”, becoming an “interesting hybrid” (Allmendinger, P. and G. Haughton, 2009). As a policy tool for coordinating the relationship between various elements under the leadership of the government, planning is essentially a comprehensive platform that undertakes the functions of the governance axis and coordinates the interests of all parties in the same space, and is an interpretive tool for meta-governance theory. With the construction of China’s territorial spatial planning system, spatial planning may become a key platform for realizing meta-governance. Therefore, in order to improve the meta-governance capability of spatial planning, it is necessary to study and discuss the structure and elements of planning meta-governance.

3. The YRD region: a typical cross-border ecological conflict area in China

Take the cross-border region “Yangtze River Delta” as an example. The term “Yangtze River Delta” generally refers to the Yangtze River Delta region in China, which is located in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River in China. It is not only the most affluent region in China, but also a pioneer area for national regional integration. It is one of the six world urban agglomerations recognized internationally. At present, the area includes Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui provinces, and includes many economically developed large and medium-sized cities such as Nanjing, Suzhou, Wuxi, Hangzhou, Ningbo, and Jiaying. According to statistics, in 2019, the administrative area of the four

provinces in the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration is about 358,100 square kilometers, only 3.73% of China’s land area, carrying China’s population of more than 210 million and creating nearly a quarter of China’s GDP. At the same time, as the alluvial plain before the Yangtze River enters the sea, there are many lakes and rivers in the region, and the cross-border water system is crisscrossed, and the rivers, lakes, farmland resources and natural scenery are very rich (Figure 2).

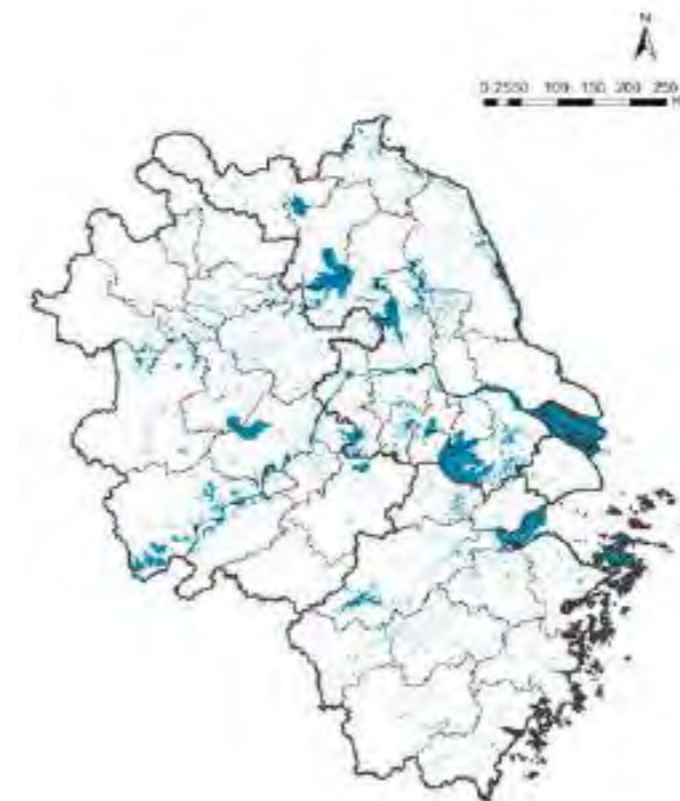


Figure2 Regional water system of the Yangtze River Delta, 2018
Source: drawn from China land use data of 2018

Since China’s reform and opening up, the level of urbanization and population agglomeration in the Yangtze River Delta region has increased rapidly. From 1996 to 2020, the total area of the built-up area has nearly quadrupled, and private township and village enterprises have risen rapidly. Disordered human activities have seriously damaged the ecosystem in the region, and the contradiction between urban construction and water competition has become increasingly prominent (Han Longfei et al., 2015), resulting in a decline in river network density and serious ecological pollution. In addition, due to factors such as watersheds and wind directions, industrial layouts in urban planning are often concentrated on the edges of administrative regions, resulting in cross-border water pollution agglomeration (Gu Huashan, 2020), environmental governance conflicts in the upstream and downstream of rivers, and even social conflicts in adjacent areas. For example, in the 1990s, due to the gathering of a large number of small and medium-scale printing and dyeing industries in southern Jiangsu (Figure 3), the contradiction of industrial water pollution at the border of Jiangsu and Zhejiang was triggered, causing people in downstream cities to build dams, diarrhea, fishermen petitioning, and dead pigs drifting incidents. In the Yangtze River Delta

region with rapid development, intensive land, and vertical and horizontal water systems, the problem of collaborative governance for ecological goals is particularly prominent and acute, which is a very typical cross-border regional space.



Figure 3 Land use planning of Wujiang District and Lili Town, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province (red spots are planned building sites)
Source: Local government websites

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF PLANNING GOVERNANCE OF THE YRD REGION

First, synthesizing the important policy documents and leading models in the process of regional coordinated development in China's Yangtze River Delta since the 1950s (Table 1), the regional coordinated process has the following meta-governance characteristics: 1) In terms of governance goals, economic cooperation has shifted to ecological protection. 2) In terms of the main body of the axis, local cooperation takes precedence over the central authority. The collaborative process of the Yangtze River Delta is often dominated by the spontaneous promotion of local governments, and the combination of "bottom-up" and "top-down", and the role of the central government is more empowerment and support. 3) In terms of coordination platforms, in addition to planning coordination platforms, diversified coordination mechanisms such as temporary institutions, meeting mechanisms, high-level dialogues, and social cooperation platforms have also been formed. 4) On the governance scale, the overlapping scope of planning circles brings challenges to the boundaries of powers and responsibilities of regional planning entities. The Yangtze River Delta region has different concepts in different coordination mechanisms and corresponds to different administrative space ranges. It also means that there is a certain overlap and conflict between spatial governance under the leadership of different governance subjects.

Year	Cooperation Region and Platform	Number of Provinces						Mode
		Shang hai	Jiang su	Zhe jiang	An hui	Jiang xi	Fu jian	
1954	Shanghai Bureau	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1957	Economic Collaboration Conference	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1958	East China Collaboration Zone	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1961	Central East China Bureau	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1982	Yangtze River Delta Economic Zone (Recommendation)	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1990	Shanghai Economic Zone	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1990	Yangtze River Delta Economic Development Zone (Recommendation)	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1991	Yangtze River Delta Region	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1992	Yangtze River Delta Cities Collaboration Department Directors Joint Meeting System	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
1997	Yangtze River Delta Cities Economic Coordination Association	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2001	Shanghai-Suzhou-Zhejiang Economic Cooperation and Development Symposium	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2003	Yangtze River Delta Cities Economic Coordination Association Symposium on Major Leaders of Two Provinces and One City in Yangtze River Delta	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2005	Joint Meeting of Mayors of Yangtze River Delta City Economic Coordination Committee	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2008	Pan-Yangtze River Delta Region	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2010	Yangtze River Delta Planning Core Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2013	Joint Meeting of Mayors of the Yangtze River Delta City Economic Coordination Committee	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2016	Yangtze River Delta City Cluster	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2017	Shanghai Metropolitan Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2018	Yangtze River Delta Regional Cooperation Office	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2018	Yangtze River Delta Regional Integration	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2019	Yangtze River Delta Integrated Development Demonstration Zone	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2019	Yangtze River Delta Planning Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2019	Yangtze River Delta Central Region	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2019	Shanghai Metropolitan Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2019	Yangtze River Delta Integrated Ecological and Green Development Demonstration Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
2020	Shanghai Metropolitan Area	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲

Table 1 Spatial and lead model changes in cross-border synergy in the YRD region

Source by author

In addition, the planning meta-governance in the cross-border area of the Yangtze River Delta shows the characteristics of stages, and the meta-governance elements (axis main bodies, coordination platforms) and governance structures (cross-border planning agencies, planning texts and planning tools) at each stage are different (Table 2). However, the main body of the planning meta-governance has been gradually clarified, the coordination platform is being built, and the cross-border planning institutions, planning texts and planning tools have been gradually improved, which has laid a certain foundation for the improvement of the planning meta-governance capability of the cross-border area.

Phase	Planning Meta-governance								Other mechanisms	The goal of Coordination
	Elements		Structure				Cross-border planning tool			
	Axis	Platform	Cross-border planning agency	Cross-border planning document	Cross-border planning tool	Evaluation				
Before 1960	N	N	N	-	N	-	N	-	A. Meeting platform	Economic Growth
1960-2003	N	N	Y	-	Y	-	N	-	A. Temporary organization B. Meeting platform	↓ Ecologically friendly & High quality development
2004-2018	Y	N	N	-	Y	+/-	N	-	A. Strategic Cooperation agreement B. High-level leaders' meeting C. Regular Meeting platform	
2019-now	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	+	Y	+	A. High-level leaders' meeting B. Regular Meeting platform C. Cooperation Declaration D. Disposal of private think tanks	

Table 2 Elements and structural features of Planning Meta-governance in the YRD

Source by author

5. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the context of ecological civilization, regional-scale spatial governance and planning coordination are issues of common concern to urban and rural planning and management disciplines. Based on the chaos of planning at the regional scale, the decentralized multi-governance governance model is not enough to adapt to the planning problems under the management system of my country's administrative regions. The meta-governance perspective emphasizing the "axis subject" and "coordination platform" can provide ideas for planning at the cross-border regional scale.

On the one hand, the market entities and planning systems involved in the regional scale are complex, and it is necessary to rely on the authority of the national government and regional institutions as the axis of planning and the regulator of the interests of all parties to combine various forms of governance, make institutional arrangements, and regulate planning framework. Especially in the context of ecological environment issues, the historical experience of the Yangtze River Delta reminds us that in the context of relying on market-oriented regulation and lack of government authority guidance, planning will have no effect on the protection of regional ecological space. But at the same time, the government can only act as a regulator, and cannot forcefully intervene and break the rules of governance.

On the other hand, planning synergy and a blueprint does not mean creating a large and comprehensive plan, nor does it mean all-encompassing. At the cross-border regional level, a completely unified and all-encompassing planning system will break the existing interest balance and conflict coordination mechanism, and become a tool for the power expansion of the higher-level government. The challenge today is not for planners to have expertise in every thematic area that needs to be engaged in a plan, but to work productively with other professionals, with various groups representing different aspects of the public, lobby groups, Cooperation with interest groups, etc. (Allmendinger, P., G. Haughton, 2009). In the rapidly developing cross-border regional space such as the Yangtze River Delta, planners need to find and coordinate the best combination of governance models according to the governance situation, build platforms and design interfaces for cross-border subjects, and connect and coordinate with various majors and disciplines.

Among them, spatial planning should become an important coordination platform at the transboundary regional scale. At present, China's planning on the scale of cross-border areas is mainly based on development planning and special department planning, and spatial planning still mostly uses the boundaries of administrative regions as the planning unit. In recent years, the Yangtze River Delta Ecological Green Integration Demonstration Zone, as China's first cross-border territorial space planning pilot, is gradually revealing the role of spatial planning on the scale of cross-border areas. Spatial planning can bring a clearer spatial dimension to the integration of various policy sectors such as economic development, health and education, and transportation, and play a key role in how various elements interact and manifest in different spaces (Kidd, 2007). Transboundary areas may become the most appropriate scale of intervention for spatial planning: joint agencies established by the state or relevant localities as the main body, relying on the coordination platform of regional spatial planning, unify planning, implement planning, formulate coordination rules, and enhance regional network stickiness, improving current territorial and spatial planning system, and achieve the coordination goal of planning meta-governance.

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