

Managing the improvement of a city's public realm- the case of Chiayi City's chief townscape consultant project 2005, 7- 2006, 12

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ABSTRACT

The project of chief townscape consultants was initiated by Taiwans' central government in 2003 to have urban design professions help local governments processing their townscape enhancement projects in accordance with central government policies. A team of planning and design professions, mainly from the NCKU, invited by the author, was organized to work for Chiayi City from July 2005 to December 2006.

The process was never smooth but the team managed to develop training courses, planning and design forums, and documents such as city-wide townscape improvement framework and suggestions for managing urban design control etc. They were welcomed by the city and did help related parties understand and work better on public realm design.

Two things are considered significant for the team to face the complexities of this consultant project and to come out with satisfactory results: the collaboration among different professions and a useful working mechanism based on contemporary urban design theories and principles.

This paper focuses on the management of this project. The team's initial expectation and working concept, and the way the team collaborated, will be discussed. The process of knowing the city, identifying urban design challenges and all the documents developed and forums and training courses responding to city's need is set against Punter's 12 general urban design principles to discuss its significance.

The key principles that guide the team through the various stages of the project are almost identical with that of management discipline and will be discussed in the concluding section.

KEYWORDS

public realm, townscape improvement, planning process and management, Chiayi City

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1. INTRODUCTION

The eighteen months consultant work, from July 2005 till September 2006, was considered successful not only that the required tasks were fulfilled and the public sector gave good responses, but also that the team did, through various efforts in different sectors, help the city understand better and improve the management of its public realm design.

Based on documents developed over the project period, this paper tries to set all related works and documents against Punter's general urban design principles [2006] and some general principles of management science [Magretta and Stone 2003; Ohmae 2005] to see the significance of the initial working concept and the way the project was managed. Planners and urban designers might be more interested in knowing the documents we developed; The author, who is also the project director, considers only when the team held strong professional aim and co-operated to face the complexity of the project can a satisfactory result be achieved. Management is no doubt one key to this.

Before exploring aforementioned principles, our working concept and some measures for management, the paper introduces first the project and the City of Chiayi.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND, CITY PROFILE AND CHALLENGES TO TOWNSCAPE IMPROVEMENT

The chief consultant project is part of Taiwan's townscape reform program, having planning and design consultant to help a municipality with its townscape projects. Given similar tasks, the challenges to such a team and the impact of their work differ significantly from place to place, owing to different local conditions and political and administrative support etc. After introducing project background and the city, this section outlines some challenges to our team.

2.1 Project Background

The so called townscape reform project was initiated by Taiwan's central government round 1999 to tackle some major urban problems in Taiwan's cities. It has become one major sector of Taiwan's recent urban design movement and has made significant changes to cities and towns all over Taiwan. A review mechanism with some design principles are developed to guide the development of local projects and a participatory planning process was emphasised.

Though over the years successful projects abounded, giving credit to this project and confidence to the initiators, quite a few projects did more harm than good to the public realm, visually and functionally and in major cities as well as in small towns. The idea of getting each city or county a chief townscape consultant was initiated in 2003. Expected most is that through the help of such a team a city-wide framework can be developed to offer workable vision and procedures for enhancement proposals and to knit individual projects together.

The former chief consultant of the City of Chiayi did help develop a framework pointing out clearly the city's physical character and opportunities for future development, namely the city centre- tourism axis, the cultural- tourism axis and the blue-green axis.

2.2 Profile of Chiayi City

2.2.1 Character of the City of Chiayi

Situated south of Taiwan and north of the Chia-Nan Plain, the City of Chiayi is a small city in terms of population size (around 273,000) and land area (60 square kilometers). It has a core area of densely built center with significant amount of mixed development surrounded by agri-

cultural land and protected natural areas. Two rivers flow westward creating its northern and southern boundaries and some water-side open spaces [Figure 1].

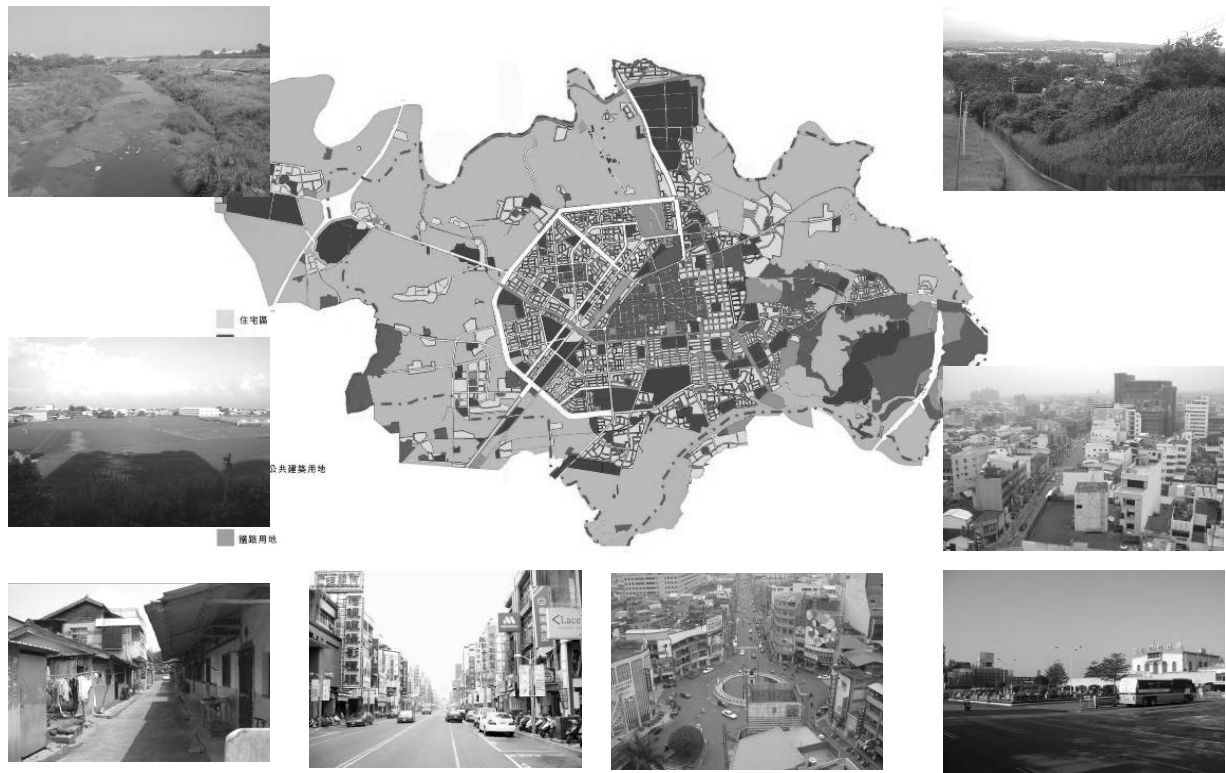


Figure 1. Chiayi City's planning map with photos showing images of different districts

Like most of Taiwan's cities, 'modern' city of Chiayi was planned and developed during the Period of the Japanese Occupation, creating a grid-iron road pattern with important public buildings on some nodal points. The city's characteristic wooden buildings were constructed during this period because of the cultivation of forests in Ali-mountain area.

Over the past two decades the city saw very little growth in population and economic capacity and suffered from the impact of land speculation and ill managed development over the early nineties. Its major urban design problems include visual chaos, pedestrian unfriendly public realm, ill-maintained environment, insufficient open space and parks, serious air and water pollution, poor public transport, and the losing of local character etc.

However, its interesting mix of town, villages and rural and natural districts within easy reach, rich physical and cultural assets and, importantly, its sound urban function with low urban pressure make it capable of being a nice place to live. The city has manifested itself and highly expected to be a city 'small and beautiful.'

2.2.2 Chiayi City's Townscape Reform Projects and Related Plans

Since 1999 the City has developed more than sixty townscape enhancement projects scattered about in the city. Nearly half of them are tree planting on major roads and park development. Others are enhancement to major streets and nodes and the development plans for some cultural-historic districts, and a few neighbourhood projects.

Still Chiayi's townscape reform cast very little impact on the city's visual, functional, or environmental quality [Figure 2]. Over the past decade, when successful experiences from Kaohsiung City, Hsinchu City, Yilang County and other places were well publicised, none of Chiayi's public realm projects gained notice. A strong wish for something new, commendable

and relevant to the city's history was and still is often emphasized in project goals and in open discussions.



Figure 2: *Some of Chiayi City's townscape 'improvements'*

Based on the city's 1999 Comprehensive Development Plan, the former chief townscape consultant helped the city developed a Townscape Development Plan (2003), identifying three corridors for improvement. Also, since 1999 the city has developed some city-wide plans such as the Urban Design Structure Plan (1999), the Living Environment Reform Plan (1999), and City-wide Pedestrian Space Improvement Plan (2006). However, they cast very little impact and the city's public realm saw no significant 'reform'. As the chief planner of the city's planning department contended, most officials do not consult those strategic level plans when they prepared related environment projects [Hwang 2007]. Officials complained about the uselessness of those studies and plans; council members criticised about the very little contribution they done to the city's environment [Wu 2008].

2.3 Challenges to Chiayi City's Townscape Improvement

Apart from having to know the city in a short time, the team identified some other challenges for helping the city improve its townscape quality. After a series of field surveys, reviews of related plans and actual works, and knowing how the official members worked on related projects, we found firstly that the city needs an overall framework that not only positions individual project in the right place but also offers useful planning and design guidance; secondly, it needs a mechanism that officials can follow and work better on townscape projects; and thirdly it needs to develop an environment or culture that values, welcomes and encourages good design [Wu 2008].

3. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CHIEF TOWNSCAPE CONSULTANT PROJECT

Aforementioned challenges were identified during the process of our consultant work. The rationale behind this was important. The team considered it important to help the city not only solve existing problems but overcome some structural barriers so that significant break-through can be made. The team believed that townscape improvement must have functional and environmental considerations as the support for visual quality. Successful designs respond to both physical settings and local needs appropriately so they attract people. What's more, they are often well maintained [Punter 1999; Carmona et al. 2003].

This section discusses how the team organised all related works and how works assigned and reviewed. Control of project schedule through regular meetings and the use of tables for control will be explored. Stage by stage tasks and outcomes will be introduced in the end to show the way the project progressed.

3.1 Concept of Project Management

The team's initial working concept was devised before the project started and was found significant and useful throughout the whole eighteen months [Figure 3].

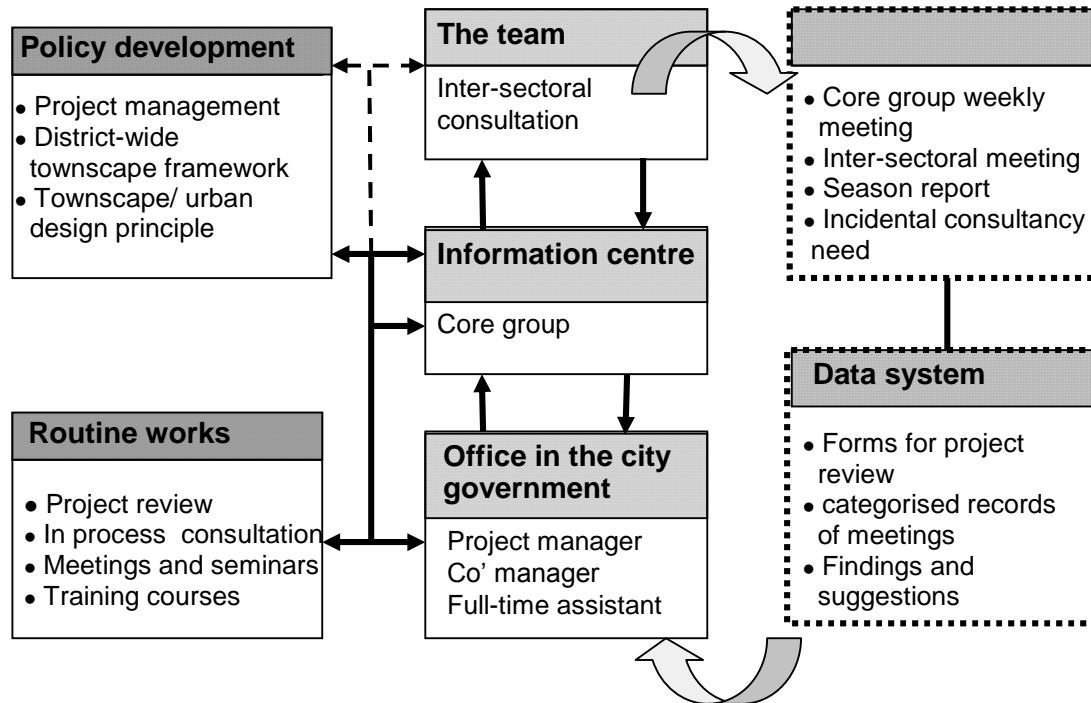


Figure 3: The working concept of townscape consultant project- showing nature of tasks, relation among actors, and information flow and control

Three points are worthwhile emphasising here: the organisation and cooperation of the team, the separation of routine works and policy developments and the control of regular meetings and reports that help propel different sections of the project and establishment of a data system.

The director and two co-directors (an urban designer, a planner and an architect) and two assistants formed the core group, sharing survey, review and the development of design policies and responding to general project needs. Supporting consultants specialised in transport planning and management, tourism planning, green design and planning, urban conservation etc. helped offer general suggestions and review specific projects.

All works are divided into two groups: 1. routine works, such as project reviews and consultation meetings; and 2. policy level works, such as developing principles for reform projects and devising mechanism for up-lifting design awareness. The latter relies of course on identifying problems from the former and on supporting works such as site visits, review of major plans, case studies and consultations.

From the very beginning all members were asked to keep good records of every meeting or review each attended, covering issues and problems discussed and suggestions given. Standard forms and tables are developed for meeting record, site survey, and plan review etc. and all records were reviewed and collected by the core group. The core group met every Monday, reviewing past week work, in progress works and discussing proposed later actions. Policy level works will be discussed, routine works reviewed, and certain level conclusions made so that responsible personal and schedule can be arranged.

3.2 The Major Stage-by-Stage Tasks and Outcomes

The eighteen months can be divided into three sections. The first for knowing the city, including identifying general urban design problems; the second, offering general principles and guidance for project management; and the last, consensus and capacity building. Important meetings and conferences organised by the central government helped the team understand better our role and offered useful lessons from other cities and counties.

Organised in Table 1 are the key tasks and outcomes developed over the periods, while routine works are excluded. Altogether they contribute to four major parts significant to the improvement of the city's townscape improvement plans: *knowing the city*; *building consensus*, concerning the nature of public realm design and commitment to design quality; *developing principles* that would guide future projects; and *enhancing project management*, including better information system and in-time consultations.

Table 1: Major works and results of Chiayi's chief townscape consultant project through the years, divided into three periods

	<i>Major works</i>	<i>Results and documents</i>
1 st and 2 nd seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City survey ● Consultant meetings (8) ● Review of relevant projects and plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Development forum of 5 provincial cities ▲ Forum of Chiayi's Urban development ● Case study- Portland Central City Design Guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ 2005 Nation-wide space reform forum ▲ 2005 1st National Conference on Landscape/townscape Structure Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Results of survey (5/ table with images, issues and comments) ● Extracts of the city's major projects and plans (15) ▲ Lessons from Portland's study ● <u>Distribution of the city's 88-94 townscape reform projects, a map</u> ● <u>Notes on Chiayi City's townscape structure plan</u>
3 rd and 4 th seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City survey and review of former townscape reform projects ▲ Case studies- Tainan City and Chanhwa City ▲ Draft plan for Chiayi's townscape forum ▲ Visit the mayor- the team of the chief consultant project and the team for townscape structure plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Case study- Tainan City ▲ 96 townscape reform plan negotiation meeting (CPA, MOI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Result of survey- nodes and major streets (5) ● Extracts of city-wide plans (11) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ <u>Three townscape projects management principles</u> ★ Concept plan for the city's townscape network ▲ The city's first townscape forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ <u>Suggested framework for the city's townscape reform projects</u> ■ <u>Stage by stage notes for the development of townscape proposals (project management)</u> ■ ★ End of first year report (Portland's experience/ Punter's general urban design principles)
5 th and 6 th seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Year 96 competitive project assessment meeting (Taipei) ▲ Draft proposal for the second townscape forum ▲ Plan for public sector staff training ● Updating the information of major projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Yearly meeting of chief consultants (CPA, MOI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ ★ <u>The chief consultant's special report: outline and lessons from year 96 competitive projects/ suggestions for Chiayi City</u> ● Extracts of city-wide plans (2) ▲ The second townscape forum ▲ ■ Training course for townscape project ▲ Report of 'Yearly meeting of chief consultants' ★ ■ <u>Suggestions for the City's urban design review</u> ■ Updated tables of major projects

CPA- Construction and Planning Administration; MOI- Ministry of the Interior

● Knowing the city; ▲ Building consensus; ★ Developing general principles; ■ Enhancing project management

Tasks and outcomes in Table 1 are marked with different symbols representing their roles. The first two seasons were devoted to knowing the city, including city surveys, review of city-wide plans and consultations with local planners, concerned groups and professions. The result, organised as a townscape project map and a series of tables outlining project conditions, became a key document of Chiayi's townscape reform project. Later on more effort was devoted to developing general principles for townscape reform and enhancing management. Building consensus was a major theme throughout the whole periods.

Various efforts were tried to respond to the city's need while the team encountered, including offering lessons from case studies, developing principles for project management, and suggestions to Chiayi's Landscape Structure Plan etc. All those were later integrated into two important documents offered at the end of the first year: *general townscape improvement policies*, covering area-by-area environment issues, improvement concepts, development policies and planning and design principles [Table 2]; and a step-by-step *Notes for townscape project management*.

Table 2: Part of the suggested enhancement policies for the city's green network

<i>Environmental issues</i>	<i>Concept for improvement</i>	<i>Development policies</i>	<i>Development principles</i>
A-1-1 Scattered green resources	γ connecting, Diversifying, en-living green resources	γ defining roles of the resources so that later development can respond to	γ strengthening use support without compromising environmental concerns
A-1-2 The awkward roles of parks and botanical garden	γ differentiating areas for protection or for daily use	γ defining roles of different parks, boulevards, etc. responding to ecological concerns and need for daily uses	γ limiting human interferences to protected natural areas

Townscape forums and training courses were organised at the latter part of the project. They were considered important mechanism for consensus building and awareness promotion. Though it was welcomed in the beginning and was arranged in the succeeding chief consultant project, the city did not develop its capacity to take charge such matters and have them held regularly.

Overall the team had been helping the city to develop design awareness and expertise. Through the processes of revising project contents and selecting designers, the team stressed the importance of encouraging design expertise and due consultation. However, there are structural barriers. Comparing with Taiwan's other cities such as Taipei, Kaohsiung or Tainan, Hsinchu, the city is seriously short of talented urban designers; and central government's funding system and schedule control discouraged reasonable time for planning and design analysis and the invitation of capable designers. Also harmful to the city's was (and still is) the two-tier system where projects not sponsored by the townscape reform project can be excluded from the 'interference' of the consultant team, rendering a careful control of small projects while major constructions can well breach fundamental design principles.

Obviously, an overall townscape reform structure with sound design principles are needed; and project management has to be improved. However, no suggestions or plans will exert influence on the city's public realm unless they are incorporated into the existing policy framework or management system. [Punter 1999 and 2006; Carmona *et al.* 2003]

The last important document the team developed according to the city's request was a Proposal for Enhancing Urban Design Control, crafted for the city and based on Punter's general design review principles [Figure 4]. Suggested changes to the organisation of the Urban Design Review Commission and possible task arrangements to develop related documents and enhance targeted areas were also included (the grey part in Figure 4).

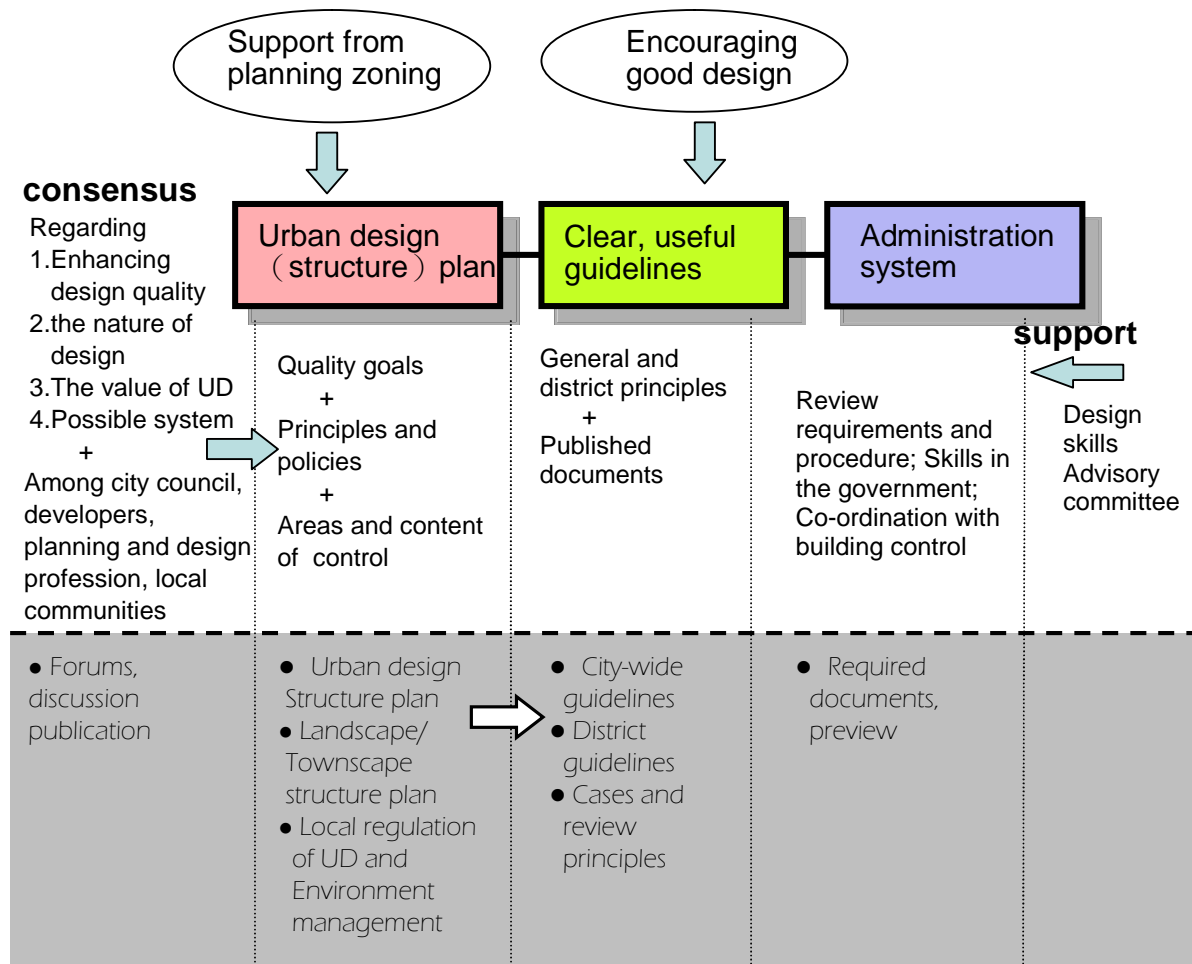


Figure 4: A conceptual diagram showing principles and measures for better urban design review

At the end of this project, the team convinced the city government to have the final report issued in a book format so that it can be widely consulted by the officials and the general public, avoiding the fate of most thick project reports that ended up buried in file cabinet. Key materials of Chiayi's townscape reform projects, including important suggestions from the team, project review from the planning department, are included with most texts rewritten in a more plain language that the general public can understand.

4. FINAL DISCUSSIONS

It is always the hope of the team to see the city improving. Gladly, some suggestions did influence the city's urban design management, though significant 'reform' of the public realm has yet to come. The role of such a consultant and the way urban design academics involve in the city are worthwhile discussing.

Hsia sees Taiwan's urban problems- urban primacy owing to urban rural migration, booming of the informal sector, the disarticulation of value systems and the alienation of spatial experiences- the result of twisted economic development and industrialisation. He contends that a participatory urban design that helps foster a citizen society and the real use value of urban spaces the key to Taiwan cities' spatial and cultural reform [Hsia 1990]. Planning and design professionals have to come out of the limited roles of technique bureaucrats witnessed in Taiwan's planning history to challenge the existing planning, as well as political, system to participate in such a change [Chang 1993].

The County of Yilang's planning and design success demonstrates the importance of useful planning and design consultation that led the county to develop in a right way. Tseng [2004] contends that commitment to environment quality, administrative support, better conditions for architects' ingenuity, collaboration between public and private sectors, active local societies, added with strong sense of proud from all sectors, are factors for Yilan's success. Wu [2009] considers political support from political leaders and the general public the key to long term success. Yilang offers a platform where planning and urban design professionals can contribute because it values professional input. The existing planning system does not promise quality environment people now expect. Also not every city understands clearly the value of urban design and the importance of comprehensively involving quality concern in its planning system and development control.

Punter's suggestions for a planning system to deliver better design quality were developed after in-depth studies of best practices in the UK, the US and Vancouver [Punter 1997, 1999, 2003]. They respond to both zoning systems and discretionary planning systems and cover the following areas: community vision; design, planning and zoning; broad, substantive design principles; and due process (with respectively 2, 3, 3, and 4 principles). The efforts and outcomes of our consultant project fall in this frame, highlighting the importance of widening the concern beyond townscape to tackle problems under surface, especially the efforts of consensus building and changes to existing systems, to have real influences.

The team never knew exactly what challenges we'll encounter; neither did we plan to tackle project management issues in the beginning. Quite some efforts and ideas leading to later suggestions and actions were developed over the process. The key to this might be the team's initial concern for offering something new and useful and the wish to face structural problems rather than routine works. In retrospect, it is interesting to see all our efforts against Punter's principles and some principles of the management science.

The team was not a company doing the job for profit. We care for the quality of the city and we care for both the usefulness of our suggestions and that we develop our expertise. Appropriate management is no doubt significant to ensure efficiency and service quality. To tackle the unfamiliar works was challenging, but it was also encouraging to have them done decently with the help of related experts. The arrangement of manpower and the way all members shared works and developed all key documents together helped the success.

The eagerness to do a good job beyond the contract's requirements and so to have all directors working on the identified policy areas make this project distinct from the usual patterns seen in our planning schools. It is interesting to see this project from the view point of the management science. Magretta and Stone contend that the key to non profit organisations' management is not client but mission. Share values in an organisation helps significantly in successful management. Hsu emphasises the importance of mutual trust and enthusiasm for ideals as the base for real management [Magretta and Stone 2003]. Efforts in the first period of our project conveyed our concern for communication and building mutual trust. The key attitudes of professionalism advocated by Ohmae, namely caring for the customer (to us the city's public realm and the city's expectation), continual learning, daring to challenge existing norms, and willing to make a way through obstacles, were held by all

members of the core group. What he identified as the key elements of professionalism- ability of foreseeing, ability to develop innovations and persuade, and ability to work with dilemmas- were the things we're forced to face [Ohmae 2005].

Other successful stories of townscape consultants' contribution to a municipality exist, but few talked about their project management. The processes the team went through, the way we manage to respond to the city's needs, the way we cooperated, and the various forms and tables we devised might be helpful for planners or urban designers tackling similar issues. We value the contribution of sound plans and good designs and contend again the importance of aforementioned professionalism which is the founding rock of planning profession and the key to our honour.

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