Global Taiwan Institute

Urban Governance in East Asia:
Lessons from Taiwan's Open Green Program

Jeffrey Hou

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Urban Governance In East Asia

About the Author

Jeffrey Hou is a professor and former chair of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington, Seattle. His research, teaching, and practice focus on community design, design activism, and democracy and public space. In a career that spans across the Pacific, Hou has worked with indigenous tribes, farmers, and fishers in Taiwan, neighborhood residents in Japan, villagers in China, and immigrant youths and elders in North American cities, in projects ranging from conservation of wildlife habitats to design of urban open space. Professor Hou's research project for GTI examines the Open Green Matching Fund program in Taipei. Unlike typical urban regeneration approaches that focus on large-scale urban redevelopment, the Open Green program provides funding for neighborhood and community groups to engage in bottom-up, community-drive placemaking projects that improve local environments.

Author's Notes

Fieldwork for this study was conducted from the summer of 2015 to 2019, through targeted interviews with key government staff, professionals, and community stakeholders in Taipei, Taiwan. Altogether, twenty-one individuals were interviewed. Through interviews with different stakeholders, including community participants, professionals, and city government staff, this study explores how and which processes through which learning has occurred, and how the processes and outcomes may be linked to a greater capacity for collaboration in the future. On-site observations (at the Open Green project sites) have also been conducted to gather additional data including how the sites have been used. Altogether, fifteen sites were visited for this study. The author served as an advisor to the program off and on from 2011 to 2015.

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Key Findings

- By creating opportunities for interactions and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, Taipei's Open Green Program holds important implications for civic engagement in local governance in Taiwan and East Asia.
- Rather than treating citizens and communities as clients on the receiving end of services, the experience from Taipei's Open Green Program suggests that programs need to provide opportunities for social learning and capacity building
- Rather than considering communities as enclosed and place-bound, agencies and programs need to take into account the roles of a wider range of actors and stakeholders who can bring additional skills and assets to the table, especially in communities that are lacking in those assets and resources.
- As different stakeholders work together, the interactions, conflicts, and negotiations present opportunities for learning and developing new models of governance that meet the specific needs and aspirations of the society in transition.

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Introduction

Community-based participatory planning in Taiwan has been a bright spot of progressive planning practice in East Asia in recent decades. At a national meeting on "community building" (社區營造) in Taipei in December 2019, Taiwan's then Vice President Chen Chien-Jen (陳建仁) commented that for over 20 years, the Community Building program in Taiwan has been critical to the development in the country's civil society. More specifically, he said, "in the era of globalization, the role of the government is no longer all-encompassing. Instead, an equal partnership between the government, the business community, and civil society is critical to the development of a democratic, inclusive, just, and sustainable nation."[1] At the same meeting, then Minister of Culture Cheng Li-Chun (鄭麗君) further commented that in the next phase, "the government should focus on developing models of public governance and a support structure for community building to support bottom-up processes."[2]

The emergence of community building and civic engagement practices in Taiwan has paralleled the process of political liberalization since the 1990s. The growing practice was no small feat given the substantial history of authoritarian rule and top-down planning, dating back to the colonial era. The context from which the recent participatory practices emerge begs the following questions: As citizen participation and community engagement has become increasingly common in Taiwan in recent decades, how do different actors and stakeholders learn to engage in a participatory planning process? Specifically, (1) How did planning professionals and government staff overcome persistent institutional and cultural barriers to engage the citizens?; (2) How do community stakeholders acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully and effectively in the planning process?; and (3) How has such a learning process contributed to the capacity for civic engagement and collaborative local governance?

To address the questions above, this study focuses on what and how multiple actors and community stakeholders in Taipei learn through the collaborative local planning processes. It further focuses on how such learning may lead to enhanced capacity in pursuing practices of civic engagement in Taiwan, distinct from the conventional, state-driven planning processes that characterize the planning practices of the past.

As case-study research, this study examines the specific case of the Open Green Matching Fund program (打開綠生活) in Taipei that began in 2014.[3] Unlike typical urban regeneration approaches that focus on large-scale urban redevelopment, the Open Green program provides funding for neighborhood and community groups to engage in bottom-up, community-driven placemaking[4] projects that improve local environments. Additionally, more than just a funding program, professional consultants are hired to support community groups in developing and implementing their projects.

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1 "肯定社區營造理念 副總統盼此自發性豐沛力量進一步帶動臺灣競爭力." Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan). November 30, 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/25077

2 "文化新聞."ROC Ministry of Culture. December 1, 2019. https://www.moc.gov.tw/information_250_106810.html

3　See Author's Notes (5)

4　"What is Placemaking?", Project for Public Spaces, https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking (Accessed: April 27, 2021).

Civic Engagement in East Asia

Civic engagement in urban planning has been introduced in East Asian countries in recent decades. In Japan, citizen voices against top-down decision-making first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, in a period of rapid economic growth accompanied by environmental degradation and urban overcrowding.[5] Starting with protests and confrontations, the public quickly turned to demands for participation in the planning process which led to the establishment of relevant ordinances, requirements for public hearings, and the introduction of district plans with required approval by local communities, experts, and planners.[6] In South Korea, citizen demands for participation emerged as a response to the large-scale construction of monolithic housing blocks, or the so-called "block attack," along with forced evictions in the 1980s.[7] In Hong Kong, without the kind of major political reforms experienced elsewhere, coupled with the continued domi-

nance of pro-development interest, communities continue to play a very limited role in urban governance.[8] Instead, citizen movements have emerged through self-organized resistance against the demolition of historic landmarks and eviction of communities due to proposed redevelopment and infrastructure projects.

*Image: A publicity photo from the inaugural "National Community Building Conference" (*全國社造會議*) held in Taipei on December 1, 2019. (Image source: Taiwan Ministry of Culture)*

As a program that parallels other recent initiatives in East Asia—such as the Seoul Community Support Center and the Hanpyeong Park Project,[9] also in Seoul—the case of the Open Green program in Taipei holds important implications for the ongoing development of civic urbanism in Taiwan and the region, particularly in terms of the involvement of multiple governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

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5 Yukio Nishimura, "Public Participation in Planning in Japan: The Legal Perspective," in *Democratic Design in the Pacific Rim: Japan, Taiwan, and the United States,* Randolph T. Hester, Jr. and Corrina Kweskin, eds. (Mendocino, CA: Ridge Times Press, 1999), 6-13; Jeffrey Hou, Li-Ling Huang, and Tamusuke Nagahashi, "From Exchange to Collaboration: Cross-Cultural Learning of Participatory Planning in the Pacific Rim," Paper presented at The Seventh Conference of Asian Planning Schools Association (APSA). Hanoi, Vietnam, September 12-14, 2003.

6 Nishimura, "Public Participation in Planning in Japan: The Legal Perspective."

7 Hyung-Chan Ang and Sohyun Park, "Design Tools and Three Steps in Participatory Design Processes: A Proposal for Better Communications among Residents and Experts, based on a Case Project of Neighborhood Park in Seoul, Korea," *Proceedings of the 6th Conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network*, Quanzhou, Fujian, China. June 18-21, 2007; Hae-Joang Cho, "Breathing New Life into Urban Communities Struck Down by the 'Block Attack' and Apathetic Individualism," *Green Community Design: Proceedings of the 8th International Conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network*, 1-8. Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Seoul National University. August 22-24, 2012; Young Bum Reigh, "Issues of Urban Community Design in Korea: Urban Redevelopment vs. Community Renewal," *Green Community Design: Proceedings of the 8th International Conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network*, 67-72. Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Seoul National University. August 22-24, 2012.

8 Mee Kam Ng, "Property-led urban renewal in Hong Kong: Any place for the community?" Sustainable Development 10 (2002): 140-146; Mee Kam Ng, "From government to governance? Politics of planning in the first decade of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," *Planning Theory & Practice* 9, No. 2 (2008): 165-185.

9 Yun-Keum Kim, "Looking back at the development of community participatory design in Korea through 'Hanpyeong Park Project,'" Presentation at Democratic Design without Borders, EDRA 46 Mobile Intensive, Los Angeles. May 27, 2015.

Community-Based Planning in Taipei

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Developed alongside political liberalization since the 1990s, the practice of community and urban planning in Taiwan has been an integral part of the social transformation in Taiwan. In the early 1990s, a social movement focusing on historic preservation was one of the first to influence decisions in the urban planning process, leading to legislation and programs that consider the protection of local, culturally significant properties. In the mid-1990s, the emergence of the Community Empowerment Program (社區總體營造) introduced by the Council of Cultural Affairs provided the impetus for the rapid expansion of community-based planning practices across the country. Many of these projects have focused on community building and local cultural and economic development, thereby transforming ordinary people into actively engaged citizens and strengthening civil society in Taiwan.[10]

In Taipei, the District Environment Improvement Program (地區環境改造) was introduced by the City Government in 1996, under Mayor Chen Shui-Bian (陳水扁). This program encouraged ordinary citizens, including those without professional training, to apply for grants to improve their neighborhood environment.[11] Since 1999, the Urban Development Bureau further developed a program for training and certifying community planners to provide technical assistance in neighborhood im-

provement.[12] The Open Green Matching Fund program represents the latest phase in the evolution of community-based planning in Taipei, focusing on community-centered urban regeneration. The difficulties of pursuing large-scale redevelopment in Taipei, coupled with relatively strong support for civic participation, has led to several experiments in alternative approaches to urban regeneration. The Open Green Matching Fund program is one such program introduced by the City's Urban Regeneration Office (URO).

Starting with a pilot project focusing on the activation and transformation of both private and government-owned spaces for urban greening and community use, the program was formally launched in 2014. Proposals from citizens and community organizations were solicited once a year. The submissions were evaluated based on a set of criteria, including: (1) creativity of the proposed project; (2) making of a "new public space"; (3) opening up of the community boundaries; (4) loosening the rigid uses of space; and (5) laying down the foundation for regenerative cycles. From 2014 to 2017, the number of funded projects grew from 15 to 25 each year, located in different corners of the city, involving a wide variety of stakeholders. Between 2014 and 2017, a total of 61 projects were completed throughout the city.[13]

> "The difficulties of pursuing large-scale redevelopment in Taipei, coupled with relatively strong support for civic participation, has led to several experiments in alternative approaches to urban regeneration."

10 Chi-Nan Chen, "Reflections on the Community Building and Progress of Taiwan Democracy," *Reflections, and Future of Community Empowerment in Taiwan, Proceedings of the First Community Empowerment Forum*. Taipei: Society of Community Empowerment, 2013. (In Chinese)

11 Li-Ling Huang, "Urban Politics and Spatial Development: The Emergence of Participatory Planning," in Globalizing Taipei: The Political Economy of Spatial Development, R. Y-W. Kwok, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 78-98.

12 Chung-Jie Lin, "Developmental Context and Future Vision of Community Planning in Taipei," Proceedings of the International Community Planning Forum, Taipei. Taipei: Taipei Bureau of Urban Development, 2005. (In Chinese)

13 Urban Regeneration Office of Taipei (URO). Way to Community: Collaboration and Placemaking. (Taipei: Urban Regeneration Office of Taipei, 2019). (In Chinese and English)

Unlike the large-scale urban regeneration projects, the Open Green program presents an alternative approach that integrates public engagement, activation of vacant spaces, and community-based placemaking. Rather than top-down or bottom-up decision-making, it represents a collaborative process to urban improvement and regeneration.

Also, unlike previous community-based planning programs in Taipei that considered communities as place-bound and provided funding only for community-based organizations, submissions to the Open Green program are open to the public.[14] To be eligible for funding, the applicants only had to acquire permission to use the property (for a minimum of five years) and demonstrate support from the community. Collaboration has been key to the program as the planning and implementation of projects require collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including applicants, property owners, neighbors, interested citizens, civil society groups, planning and design professionals, and staff from the Open Green program. As an ongoing experiment, the program provides learning opportunities for the city staff, professionals, and community members alike in the pursuit of collaborative placemaking and urban regeneration.

14 ChenYu Lien and Jeffrey Hou, "Open Green: Placemaking beyond Place-Bound Communities in Taipei," in Public Space Design and Social Cohesion: An International Perspective, Patrica Aelbrecht and Quentin Stevens, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 178-196.

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Learning through Open Green

D In the following section, findings from the study are organized around the three initial questions (see pp. 1-2), which set the stage for a discussion concerning specific processes and mechanisms for learning.

Overcoming Institutional and Cultural Barriers

Institutional changes occur often only as responses to external forces. In the case of Open Green, the program was the outcome of a series of events that began with the Taipei Floral Expo 2010 and the planning process leading up to the Expo. As the host city for the international event, the Taipei City Government put forward an initiative called "Taipei Beautiful" (台北好好看) to create temporary green spaces on vacant private property, using development bonuses as an incentive. Essentially, property owners and developers would receive up to 10 percent more floor-area ratio in exchange for turning vacant land into temporary green space. The incentive program was met with intense criticisms from the public and civil society groups for favoring private developers and contributing to real estate speculation. Citing the temporary and short-lived nature of these green spaces, "fake park" (假公園) became a rallying cry by activists and civic organizations against the city government.

As the agency in charge of the program, URO sought to turn the criticisms into opportunities for experimentation. First, a consultant team with extensive experience in community-based design was hired to experiment with a series of sites along the Roosevelt Road (羅斯福路) in the southern part of the city. The sites were highly visible because of their locations along a major thoroughfare. Two key issues became the focus of the project: creative uses of the temporary sites beyond just grass turfs, and the management and maintenance of these spaces after the construction. The decision to engage a broad spectrum of civic actors—including nonprofit organizations and local businesses, beyond the traditional participants such as local community leaders and the "neighborhood manager" (里長)—set important precedents for community-driven projects. These included the creation of a community garden (involving neighbors), a rainwater harvesting demonstration park (involving an environmental NGO), and a reading garden (involving local independent bookstores).

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The successful outcome in terms of community engagement in the Roosevelt Road Green Dots project encouraged the URO staff and agency leaders to expand the experimentation, which eventually led to the establishment of the Open Green program in 2014. The emergence of the concept and initiatives of placemaking around the world gave further legitimacy and support for the program, and thus acceptance by the agency director who named the program "Open Green." Among the staff, the approach of expanding the involvement beyond the traditional actors in community planning allowed them to see an opportunity for greater engagement of citizens and civil society members in the urban redevelopment process. In sum, the URO staff, together with the help of the professional team, turned the criticisms against the Taipei Beautiful initiative into an opportunity to reconsider how civic engagement is approached in community-based planning and placemaking, thus overcoming longstanding barriers for citizen participation.

In terms of cultural barriers which are often just as strong as the institutional barriers, the successful involvement of additional actors seemed to have played an important role. Participants saw the benefit of broader engagement and collaboration, including greater levels of participation at the neighborhood level, as well as the skills and assets the additional actors brought to the table. In the neighborhood of Gufeng (古風), for example, where multiple Open Green projects have been implemented—including a community makerspace, conversion of a dormitory residence into a community space, and improvement of an alleyway—the neighborhood manager was pleased to see the higher level of participation in events organized by outside groups supported by Open Green funds.

A community organizer commented, "The neighborhood manager had some concerns in the beginning but had since become completely open [to people from outside]. She now recognizes that the outsiders bring professional knowledge which can benefit the locals."[15] By opening the community resources to people from outside the community, the case of Gufeng demonstrates how cultural barriers for engagement can be overcome.

Acquiring Skills and Knowledge in Participatory Planning and Placemaking

In the case of Open Green, three distinct processes appear to be critical to how community stakeholders acquire skills and knowledge for effective and meaningful participation.

First, by expanding the scope of engagement beyond the typical stakeholders in a given neighborhood, Open Green projects often engaged actors beyond an existing network who have additional skills and knowledge to contribute and share with others. In the

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Gufeng neighborhood mentioned above, one of the best-known Open Green projects was called the White Hut (小白屋). Initially envisioned as a tool library, the influx of volunteers expanded the operation into a community repair station and makerspace. The volunteers have trained others in the neighborhoods. Also, instead of providing just free repair service, the volunteers have taught residents and others how to perform the repairs themselves. These interactions have in turn built social bonds within and beyond the neighborhood. The additional volunteers also helped snowball the operation into other initiatives in the neighborhood, including a community kitchen and workshop space, and expansion of the White Hut itself into the adjacent property.

Secondly, learning in the Open Green projects comes from participation in the project itself. Lane No. 334 is the site of another Open Green project, located next to a girls' high school in the Changwen neighborhood (璋文里) in Taipei.

The project facilitated the collaboration between a nonprofit organization focusing on the prevention of domestic violence, the neighborhood manager, high school teachers and students, residents, and a graphic design firm based in the neighborhood. It was the first time that these different actors had worked with each other in the neighborhood. The nonprofit organization connected the neighborhood manager, Ms. Lin Shu-Chu, to the funding opportunity. Lin then sought support from the high school and the graphic design firm, who in turn helped the students in developing the design.

The finished design transformed a dimly lit alley into a welcoming and safer space for the neighborhood. The successful experience has led to further collaboration between the school, the design firm, and the neighborhood, including: a project to transform planter boxes along the high school fences into community gardens; using the vegetables for cooking classes; holding design

> "By opening the community resources to people from outside the community, the case of Gufeng demonstrates how cultural barriers for engagement can be overcome. "

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classes in the school, with students helping local businesses to make product packaging; and a street market/festival showcasing local businesses. Learning by doing was reflected upon in the interview I did with Lin, the neighborhood manager: "I always wanted to take a class on community planning but I never had time. [Open Green] allowed me to learn by doing. Every corner in the neighborhood became a classroom for me. And there is so much homework!"[16]

Thirdly, the involvement of the professional team also played an important role in the process of learning. Specifically, the team, from the firm Classic Design and Planning (經典工程顧問有限公司), was hired not only to run the program but also to provide technical assistance to the communities and assist them with navigating the community and administrative processes, especially with participants who are less experienced. Additionally, the team also helped with connecting communities to available resources. For example, in a project located in the Mingshin neighborhood (明興里), the neighborhood manager learned from the team about a more environmentally sustainable method of construction and has since become a strong advocate of such a method. In the Lane 334 case, the team was responsible for connecting the neighborhood manager to the graphic design firm. Lin, the neighborhood manager, said:

> "The assistance from Collaborative O was comprehensive, much better than public agencies. Public agencies typically only provide the funds and require you to deliver results. But Collaborative O would identify resources, resources that we did not know before [...]. They are still in the social networking group and continue to stay in-

volved even after the project was done." [17]

In addition to the professional team, the communities also received specific input and suggestions from a committee of specialists who participated in reviewing applications, visiting sites, and inspecting project outcomes.

Building Capacity for Civic Engagement and Collaboration

Greater capacity for civic engagement and collaboration is evident in many Open Green projects. Starting with the White Hut, additional projects have sprouted in Gufeng that engage more residents and volunteers, demonstrating enhanced capacity. The organizers of these projects have recently been commissioned to support the training of community planners in other cities outside Taipei. "Taipei Umbrella," one of the early Open Green projects, is now in its second iteration. Starting with a temporary design, the designers and volunteers for the project developed a new design based on their observations on how the site has been used by neighbors. The group has branded its design as "ParkUp" and has implemented a similar design in two other locations in Taipei.

The Songde campus (松德院區) of the Taipei City Hospital is the site of two Open Green projects. The hospital staff had a working relationship with Hsiliu Environmental Greening Foundation (錫瑠環境綠化基金會), which suggested that the hospital apply for Open Green funds to activate and improve sites adjacent to the campus, with a focus on mental health services. The projects—a seating area near the main entrance and a community garden on the hill—provided opportunities

"The decision to engage a broad spectrum of civic actors—including nonprofit organizations and local businesses, beyond the traditional participants such as local community leaders and the "neighborhood manager" (里長)—set important precedents for community-driven projects"

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16 Author's interview, December 19, 2018.

17 Ibid.

for the hospital staff to work with additional partners and stakeholders, including the local branch of Community University (a nonprofit organization focusing on continued education and civic engagement in Taiwan), with expertise in urban gardening; the Taiwan Disability and Welfare Association (with an interest in horticultural therapy); and the adjacent neighborhood. The engagement and interactions have lessened the tensions between the neighborhood and the mental health facility. The hospital staff have also learned more about the design of green space from the projects and have since improved gardens inside the hospital.

The URO staff have also learned from the process. Specifically, one staff member mentioned that they have learned to step back and allow the communities to find their way through collaboration with other partners and stakeholders. "Government resource[s] [are] not necessarily a good thing. We learned how to work with existing assets in the community rather than government incentives," said Huang Hsin-Huei, a URO staff member.[18] The importance of informal interactions was another lesson learned for the URO staff. Specifically, they learned the importance of informal events and activities to allow stakeholders, professionals, and even government staff to familiarize and connect with one another. Similarly, they also found that informal communication is also important between different departmental agencies. The experiences from the Open Green Program have recently been applied to other municipal programs, including the activation of social housing spaces and old buildings. Similar to the model of the Open Green program, applications are open to the public, not just limited to residents.

For the professional team commissioned by URO to run the Open Green program, the program provided them with important learning opportunities and experiences as well. First, it allowed the team to experiment with new approaches to community-engaged placemaking, including the involvement of volunteers outside a community. When Open Green was first conceived, the concept of placemaking was still novel in Taiwan. The program allowed the team to develop methods and mechanisms through trial and error, including how community projects are funded and how to go about building community capacity. Internally, by engaging and supporting the communities through the process, the Open Green projects provided the staff, many of whom were new to the practice, with important opportunities for learning and training. "They learned to work with different kinds of people, develop social relationships, [and] respond to different scenarios…" said a senior staff member. [19]

> "By opening the community resources to people from outside the community, the case of Gufeng demonstrates how cultural barriers for engagement can be overcome. "

Image: An urban garden space in Taipei, created under the rubric of the Open Green Program. (Image source: Classic Design and Planning Company)

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18 Author's interview, July 3, 2018.

19 Author's interview, December 21, 2018.

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Issues and Challenges

Like most municipal programs, Open Green is also faced with issues and challenges. Two specific challenges stood out for this study. First, the involvement of a professional team in running the program meant that the city staff became removed from the community process. By contracting the team to run the program (rather than URO), the administrative procedure was drastically simplified—which provided greater flexibility for projects in terms of how funds can be spent, and thus greater convenience for accounting and reporting. The arrangement lessened the degree to which the communities had to deal with the municipal bureaucracy.

However, while the arrangement seemed to have benefited the community, there have been downsides to this approach. Specifically, the city staff have been less engaged in individual projects, and often don't have a full understanding of the community process—and, for the newer staff, even the history of the program. "Our learning has been more indirect […] filtered through the professional team," said a URO staff member. [20] Reflecting on the process, a senior staff member commented that "We have actually done a lot. But we are less visible. The communities tend to have a stronger and more intimate relationship with the professional team." [21]

The different levels of engagement have led to tensions between URO staff and the professional team, in terms of the future direction of the program. For example, URO would like to see a more structured approach to community deliberation on the projects, whereas the professional team would like to maintain the degree of flexibility to allow for a more organic way of community engagement. In 2018, the professional team decided not to renew their contract with URO, which in turn decided to pause the program for one year to step back and recalibrate.

As a government initiative, the Open Green program is not immune from the political process, including changes in staff and political leadership. Although there is a great level of knowledge and experience overall (among community stakeholders, professionals, and government staff), the actual policy and practices are still subject to political leadership, particularly in regards to agency leaders. The constant change of staff presents another problem, especially when knowledge and experience have not been passed down from staff member to staff member (according to interviews with professionals working with the staff). Similar to the URO, there has also been attrition on the staff of the professional team. As Open Green becomes more established as a routine program, the staff at Collaborative O. have become less motivated.

Another challenge for Open Green is the uneven degree of capacity-building across different sites and different projects. Even if projects have been completed, the actual community capacity may remain weak. In the historical Dachiao (大橋) neighborhood, for example, the funded projects have been completed. However, this was achieved mostly through the effort of a university-affiliated, community-based design studio led by faculty from a local university. The overall community capacity remained limited, according to those who were involved. As such, projects that were successful and well-used immediately after their completion became poorly maintained and managed over time.

Lastly, the measurement of community capacity pres-

> "As a government initiative, the Open Green program is not immune from the political process, including changes in staff and political leadership"

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20 Author's interview, July 3, 2018.
21 Author's interview, December 21, 2018.

ents another issue. The funds for the Open Green Program came from the central government. But because the evaluation criteria do not include community capacity, the program has constantly received low scores from the granting agency in the central government

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Conclusions and Reflections

Although Taipei's Open Green Program has only been around officially since 2014, the process that led to its development began as early as 2009. The decade of development to this day provides a fertile ground for examining its outcomes, including both successes and challenges. Although this study presents only a snapshot of the entire program (especially given the total of 61 projects, and growing, throughout the city), the evidence for learning and collaborative capacity-building is clear. In terms of specific processes and mechanisms, this has included learning to leverage existing challenges for experimentation, and to overcome barriers for citizen engagement in planning and placemaking.

"The case of the Open Green Program in Taipei is significant in the context of changing urban governance in East Asia. "

With greater participation by a wider range of actors and stakeholders, there were generally greater assets and resources available to a community, as well as opportunities for collaboration. In many cases, including those described in this chapter, the collaboration has been sustained through additional projects beyond the Open Green Program. Finally, the program provided opportunities for learning not just for the community stakeholders, but also for the agency staff and members of the professional team. Despite the ongoing issues and challenges, it is clear that the participants in the program, including community stakeholders, agency staff, and professionals, have all developed greater capacity in civic engagement and collaboration.

The case of the Open Green Program in Taipei is significant in the context of changing urban governance in East Asia. As citizens demand greater accountability from local governments and participation in planning decision-making, municipalities need to develop more effective ways of engaging citizens and communities. But rather than treating citizens and communities as clients on the receiving end of services, programs need to take into account opportunities for social learning and capacity building. Rather than considering communities as enclosed and place-bound, agencies and programs need to take into account the roles of a wider range of actors and stakeholders who can bring additional skills and assets to the table, especially in communities that are lacking in those assets and resources.

Finally, initiatives like the Open Green Program in Taipei have provided important opportunities for civil society actors, government staff, planning and design professionals, and community stakeholders to work together and learn from each other. The interactions, conflicts, and negotiations present opportunities for learning and developing new models of governance that meet the specific needs and aspirations of a society in transition.