The Analysis Of The Spatial Changes And Policy Responses Of London

Introduction

With the development of globalization and the increasing stress from the environment, the developing patterns of cities start to expose problems like inefficient land production, maladjustment in urban and rural area and imbalanced social development. Whether these issues can be successfully improved decides whether cities can have sustainable development and increasing competitiveness. One of the representative cities of successful urban transformation is London, the UK. Same issues happened in London as a result of the population explosion after the First World War. Since 1919, London has attracted over 1.8 million people to the central area and reached the maximum of the 20th century in 1939 (White, 2019). Urban transformation therefore was needed as a result of forming an overcrowded society and regional disparities. The key policy of the plans is the decentralize the industries and population from central London.

This essay will first describe some definitions and examples of urban transformation in the literature review and then mainly focus on the urban transformation of London area in terms of its spatial changes between monocentric and polycentric models and related policies in planning strategies.

Literature review

In order to evacuate the explosive population in city centers, there are mainly three ways of spatial planning strategies. They are the suburbanization pattern, the new town construction pattern and the satellite town pattern. The suburbanization pattern is a natural process when the life quality in urban area decreases and there are little serious strategies needed to be planned for the governments. The most important requirements for the government to do is to adjust the focus on improving the facilities and welfare in suburban areas. However, according to the case study in Poland by Mesjasz-Lech and Szczepa?ska (2015), the probable negative impacts of suburbanization are noted as the urban decay in central city, social polarization and environmental pollution. The new town construction model is defined as the adjunctive transfer of city center into new towns and even take advantage of the rural land. However, the concern is that, since it requires time for a new town to develop its own commercial and educational functions, the early development can be difficult to operate. Consequently, although evacuating some of the population to new towns can mitigate the pressure on housing shortage in city centers, the commuting for people from home to work can be another issue to slower the development of new town areas (Thorgeirsdottir, 2010). The last method, the satellite town pattern, can be described as a way of preventing the urban sprawl by constructing green space between satellite towns and central areas to control the extension. As is discussed by Patel et al. (2019), unlike the new towns, the satellite towns are not independent, but highly related to and relied on the central urban area. And this is the strategy that were utilized by London government while facing the problem of population explosion.

Although the decentralized policy has been the major study, thanks to the great success of solving the population problem in the 20th century, later, urban concerns such as inadequacy functions, far commuting distance and high cost of new towns bring new stress to modernity Britain. The former single-core concentric circle pattern therefore requires changing.

Most studies discussed the type of developing transformation for cities, for example, the cultural transition in Ruhr, Germany (Preite,2012), and economic transition in Pittsburgh, the US (Pallagst, 2009). While the spatial planning information is mainly shown in the authority papers proposed by the government. This special aspect that will be mainly introduced in this essay is the strategic spatial planning transition in London, the UK. According to Amin (2004; as cited in Cerreta, Concilio, and Monno, 2010), the reason why strategic spatial planning is suitable for the present social challenges is that the spatial planning which contains a multitude of city network design matches with the unique spatiality possessed by cities and regions. And the transformational orientations for city development are expected to be environmentally friendly, initiative and intelligent.

Transformation and policy responses

Since the industrial revolution, the traditional industries were replaced by advanced machine production, along with enormous job opportunities appearing in central London. People chose to move from rural areas into cities to earn a living, following the trend of urbanization. However, what has put stress on the city were problems like housing shortage, lack of public facilities and environmental pollution caused by increasing demographic pressure. In other words, even though the productive forces in society increased, as a result of limited focus on public facilities and social problems, the living and health conditions for citizens are unsatisfactory, especially for working class.

The Greater London Plan (1944) mainly pictured four concentric ring-like zones, one for the center and three for the region. The innermost zone as the central city has the highest population density of around 185 to 250 inhabitants per hectare. The next is the suburban ring surrounded by the third ring named the green-belt zone. The last ring is planned for rural zones and to build eight satellite new towns. The whole concentric circle is connected by radial roads and railway lines (see figure 1).

Figure 1: realized new town around London (the Greater London Plan, 1944)

Moreover, the government made efforts to acquaint and attract residents with the new decentralized plan by using publicity means. Thanks to this plan, there were millions of people evacuated from the central area and the pressure of overcrowded population was finally released.

In order to accommodate new development and improve the incomplete housing and employment issues, new spatial strategies which focus on ‘vertical growth’ are presented in the draft London Plan. They are the Growth Corridors and Opportunity Areas (see figure 2 and figure 3).

Figure 2: the London’s Growth Corridors. (Gordon, 2016)

Figure 3: Adopted Opportunity Areas (Mayor of London, 2019)

The five Growth Corridors strategy is proposed to be a connection among housing, employment and transport links in London area (Wetzl, 2018). Additionally, the outspread corridors also enhanced cooperative development between London area and the southeast areas, being able to deal with the barriers in housing shortage and infrastructure construction. As for the Opportunity Areas presented by the Greater London Authority (2018), they are the major source for brownfield land and related to the improvement for new housing, commercial and other development which are able to provide at least 5,000 jobs and 2500 houses with complete public infrastructure. According to the draft London Plan (Mayor of London, 2017), the Opportunity Areas are expected to provide affordable housing to the greatest extent while constructing mixed and full-featured communities. The Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks, as one of the new approaches, represent the major's determination of creating strategies on the basis of current situation collected form local communities and related stakeholders.

Evaluation

The Greater London Plan created the biggest mass-migration in England history, and the achievement in decreasing population was ensured by decentralized industries (White, 2019). Later, the trend became into the decentralized development in central London, as a consequence of the advantages in satellite towns with lower taxes, better education resources and better air quality (Peace, 2018). Therefore, a more comprehensive plan was needed every few years, considering the changing regional and global circumstance. In the new plan, the complement of the vertical growth areas not only helped with the interflow between central area and reginal zones, but also, at a deeper level, stimulated the economic development in the inner city. What also needs to be emphasized is that population is not just about numbers on the paper, but about the national living standards. Therefore, using rational planning strategies is of significant to balance the natural population mobility instead of ignore the ideas and responses from all kinds of stakeholders.

As is written in the Abercrombie's green-wedge vision for London (2015), the green belt in Greater London Plan succeeded in improving the overall spatial planning for the reason that it helped separate different zones between industrial, residential and rural areas. Namely, it was beneficial for both planning and environmental purposes. As a representative of urban transformation, the success of Abercrombie's plan has attracted the planners in Spain and was used for reference to improve the project of Greater Valencia (see figure 4).

Figure 4: the Greater London Plan (left); the Valencia Stage Plan (right). (Selva Royo, and Mardones Fernández de Valderrama, 2018)

Conclusion

The process of London spatial planning can be described as: the concentric circles with four zones in the 1940s; the eight satellite towns planning in 1950s; the anti-magnetic developing growth corridors in 1960s; and innovative developing mode of referencing the current city features and consulting the residents in recent years. The experience of forming the London metropolitan area has positively affected the planning efficiency and social concerns in some degree. Additionally, the most important strategic concept throughout the whole plan can be

concluded as the importance of constructing urban areas with corresponding approaches in consideration of diverse characteristics, local issues and demands for there are regional differences existing among cities. In conclusion, the optimized layout of London strategic spatial planning succeeds in promoting urban development and the harmony with the surrounding areas because it complies with the spirit of advancing with times.