

Sustainable Urban Conservation and Community Participation

1. Background

1.1 Old City Conservation in Yangzhou

With a history of nearly 2500 years, Yangzhou was among the first 24 cities named as „Famous Historical and Cultural City“ by the State Council in 1982. The Old City of Yangzhou, covering an area of about 5.1 km², remains as the city center with about 110,000 inhabitants. The Old City, developed mainly from the cities of Ming and Qing Dynasties, has a rich historical and cultural value with 117 officially listed cultural heritage sites. Stretches of traditional and historically valuable blocks and buildings remain behind modern commercial streets, characterized by 1 to 2 storey traditional courtyard buildings with narrow streets and alleys, but mingled in the traditional context with some multi-storey buildings newly completed less than 20 years ago. With the economic and urban development, the traditional blocks and buildings are facing the threat of being improperly developed, and meanwhile, the poor building qualities and living conditions in the Old City has led to the migration of higher-incomers and young generation to the new city area, so the historic area is facing an increasing risk of deterioration.

Already for several years the Yangzhou Municipal Government has recognized the historical and economic value of the old inner city and has paid special attention to preserve the historic area. Within the framework of the Sino-German Eco-City Planning and Management Programme, GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), entrusted by German Government, has since 2002 supported Yangzhou Municipal Government's efforts in preserving the old city centre and introduced the concept of "Sustainable Urban Conservation" for the rehabilitation of the old city. It aims to improve the living conditions of residents in traditional urban neighbourhoods by upgrading these areas and supporting self-help initiatives. Since 2005, Yangzhou Municipal Government, GTZ and Cities Alliance[®] have been committed to elaborating a comprehensive upgrading strategy—Yangzhou Urban Upgrading Strategy—for the whole inner city of Yangzhou, which focuses not only on the preservation of listed historic buildings, but also on the residents, particularly the lower-income groups, in improving their living conditions, and modernizing their houses. By following a process-orientated and gradual upgrading approach, rather than a project-orientated approach that usually leads to the relocation of a large number of residents, residents were encouraged to participate in the modernization of their houses and community and benefit from the growing economic vitality of these areas.

In 2006, a pilot neighborhood called Wenhuali was identified by the GTZ Expert Team jointly with relevant government agencies of Yangzhou. Located in Shuangdong Area, one of the four historic areas in Yangzhou, Wenhuali is a block of 120m x 120m (about 1.4 ha) where contains 147 households. Most of its buildings were constructed in the period from the end of Qing Dynasty to the founding of PR China. Mainly of one-storey brick and wood courtyard buildings, these houses have kept their traditional layout and images on the whole, but have all the major

problems that are typical of traditional neighborhoods of the Old City.

- The buildings are generally of poor quality, and the structure and facade of most of the residential houses are deteriorated. With all the repair work in the past dozens of years, the alteration and extension has to some degree changed the original layout of the buildings, so some traditional residential houses are losing their historical values.
- Sanitary conditions of the houses in the area are often poor, individual toilets or bathrooms are often missing. Most of the residents still use public toilets.
- Infrastructure is incomplete. The existing storm water drainage is increasingly used for discharge of grey water and sometimes with sewage from toilets. Major collection pipes for sewage along major roads leading to a sewage treatment plant are in place; however the local network in the blocks is not connected and needs replacement. Electricity supply is insufficient and can not meet the requirements of safety and city image.
- Over the years, provisory extension of houses has reduced public spaces and access. Public space within the neighborhood is lacking and residents have no place for daily communication and entertainments.
- Deteriorating house facade and poor living conditions have led to the migration of many young and well-being families to the new city areas, and this has caused a problem of a high percentage of low-incomers and old people in the Old City. About 41% households remaining in this area have per-capita monthly incomes less than 600 CNY, about 37% residents are over the age of 60, and 21% residents over 70. ©



Fig.1 Historical Areas in the Old City, Yangzhou. Source: GTZ Expert Team

Surveys in the pilot block showed that in the past twenty years residents had been renovating houses on their own. But in the process insufficient recognition of the values of the historic area, as well as a lack of guidelines for residential house renovation had caused harm to the historic areas. At the beginning of the program, the residents were not really aware of the vision for upgrading the Old City. An uncertainty about the future had resulted in a 'wait and see' attitude and reliance on the government for direction. These had constituted obstacles for residents'

participation. For all the efforts and time the expert team spent in advocating, public participation was still of a very low level. To address this problem, the pilot project introduced Community Action Planning (CAP) approach and invited the internationally well-known CAP expert and practitioner, Prof. Reinhard Goethert from MIT, together with GTZ Expert Team, to try CAP methods in Wenhuali for public participation. The aim was to explore a new channel of public participation in old city upgrading, and more effectively encourage residents' involvement in the upgrading of the historic old city and the improvement of their living conditions as well.

1.2 CAP and Public Participation

The CAP approach is a method to guide and structure public participation in projects. It involves and links the citizens of a community or residents of a neighbourhood with local government decision makers and technical staff in a process of planning and decision making and agreement on priorities for action. All participants are involved in reaching a comprehensive understanding of the planning and construction issues. CAP was first put into practice by Otto Koenigsberger of America in 1964, and there have been successful application cases now in the world. In academic field, similar terms include „Participatory Planning“, „Participatory Development“, „Micro Planning“, „Community-Driven Development“ and so on. As an important branch of urban planning and design, CAP focuses on solving problems within framework of concrete location, time, and resource allocation. Different from traditional methods centered by urban planners and government agencies, CAP is based in communities and the basic principle of CAP is to rely on the cooperation of all stakeholders. CAP usually works out action plans on what, who, how and when.

If we divide an average construction project into five stages, i.e., initiate, plan, design, implement and maintain, it will be worthwhile studying in which stage and how public participation should be introduced, and what effect there will be. Generally speaking, public participation can expect good results in the following conditions: when a project or programme is related to a wide range of people; when confronted with many problems, e.g., when there are contradictions among people with different interests; when there are doubts about the vision of a project; when sufficient services can not be provided solely by governments; or when it is necessary to maintain the sustainability of a project or programme; and so on. Accordingly, the following conditions will be unfavourable for the good effects of public participation: when it is about extremely technical issues; when the public have got used to relying on government services; or when a government cannot empower its lower level authorities. Fig. 2 is a summary of different public participation methods and their different effects in different stages of an urban construction project: from project initiation to planning, to design, to implementation, to maintenance, policy orientation is diminishing while technical orientation keeps increasing, and the planning and design stages are the best time to share control over decisions with the public, and it is also when best results can be achieved. ©

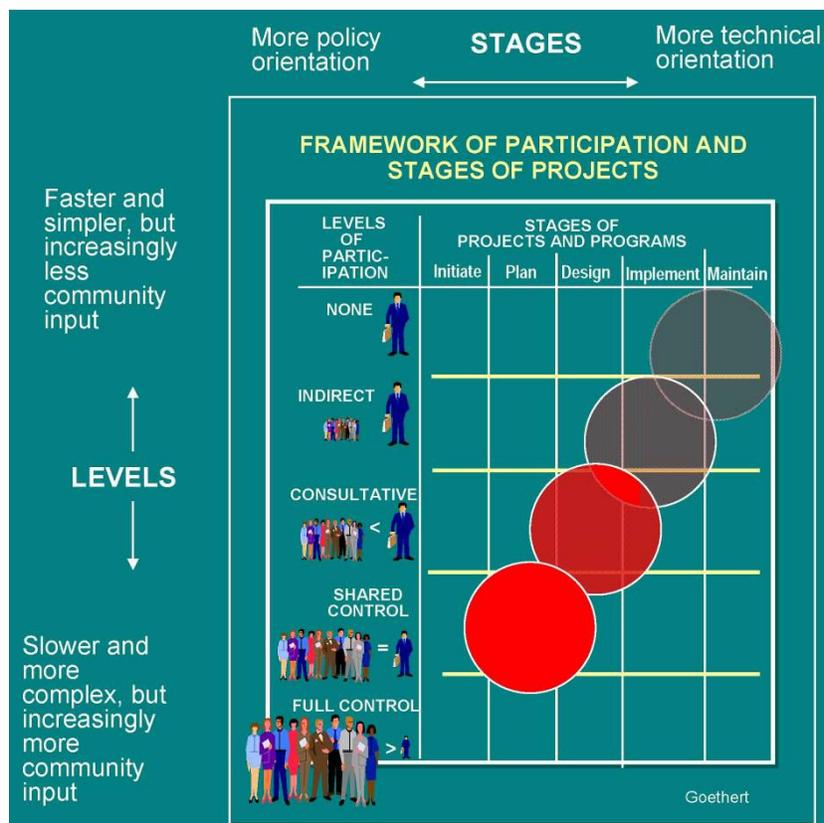


Fig. 2 Different stages, levels and effects of public participation.  refers to government representatives, relevant professionals and practitioners,  refers to community residents.
Source: Goethert.

International practice over the past 40 years proves that CAP approach can often achieve some effects in the planning and decision-making phase that can not be done by other planning methods. These achievements include: jointly set the vision of the community; implement short and long-term strategies to form a community identity; find out solutions for the complicated problems, or at least define clearly the problems and tasks; activate local networks favourable for the development of a community and use it as a catalyst for actions in overcoming various obstacles in the urban development process; build mutual understanding among different groups with different interests to better integrate different efforts; build up the planning and design capacity for the local teams; and provide an open and transparent platform for discussion to raise public awareness[®].

1.3 General procedures of CAP

A well-organized CAP includes three phases: Pre CAP, CAP Workshop and Post CAP. © The length of the time for each phase depends on how complicated the problems are and how mature the existing local community networks are. The core of CAP is the CAP Workshop lasting usually for several days with the participation of both residents and other stakeholders. The topics for discussion and procedures are usually as follows:

- Identify problems and consider priority: what exactly are the problems to be solved?
- Strategies to be chosen or to be abandoned: what kind of actions and methods are most appropriate for solving the problems?
- Plans for implementation: who, when and how, and how to promote the work?
- Monitoring: state how the monitoring is going on and what can be learnt in it?

For all the general procedures and process of CAP, in practice anticipated outcomes can only be achieved by organizers with careful design, planning and organization by considering the specific circumstances of an area.

2. Community Participation Practice in the Pilot Block

The CAP for Wenhuali was organized by GTZ Expert Team, with coordination by the local neighbourhood committee. Relevant government agencies as the Old City Office, Planning Bureau, Cultural Bureau, and House Management Bureau participated in a supporting role. The following is a brief explanation of the whole activities in the three phases of Pre CAP, CAP Workshop and Post CAP.

2.1 Pre CAP

The main activities and tasks in this phase include:

- Go to the residents' homes and do investigation, and contact relevant government agencies and institutions, for the information of existing problems and potentials.
- Determine the topics for discussion at the workshop and decide on how to organize the workshop.
- Develop a framework easy for organizing residents to participate in the discussion of planning and implementation, and draw it out for residents to discuss more conveniently.(See Fig.3)
- Hold a photographing activity "the Old City in My Eyes". Distribute instant cameras to selected families in each lane and asked them to record what they determined as 'good historical' elements and 'non-historical' elements. The photos were then printed out and brought to the assembled workshop on the following day.



Fig. 3 Framework Symbols for the CAP Workshop. Source: GTZ Expert Team

2.2 CAP WORKSHOP

CAP Workshop was the core of all the activities and it lasted for 3 days. The workshop was held in the Shuangdong Area Conservation Office nearby the community so that it should be convenient for the residents' participation. About 30 residents took part in the workshop; other attendants included representatives from relevant government agencies, the local street office and neighbourhood committee. The main activities and tasks in the phase included:

Day 1: Activate residents' awareness of participation, build awareness of the historic values of the Old City, and reach a common shared understanding of existing problems.

- The Residents placed the photos taken earlier in the prepared frame, discussed the historical and non-historical elements of the street, facade, and house;
- Questions were raised for the residents as *"What would you be proud to show visiting relatives or tourists?"* and *"What would you want to pass on to your children?"* Residents then discussed about the historic values of the area;
- Highlight problems of the street, facade, and house (e.g. the exterior wall decoration not complying with historic image, and etc.)
- Consider priorities of the concerns according to their importance (understand and analyze the concerns from two different viewpoints of family and city image)
- Consider cost and determine budget needs for different concerns of upgrading;
- Determine concerns that are easy to implement, and concerns that are difficult to implement, and set priorities (theoretically, concerns that are important and need fewer budgets should be implemented earlier).

Day 2: Further Field Survey of Problems and Issues

GTZ professionals, residents and representatives from the neighbourhood committee did the field survey, marked out the problems of the lanes and facade on a map for the preparation of a detailed inventory. Detailed information was also obtained by going to residents' homes.

Day 3: Develop detailed action plans

- Determine and assess issues. Representatives were grouped for discussion by 3 different lanes. They categorized issues of their lane, and pinned them on a plan with different coloured slips of paper. All the concerns were listed out by type, location and number, and one representative was chosen to present and introduce the situation of his/her lane. After

that, a detailed inventory of the entire block was summarized. Therefore, residents tried to think about the issues of their lane and houses from the viewpoints of the public.

- Then set out detailed action plans to address these issues including **what** should be done, and **who** should be responsible, and what **measures** can be taken, and where the **financial source** is, and which **policies** should support them, and **when** the upgrading should take place.



Fig 4 Group Discussion and Decision-making by Residents at the Workshop.

Source: GTZ Expert Team

2 . 3 Post CAP

The main activities and tasks of this phase include:

- A guideline for phased upgrading was prepared and improved by GTZ Work Team in a simple, visual matrix, intended to have clear, transparent goals which are understood by residents and professionals alike and which provides a template for upgrading standards that determine associated costs.
- A master plan of the pilot block was developed and revised according to the residents' suggestions.
- A rapid estimation of the renovation needs and cost of each house was made so that the residents could get information about renovation goals and cost needs as a basis for deciding upgrading measures.
- Representatives from each lane were selected as contact persons to assist in the implementation of the standards as agreed at the workshop.
- The results were presented to the Deputy Mayor, relevant officials and resident representatives, to push relevant government agencies to discuss and address the issues and carry out the plans put forward at the workshop.

2.4 A Mini-CAP for Open Space Improvement

In the following months after the workshop, the upgrading of the residential houses participated by the residents was implemented, and about 40 houses have been renovated. The government

upgraded the infrastructure in the neighbourhood. In the East Wenhuali Community, a mini CAP called “Our Community: We Build It” was held by GTZ international Work Team, together with the residents and relevant government agencies, for the improvement of the open space. The lane community determined an improvement plan, and selected and located the plants, street furniture (tables and chairs) and other improvements in their lane. The initial planning and discussions were again in a workshop format on-site in the lane, which was followed by two days of implementation by the lane community. (See Fig.5)



Fig. 5 A Mini CAP for Open Space Improvement. Source: GTZ Expert Team

3. Major Achievements of the CAP

The “Community Action Planning” approach and the supporting activities in Yangzhou have proved to be successful:

- Communities participated enthusiastically; residents were very active in expressing their opinions and they were satisfied with the activities. The residents’ enthusiasm and awareness were raised so they will take more initiatives in public activities.
- Residents became more aware of the conservation for the Old City and cultural heritages, and various actors reached a shared common understanding of the existing problems of the community.
- Residents prepared an action plan to implement short and medium term improvements in their housing environment. Representatives for each lane as long-term contacting persons and monitors ensured the sustainability of residents’ participation.
- The master plan for the pilot area was revised and updated with the residents’ desires and suggestions being considered.
- The novel approach and activities of CAP attracted attention from the local and other upper-level media to have a wide coverage about the workshop, which has led to a wide discussion about the Old City conservation among more residents in Yangzhou.
- After the results of the workshop were presented to the municipal government, the deputy

mayor and the directors of different bureaus paid much attention to the residents' opinions, embraced and accepted the concepts and methodology of participation, and they have argued for its further development and application through the entire Old City.

- Achievements have been made in residents' house renovation, and infrastructure and open space of the lanes have been improved. By the end of 2007, the upgrading of the pilot block has almost been finished, and majority of original residents have stayed within their neighborhoods with their living conditions being improved.

In Yangzhou, the first integrated CAP approach as a participatory model that was supported by the government and participated by the residents, rather than fully funded by the government, has been developed for the rehabilitation of the traditional neighborhoods. The model is now being further detailed, computerized and will be disseminated throughout the entire Old City.



Fig.6 A Renovated House with Modern Kitchen and Toilet in the Pilot Area (Before and After Renovation).The result: Young members of the family will come back to live together with their parents. Source: GTZ Expert Team

4. Conclusion

Different from some cities that placed emphasis of urban conservation on physical preservation and tourism development in commercial way, Yangzhou Municipal Government and GTZ clearly gave first priority to the original residents' interests by linking the conservation of historic heritages with the improvement of living conditions, which is new in urban conservation. Goals being different, methods to be taken must have been different too. Urban conservation is a complicated process that involves a wide-range of issues. Public awareness and participation is one of the key factors that will ensure its sustainability. To reach a sustainable goal in urban conservation and upgrading, it is necessary to encourage at different levels a long-term cooperation of various social groups and stakeholders, including the participation of residents and communities. The CAP practice in Yangzhou has achieved some positive effects for its success in changing traditional concepts, and for community participation method has been tested feasible in practice. It is proved that through innovative public participatory activities, residents could build their awareness of historic values and have more participation so that common residents, or even weak social groups can also have their say and they will take more initiatives in urban conservation and community construction.

In recent years, much discussion has been made about public participation in China. As to the decision-making of a city, experts reasoning, plan hearing and plan exhibition have made some progress, and theoretical discussions have been made on social power and common residents' involvement at community level, but real practice of public participation is rare. Now in China governments possess strong resources and power, so the development of public participation needs substantial support and authorization from the governments, and endorsement by law as well. Nevertheless, as a pioneer practice, Yangzhou's experience of CAP approach may bring some enlightenment for other cities to try public participation in the process of their urban conservation and community construction.

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Notes:

- ① The Cities Alliance, with headquarter in Washington, is an international organization launched by UN Habitat, World Bank and other agencies and institutions. It aims to help cities develop their CDS and handle the housing problems of the poor population.
- ② Based on the data survey by GTZ Expert Team. See also „Yangzhou Sustainable Urban Upgrading“ by GTZ and Yangzhou Municipal Government (2005). The average monthly income per capita is 821RMB according to “Yangzhou Statistic Yearbook of 2005”.
- ③ Based on the „CAP Report in Yangzhou Wenhuali „by Reinhard Goethert on Nov.23, 2006.
- ④ See Nabeel Hamdi & Reinhard Goethert(1997). *Action Planning for Cities* (Chinese Version). Taipei: Taiwan Luhe Publishing Press.
- ⑤ See GTZ: Community Action Planning,
<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra/mediacentre/press/doc/release/GTZ-CommunityActionPlanningShortPress-280306.pdf>

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