

How can the community be sustainable?

Community management in low-income neighborhoods



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1 Introduction

The topic of this paper is community management, particularly the community management in poor neighborhoods. A community should be understood in this paper as a social unit of any size that shares common values, or that is situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a village or town). It is a group of people who are connected by durable relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who usually define that relationship as important to their social identity and practice. (James et al.,2012) People who live in the same geographical area continuously deal with common problems as a group and they struggle together to create a better living condition. The process of organization and improving is what I understand here as “community management”. (R Wade,1987)

During the creation of the community, especially the community of low income, many problems merge, such as isolation between people in the community, anarchy of cleanliness, occupation of open space, etc. which all lead to the deterioration of the community. Regarding the relatively lack of education in low-income communities, this kind of phenomenon is particularly serious. Community management itself deals with the organizational relations between people in the community, this is therefore a key issue for making sustainable communities.

In the following pages, I will firstly present a literature review and I will also show several case studies, then based on the observation in Philippines made during the study trip of the Urban Shelter course in Lund University for three weeks, I will discuss about the roles of different actors that participate in

community management and two case studies from Japan and China. Furthermore, I will discuss about how community management influences the design of urban shelter and the role of urban planners.

2 Literature Review & Case Study

2.1 The origin and development of community management

In this part I will introduce the development of community management in different countries from a historical view.

The idea of community management actually existed since primitive communes, the construction of tribes in primitive communes could be regarded as the first step of community management. In both eastern and western cultures, there were some kind of autonomous “community organizations” like Presbyterianism that one big family in this system was governed by representative assemblies of elders which was quite common in ancient times. All these can be seen as the beginning of community management. (Zhiqiang Zhang,2013)

The community management in Japan influenced many Asian countries in the contemporary age. In 1970s the industry of Japan was developed very fast, but the disequilibrium of both economy and social in different districts was also very obvious. The first intention of managing community in Japan focused on promoting economic development in relatively neglected areas, then it gradually turned into what was known as regeneration of low-income neighborhoods in the urban area. (Zhiqiang Zhang,2013)

In 1990s, the Taiwan government in China introduced the experience of community management learnt from Japan. With the aim of revitalization of local culture, the community management in Taiwan made great achievements, especially when they adapt the experience into in the fields of rural areas and into the reconstruction areas after disasters. (Allen C. Choate, 2011)

There are also many different wordings for community management in different cultures such as “community building” in Brazil which are mainly talking about the same areas. (Peter et al., 2008)

2.2 Different topics in community management

Japanese Professor Miyazaki Qung who was vice-chancellor in Chiba University in Japan and also a famous professor in the field of community defined community management as the operation that deals with different topics, he classified these topics can be classified into five important issues:

- “The well-being of people” refers to the satisfaction of community residents’ need, the management of the relationship between people and the creation of the well-being of life;
- " The roll of culture" refers to the continuation of the common history and culture of the community, management of cultural events and lifelong learning of the people in the community;
- "The importance of land" refers to the geographical environment conservation and the development of local characteristics;
- " The need of business " refers to the collective management in the real estate and economic activities and other business that the people in the community can make profit;
- "Scenery and community" refers to the construction of " community public space" and about building sustainable living environment, creating unique landscape, etc.

(Zhiqiang Zhang,2013)

2.3 Cases

Case one: Furukawa-cho in Japan

Furukawa-cho located in the northern part of Miyagawa and there is a river flows from the northwest of the center of the town to the southeast. During the fast development of the industry of Japan, there were also severe problems like the deterioration of communities, environmental pollution, the lost of attraction for young people and so on.



Figure 1. The location of Furukawa-cho (google map, 2016.4)

The community management in Furukawa-cho began with ecological restoration of an old creek which was called Miyagawa. After the second World War, Miyagawa became a disgusting drainage ditch because the residence there used to throw all kinds of rubbish into it.

In 1968, the local newspaper initiated activities that encourage people to release carps into Miyagawa river. Therefore, local residence worked together to clean the river and turned the former disgusting creek into a nice waterfront area. What's more, the local residence started to make the surrounding area beautiful, they designed the walk path along the river and now Miyagawa has become a famous tourist interest in Japan and the symbol of Furukawa-cho town.(Nick Wates et al., 1993)



Figure 2 Students were organized to visit the river

Figure3-4. Pictures of the landscape of Miyagawa river

(<http://www.haokoo.com/house/1398756.html>, 2016.4)

Case two: Taomi Village in Taiwan, China

Taomi Village is a rural village situated in Puli Township, Nantou County, Taiwan, China along the route to Sun Moon Lake. Before 1999, the agricultural village was facing decline due to Taiwan's rapid industrialization. During the Taiwan 921 earthquake in 1999, 70% of the small village was destroyed. Instead of being absorbed in sorrow, the village turned crisis into an opportunity to not only re-construct, but also to re-brand the village.



Figure 5. The location of Taomi Village (google map, 2016.4)

The earthquake destroyed the bamboo fields and deprived the local residence of their means of subsistence. People couldn't plant bamboo any more so they started to look for new ideas, they tried to find what is unique about their place. Then the idea of Taomi as an eco-village was born. Scientists were invited and

they found that this area has an unprecedented diversity of fauna. Taomi village is situated in a valley. There are wetlands and waterfalls, the place is very natural and not influenced very much by people. Of the 29 species of frogs in Taiwan Taomi boasts of 23 of them. Moreover, Taomi has around 60 kinds of dragonflies (153 kinds in all Taiwan) and 72 kinds of birds (450 kinds in the whole country). Then they started to rebuild their eco-village. (Wikipedia,2016)



Figure 6 Taomi Paper dome designed by Shigeru Ban Figure 7 Billboard of eco-travel in Taomi Village (Taomi local government, 2016.4)

Therefore, Taomi community managed not only to rebuild their village after a devastating earthquake but to create one of the most successful ecological tourist attractions in Taiwan and the world. Specialists from all around the world come to Taomi to learn about eco-tourism. 7000 tourists visited Taomi in 2001 and 16000 in 2002. In 2010 the number of tourists who came to Taomi to visit the wetlands and observe frogs, dragonflies and fireflies reached 400,000 people. (Taomi government website, 2011)

2.4 Observation in Philippines

During the study trip in Philippines, we visited several low-income neighbourhood projects. I observed that there were huge differences in community atmosphere among different projects despite the fact that they almost shared similar background, for instance residents all relocated from urban slum areas, location of the neighbourhood in the city and even similar housing typology. Through interviews with the local residents and local NGOs like TAO-Pilipinas that consists of a 10-strong all-women staff providing technical help to the low-income neighborhood, I found in the some successful projects like St. Hannibal there were different actors cooperating with each other. Not only NGOs gave help to this neighborhood, but also government and professors all involved. (TAO-Pilipinas, 2016)

3 Argument, Critique or Discussion

Based on the literature review, case study and observation in Philippines, I think the community management issue for low-income neighbourhood should take different actors into consideration. Different actors, like government, NGOs, professors and local residents, all play different roles in different cases. In this chapter, I will firstly discussion further about the the roles of different actors in the two cases that I have listed in the previous chapter and how they coordinate with each other. Furthermore, I will try to figure out the how community management influences the neighbourhood design.

3.1 Further discussion of two cases

Case one: Furukawa-cho in Japan

The community management in Furukawa-cho began with ecological restoration of an old creek and then turned out to be the regeneration of the whole town, even influenced the social development in Japan. The starter of the event, the local newspaper, which could be seen as one of NGOs, played an indispensable role at the first stage. Later, the government also participated in the community management, providing financial support, helping the local residents to find professional help from professors, but at that period, some organizations that formed by local residents played the most important role. (Nick Wates et al., 1993)

Local residents in Furukawa-cho formed their own organizations to deal with their own problems in the community, which was the most essential reason that why the community management in Japan was so successful. The government tried to help the local residents find technical support from professors instead of providing money directly.

However, there are also some problems during the process of community management. After the local residents have experienced a long period of democracy discussion and independent community management, some discussions of issues within the community usually would take an extremely long time disputing before taking into practice. The local government also found it becoming more and more difficult to participate in the decision-making period.

To be more clear, I made a table listing the role of different actors in this case.

Table 1: The role of different actors in the case of Japan

Actors	Role
Government	Providing financial support, helping the local residents to find professional help from professors
NGOs	An indispensable role at the first stage
Professors	Providing technical support
Local residents	Forming their own organizations to deal with their own problems in the community

Case two: Taomi Village in Taiwan, China

In the case of Taiwan, Taomi community managed not only to rebuild their village after a devastating earthquake but also to create one of the most successful ecological tourist attractions in Taiwan. During the first period of community management after the earthquake, professors from the universities in Taiwan volunteered to do researches about the how to rebuild this small town in the future. With the cooperation of the NGOs and the local government, they found out this small town had the potential to become an eco-village. (Taomi government website,2011)

Then the government provided the funding, NGOs and professors with their students in universities helped the local residents to do ecological restoration of their town and develop tourism. The government also formed some organizations that mainly formed by local residents to make decision in the affairs of the community. The students and NGOs would give seminars from time to time to teach the local residents about eco-agriculture, ecological tourism and so on.

But problems also merge after several years of practice. The government need to spend a lot of money maintaining the communal facilities. After the success of ecological tourism in Taomi village, the village nearby started to simulate Taomi village, then the competition became more and more fierce. The organizations formed by local residents became weak and almost make no difference now.

And I also made a table listing the role of different actors in this case.

Table 2: The role of different actors in the case of Taomi

Actors	Role
Government	Providing financial support; maintaining the communal facilities
NGOs	Giving seminars to teach local resident about technical skills
Professors	Helping doing researches about the how to rebuild this small town in the future; giving seminars to teach local resident about technical skills
Local residents	Running the business of eco-agriculture, ecological tourism

3.2 The cooperation of different actors

There are both advantages and disadvantages in the two cases. The community management in the case of Furukawa-cho in Japan is more like local-resident-dominant while the case of Taomi Village in China is more like government-dominant. In the first case, local-resident-dominant community management would properly lead to inefficiency on decision-making because different groups of local residents would have different interests and opinions. In the second case, government-dominant community management heavily relied on the support of government and the help of NGOs and professors, the local residents almost do not participate in decision-making period, which would eventually cause the contradiction between government and local residents.

So I think a possible solution towards all these situation is find a way about how to coordinate different actors.

Local residents should be the main character in the cooperation. Leading by the organizations that local residents formed by themselves, finding the existing problems in their own community and solving the problems in their own ways should be the most direct way to promote community management in a neighbourhood. Local residents should always play the most important role in the sustainable community management.

“Community participation is just not an instrument; it is also a human right for all persons to be able to participate in the decisions that affect their living conditions.” (Sigbo 2005)

However, based on the fact that usually the local residents lack professional knowledge, especially the residents in poor neighbourhood, some decisions that they made by themselves are not helpful in the long term. Then the government, professor and NGOs need to give their help to the local residents. Especially at the first stage of community management, financial support, professional and technical knowledge are very important. At this time, NGOs usually need to play the role of communicating and coordinating with all the other actors. The government usually need to provide the financial support, but instead of providing the local residents money directly, the more wise way is to helping the local residents get technical support from professors. Professors and NGOs not only need to help local residents form their own organization, but also to teach them how to run the organizations, so seminars from time to time are also necessary.

From the long run, the government shouldn't leave the spontaneous organizations alone, the role of the government should be supervising instead of dominating.



Figure 7 How different actors cooperate in community management in different stages

3.3 Community management influences neighbourhood design

Community management influences neighbourhood design, this topic can be discussed through different phrases in constructing a community.

Before the constructing period, researches are especially important during that time. As discussed in the cooperation of different actors, through community management, the designers can know the need of local residents, which influence the spatial design. The strategies that different professor are about to take and the funding that the government can provide also determine the design of the neighbourhood.

During the process of constructing, community management also matters. Especially in the poor neighbourhoods, if the local residents can participate in the constructing process, they can reduce the budget quite a lot. In this case, NGOs and professors need to provide technical help.

After the constructing period, the design doesn't end. Without proper community management, the neighbourhood would deteriorate rapidly. Only through the corporation of different actors, can the community be sustainable.

4 The Role of Urban Planners

Nowadays, urban planner mostly play the role of physical spatial design of the neighbourhood. But I think urban planners need to do more. Based on the previous discussion of different actors in the community management process, urban planners firstly play the role of professors. But different from other professors, urban planners not only provide professional information, but also coordinate with different actors.

Urban planners can use their professional skills to do the physical spatial design, dealing with the problems like traffic, clusters, typologies, landscapes and so on.

Furthermore, the urban planners are used to work with multi professional teams, and thus to take different roles into consideration. What's more important, the government, NGOs and local residents all have different purposes and requests. In order to create successful projects, the urban planners should also be the ones linking all the different actors together. This would be a way of avoiding overlapping and confused projects.

For the residents in the neighbourhood, most of all the role of the urban planners are to be a wise consultant, considering the questions of building disaster resilient, sustainable housing, and functioning neighbourhoods. Urban planners should also become teachers, who share their knowledge with the communities. Finally the role of the urban planners are to make themselves unnecessary, for example to create a situation, when the communities have already become strong, full of capacities and resilient.

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