Conserving Heritage In East Asian Cities: Planning For Continuity and Change

Community Participation in Heritage Conservation

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TECHNICAL NOTE

INTRODUCTION

Most conservation practitioners believe that cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. (Tangible = can be touched; "real" in the sense of being a physical thing, such as a building, object or ruin. Intangible = cannot be touched, but is still "real" in the sense of reflecting significant values within a community. Examples include festivals, religious rituals, dance, music, etc.) UNESCO's Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003) explains that "cultural heritage is an important component of the cultural identity of communities, groups, and individuals, and ... its intentional destruction may have adverse consequences, not just related to buildings and the physical landscape, but also to members of a community and their traditions and values." One key question for cultural heritage practitioners is: how to encourage participation by the community in the complicated processes related to the conservation of cultural heritage? This Technical Note will demonstrate not only the importance of understanding and respecting the public, in all its social and cultural complexities, but also how to engage the public more actively in the participatory process. The Note is divided into two main subjects. The first will briefly address the meanings of "community" and "neighbourhood." The second will offer specific suggestions about how to map the assets of the community so that, ultimately, the community will be encouraged to participate more actively in heritage conservation for the benefit of all interest groups, or stakeholders.

1. The Community Participation Process

1. Definition of Neighbourhood and Community

Often, writers and speakers referring to "neighbourhood" and "community" do not explain what they mean by these words.

In Southeast Asia, "neighbourhood" is often historically related to commonly owned assets, such as temples, natural resources, holy places, and local myths. Therefore, in Southeast Asian cities, neighbourhoods and larger "communities" were not exclusively formed by considerations of geography or abstract design, but were also sometimes woven into space and form through human imagination and religion. As this occurred, different ethnic and tribal groups sometimes found ways to share their beliefs and co-exist. For example, Thai-Lao communities in northeastern Thailand believe in the power of grandmother-grandfather spirits. The best space to house those spirits (in a so-called "spirit houses") is often near or at the boundaries of a historic

monument. Although community members might migrate in or out of the community, they would still believe in the same spirit. Moreover, sometimes when Thai-Chinese people live in the same community with Thai-Lao people, they carry their own former grandmother-father spirits with them as they integrate into that new community.

The concept of 'community' is complex. One of the earliest definitions of community was offered by the German theorist Ferdinand Tonnies through his distinction between Community and Society [Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft] (2001). Tonnies argued that traditional forms of living were characterised by the formation of communities. Whereas modern industrial societies need to be understood as more structured and defined by their formal institutions. Since this original definition many others have tried to explain in more detail what 'community' means. Generally it is agreed that communities occur when people get together and form groups out of both self-interest and the interest of the wider group. It is often said that people 'belong' to a community, i.e. they feel loyal to the group, and share in its goals, values and beliefs. The Sangha is one example of a strong community in Southeast Asia, whereby monks collectively abide by and follow a clear set of beliefs, rituals, rules and values. Recent research has also revealed how communities can take on very different forms in modern life. The internet, for example, has created a whole new generation of 'online communities', where people from very different parts of the world meet on the World Wide Web because of shared interests. This globalisation of communities can also be seen in Southeast Asia through the fan communities associated with world football. Across Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia and Singapore people form 'intangible communities' by following teams like Liverpool, Manchester United or Barcelona. Supporting a particular team not only makes people part of a global community of football fans, but also gives them a sense of identity that is in relation to others around them, including supporters of opposing teams. As we can see, communities do not necessarily need to be as geographically specific as neighbourhoods, and communities are formed more around shared interests and the desire to have a sense of identity that can only be achieved by being part of a larger group.

In the context of cities, the British planning theorist Nick Wates (2000) also defined community in terms of shared interests, but added that communities are particularly strong when these groups live within the same geographic area. We can thus see that in many cases there are clear overlaps between 'community' and 'neighbourhood', both in terms of definition and their geographic location. It is important to remember though that there might be a number of distinct communities within a particular neighbourhood, and that any particular community might cut across several neighbourhoods.

Given that communities are said to have a shared set of values, beliefs and interests, it is often possible to identify a 'spokesperson' for that community, or someone who can represent the community. In Southeast Asia this is often referred to as 'the community leader', or in rural settings 'the village chief'. Perhaps inevitably, and particularly in developing countries, such communities are sometimes designed by governmental authorities because of political factors such as voting patterns. In Thailand, for example, community leaders are representatives, campaigners and lobbyists of particular political parties. Therefore, "community" is not merely the result of human interaction through tradition, myth, and beliefs, but it also entails deeper personal passions and political interests.

2. Communities confront Gentrification

Recently, in the context of community development in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, one important consideration has been "gentrification," a process involving the rehabilitation of a neighbourhood by upgrading existing housing and other building stock, often resulting in higher real estate values and, therefore, the displacement of poorer people. For this reason, gentrification often has negative connotations among urban planners. Within protected heritage sites, gentrification can occur as a result of outside investment and speculation, which is what occurred in Luang Prabang (Lao PDR) shortly after it was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in 1995. The costs associated with rehabilitating buildings with specialized materials and craftsmanship to meet new standards was expensive, which many community members were unable to afford. The challenge of how communities confront gentrification is also related to how effectively they participate with each other in the process of protecting the cultural heritage assets they share as a community.

3. Community Planning

Community planning can be classified into two approaches:

- problem-oriented planning and
- asset-based community development (ABCD)

Two examples related to problem-oriented planning include a site-analysis problem involve land-use or environmental pollution problems that need to be studied within the context of water- and air-quality control and testing. Generally, problem-oriented plans are dictated by a short time frame with a firm deadline, surrounded by a sense of urgency, and driven by resource demands and priorities.

The problem-oriented planning process includes the following steps:
- Define the problem
- Articulate goals and objectives
- Analyze and evaluate
- Implement action plans
- Measure results

The problem-oriented planning process can be seen throughout Southeast Asia, where city and regional planning authorities are often reacting to many problems arising from population increases, economic development, political shifts, and environmental changes among other factors.

In contrast, asset-based community development (ABCD) seeks to uncover and highlight the strengths that already exist within communities. The basic idea is that a capacities-focused approach, which emphasizes the positive capacities within communities, is more likely to empower those communities and therefore mobilize citizens to create positive and meaningful change from within. Instead of focusing on a community's needs, deficiencies and problems, the ABCD approach helps them become stronger and more self-reliant by discovering, mapping and mobilizing all their local assets. These assets include:

- the skills of citizens,
- the dedication of citizens' associations (temples, clubs, and neighbourhood associations)
- the resources of formal institutions (businesses, schools, libraries, hospitals, parks, social service agencies).

For those who wish to engage in asset-based community development (as explained by Mathie, 2003), some actions are:

- Collecting stories of community successes and analysing the reasons for success;
- Forming a core steering group;
- Building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem solving within the community;
- Convening a representative planning group;
- Leveraging activities, resources, and investments from outside the community; and
- Mapping community assets

4. Community Asset Mapping

Community Asset Mapping is the inventorying of the assets of individuals and organizations. It has sometimes been used as a way of redeveloping devastated communities (as explained by Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). It is increasingly being used by cultural heritage practitioners as a means of understanding the positive elements that exist in a community, so that more sustainable solutions can be implemented for protecting valuable cultural resources.

The community assets approach

- starts with what is present in the community
- concentrates on the agenda-building and problem-solving capacity of the residents
- stresses local determination, investment, creativity, and control

Some forms of mapping include:

- Mapping Public Capital (social gathering places) – identifies the places where people congregate to learn about what is happening in a community

- Mapping Community Relationships delineates the relationships between organizations within a community, and
- Mapping cultural resources documents cultural resources in a community.

In the context of cultural heritage protection, cultural mapping is one important way to examine long-term customs, behaviours, and activities that have meaning to individuals and to the community. Communities can use cultural mapping as a tool for self-awareness to promote understanding of the diversity within a community and to protect and conserve traditions, customs, and resources. See, for example, the UNESCO-Bangkok website (http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/our-projects/protection-of-endangered-and-minority-cultures/cultural-mapping/), where cultural mapping is defined as "a crucial tool and technique in preserving the world's intangible and tangible cultural assets. It encompasses a wide range of techniques and activities from community-based participatory data collection and management to sophisticated mapping using **GIS** (Geographic Information Systems)."

If we choose to map community assets, a fundamental question is how we might do that?

There are a number of answers to these questions, and researchers working in different fields use different strategies and approaches when engaging with communities.

The first distinction to make is between primary and secondary data sets. Primary data is information that is collected by the researcher specifically for the study he or she is undertaking. Secondary data is the collection of material from other sources and previously conducted studies. This might include collecting data from reports, newspapers, books, and other publications. Typically a study will involve the collection of both types of data.

The second key distinction is between quantitative and qualitative forms of data. There are long debates as to the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, an issue that will be discussed in greater detail in the workshop. However, it is possible to summarise the key methods for collecting data which come under these two headings:

Qualitative Data Sets

Interviews

The easiest way to think of interviews is to see them as 'conversations with a purpose'. Interviews normally take place on a one to one base, and can last anywhere from 10 minutes to 2 hours. The most common form of interviews are semi-structured, whereby the interviewer will have a pre-prepared set of questions, and will work through them adding new ones or deleting unnecessary questions as appropriate. Interviews are highly beneficial for gathering detailed information about people's values, beliefs, anxieties, and opinions.

Focus Groups

This is essentially an interview conducted in small groups, ranging from 3 to 10 people. Focus groups are less structured than individual interviews, mainly because the conversation is less predictable as people respond to the comments of others. Focus groups generally last between 30 minutes and 1 hour, and the interviewer will prepare a set of questions beforehand. Focus groups can be very useful for gathering information about how a 'group' or perhaps a community feel about a particular issue. The information gathered, however, tends to be less detailed than the data collected in one-to-one interviews.

Participant and Non-Participant Observation

The third popular method for gathering qualitative data is to actually watch what people do. It can also be helpful to compare these observations with what they say, as the two can often be very different. Observation techniques are particularly useful for understanding how people use a space or facility such as a temple. Observation requires skills of carefully looking, interpreting a situation and taking both written and visual notes. Photographs can be particularly useful here. In the case of Non-Participation Observation, the observer is not a participant in the activity he or she is observing/researching. He or she stands on the sidelines watching. One example might be observing a ritual where the researcher is not involved in the actual practices or activities. Participant observation, on the other hand, is where the researcher IS involved in the activity, situation or group he or she is researching. One example here might be a three day festival, where the researcher participates in the activities to learn or 'feel' what the festival is about.

Qualitative methods are used by researchers who are interested in providing a richer explanation of a situation. They are typically conducted on a smaller scale, where researchers are trying to construct a detailed understanding or interpretation of the values, beliefs and opinions of the people or communities they are studying.

Quantitative Data Sets

Questionnaires

This is the most common technique used for conducting a 'survey'. Questionnaires are normally printed on paper and given to participants to complete. The more people who complete the questionnaire the greater the accuracy of the survey. In order to 'represent' a population or community, researchers will try and collect data from a minimum percentage of the population, this might vary between 2 and 20 percent depending on the situation. A questionnaire survey typically has between 10 and 50 questions, with this number varying according to the length of the answers required. 'Closed Answer' questionnaires involve respondents choosing from a selection of answers, often by ticking a box. 'Open Answer' questionnaires involve respondents answering questions with a sentence or two. Closed answer questionnaires are generally more popular as they are very useful for doing large-scale surveys where statistical relationships between answers can be identified.

Statistical Data

Researchers frequently draw on a wide range of statistical data for understanding community or neighbourhood issues. This might include creating primary data, as explained above, or involve the collection of secondary data. Government offices, both local and central, are often a key source of statistical information, as they regularly gather a wide variety of population data. In

Southeast Asia however, it can often be difficult to obtain reliable statistics about a city and its population.

Quantitative approaches such as questionnaire surveys are most commonly used where researchers are trying to understand larger scale patterns. They are often used to assess the 'attitudes' of a group towards a particular issue, and are therefore often used by politicians to assess 'public opinion' before an election.

Associated Issues
When conducting community research, there are many issues that need to be considered. These include:

Planning a Study
What type of information needs to be collected and who should it be collected from? Is it helpful to integrate multiple forms of data in a single study? These issues are often much more difficult to resolve than assumed and careful thought should be given to planning a study. In approaching potential respondents, it is important to be clear with them what the aims of the study are, how their data is going to be used, and to provide them information about the organisation you are representing.

Data Storage
How should data be collected and stored? There are advantages and disadvantages of recording digitally or with pen and paper. Many people do not feel comfortable talking while they are being recorded, particularly when discussing emotionally or politically sensitive issues. Data must also be stored reliably and confidentially.

Research Ethics
Respecting confidentiality is a crucial issue. Good researchers gain the trust of the people they are studying, and a vital issue is respecting the confidentiality of respondents. This means not disclosing the identities of people without their explicit permission. This is extremely important, and there should be no exceptions to this rule. In fact most research institutions such as universities now have ethical guidelines for guiding researchers. An example set of guidelines can be found at: www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm

Research and Active Participation
Unlike buildings or archaeological remains, people respond to researchers in a variety of ways. In many cases, people have a positive feeling about being asked their opinions and thoughts. They feel like they are being 'listened to' and that they have been given a 'voice'. As a result, it is often possible to build relationships that enable communities to become involved in conservation planning processes. Attending meetings, being part of discussions and community consultations are a good way of allowing people to become more involved.

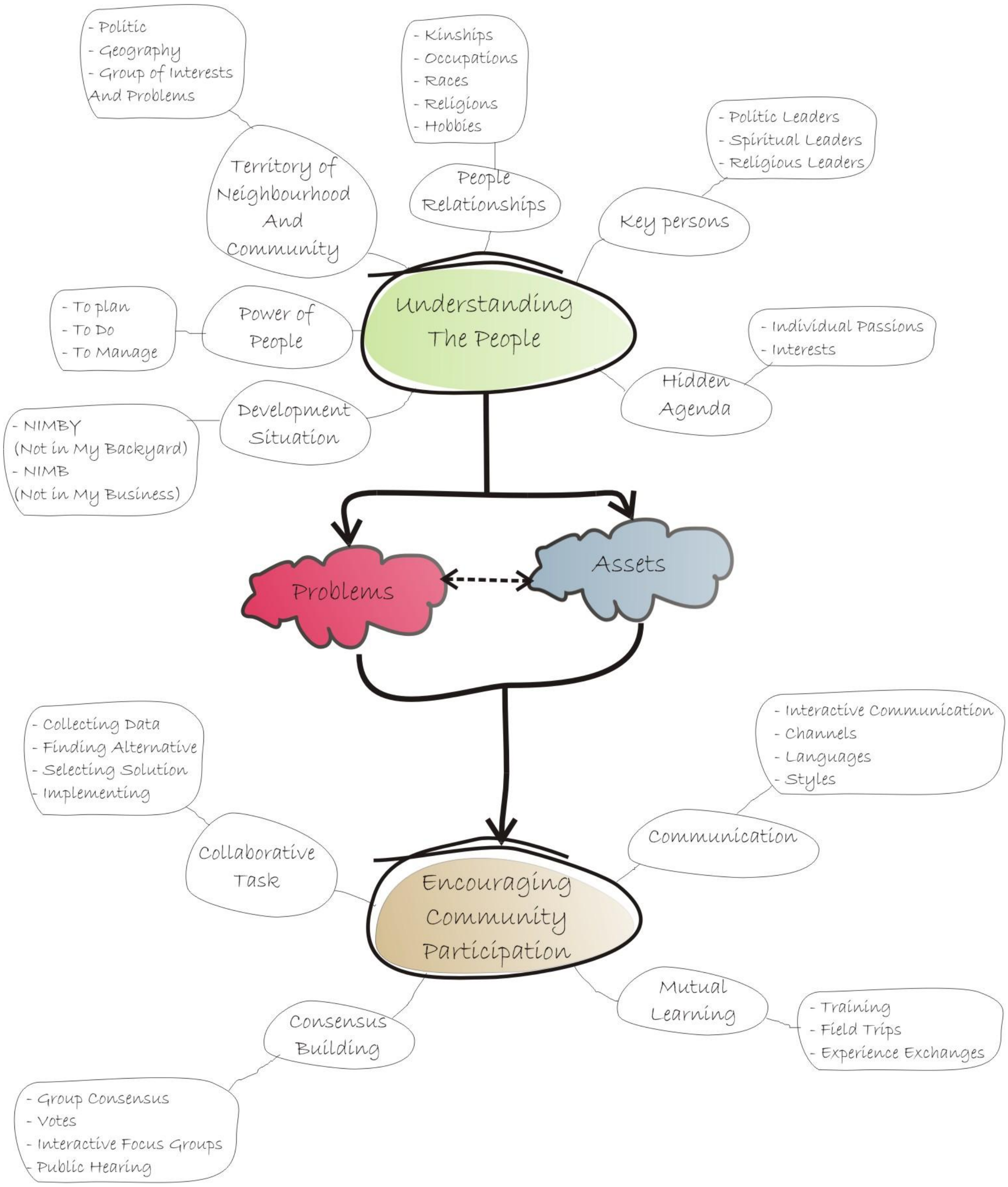

Diagram: From understanding the people to encouraging community participation

Appendix: THREE APPROACHES TO ASSET MAPPING. Fuller (2001)

The **Whole Assets Approach** takes into account all the assets that are part of people's view of their immediate community as well as the surrounding rural world. It is a systematic and balanced way to assess all the community assets from natural, social, economic, and service components of the community system. Because communities are not islands unto themselves, it means going outside the community to see what is important about the surrounding and interconnected areas. Whole asset mapping is comprehensive and although it takes longer, can provide a complete map of the community and its support system.

The Objectives of this approach are to:

- Identify important assets.
- Build an understanding of the group's appreciation of these assets.
- Identify the threats to these assets.
- Plan how the group can sustain and build upon the collective value of these community assets.

The **Storytelling Approach** produces pieces of social history that reveal assets in the community. It identifies how assets that are often hidden or dormant can be put together with other assets to produce additional assets. Often a story will be about human capacity and the people who made it happen –people with vision, a mission, leadership, energy, and community interests at heart. These stories generally have a happy ending.

Objectives of this approach are to:

- Share many great stories about community and collect written versions.
- Understand how these stories illustrate that combining resources, both human and physical, can develop a successful project. These stories will illustrate best practices.
- A synthesis of the stories will identify common assets across stories.
- Build an understanding of the group's appreciation of these assets by linking them.
- Create a network that will continue to work together at building on the assets of their community.

The **Heritage Approach** produces a picture (map or list) of those physical features, natural or built, that make the community a special place. Assets include natural heritage features such as rivers, sugar bush, park or beach, as well as built features such as an old bridge, defunct steamboat, historic building, a long-time favorite coffee shop. Almost anything on the landscape can be part of a community's heritage, if the people who live and work there feel it is significant to them.

Objectives of this approach are to:

- Develop a clear sense of what each member feels are the physical attributes of the community. A map showing key areas – community assets – will be produced as a result of this session.
- Build an understanding of the group's appreciation of these specific attributes and assets.

READINGS

📖 = Essential reading material
💻 = Available online

💻 Fuller, Tony, and Denyse Guy and Carolyn Pletsch.2001. Asset Mapping: A Handbook. Agriculture and Agrifood Canada. http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/document.php?d=11 (accessed Oct. 20, 2009).

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📖 Peterman, William. 2000. Community Empowerment, Organization and Development In Neighborhood Planning and Community-Based Development: The Potential and Limits of Grassroots Action. ed. William Peterman, 9-20. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

💻 Social Design Notes. What is Asset Mapping? http://backspace.com/notes/2004/06/what-is-asset-mapping.php (accessed on Oct. 20, 2009).

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💻 UNESCO, Bangkok Office. Protection of endangered and minority cultures: Cultural mapping. http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/our-projects/protection-of-endangered-and-minority-cultures/cultural-mapping/ (accessed October 20, 2009).

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