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Chengnan
Xin Qiao

The Xin Qiao ("Shin Chow") neighborhood in the historic Cheng Nan area of Quanzhou is caught between the divergent interests and needs of residents, business owners, and government planning entities. Prior to the arrival of studio participants in China, the challenges presented by the neighborhood were summarized by a single question: "What is worth preserving?"

It was clear that the answers to this question could not be products of purely technical research and analysis – participatory development is a process whereby residents and stakeholders are empowered to find their own solutions, and then act on them.

Defining the participatory process was a challenge unto itself; applying principles of the process to the unique context of Xin Qiao harder still. Walking into the twisting lanes of Xin Qiao, lined with brick courtyard houses and cramped shops, it quickly became clear that the ideas of studio participants regarding preservation were often vastly different from those of residents, and residents' views of the future of their community were in stark contrast to government plans.

The Xin Qiao studio group established consensus that participatory development is a process rather than an end result. As the focus shifted to facilitation of the process rather than a traditional analysis of architecture and infrastructure, the objective became empowering stakeholders to take active roles in the future of their community. The overarching question changed from, "What is worth preserving?" to, "How do stakeholders reconcile divergent interests while achieving progress?"
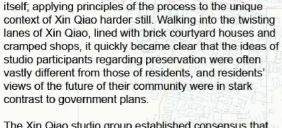

Chengnan Group Members

The Chengnan group of students came from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including Urban Design and Planning, Landscape Architecture, Architecture, Public administration, and History. Collectively, we are studying participatory development, a departure from traditional planning that places emphasis on community activism and on citizen involvement in the planning process. The combination of many diverse interests and backgrounds on our team lends a holistic approach to our analysis, and requires collaboration, negotiation, and commitment to common goals over those of individuals. In the same way, participatory development is a process whereby diverse interests – government entities, businesses, and residents – build relationships and partnerships in re-developing communities. We believe development and planning are most effective when the interests of all stakeholders are considered equally and objectives are products of truly collaborative efforts.

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