

**PLANNING FOR A HOME FOR PEOPLE AND THE
ENVIRONMENT IN TAIPEI**

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ABSTRACT

Taipei has become a more recognizable city but knowledge about planning in the city has been quite limited internationally. This research project uses two case examples of planning in Taipei – the protected to residential re-zone case and the efforts of urban renewal, to probe into conflicts of interest in land-use and to find out the limitations of planning processes. In addition to secondary data such as books, articles, meeting minutes and published/unpublished government documents, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Along the way, I found that the municipal government has placed little value on nature; nor has it planned much with the general public's benefits in mind. Instead, corporate elitism and political manipulation have limited planning and what it was mandated to do. Finally, I suggest that planners, politicians, decision makers and residents in Taipei deeply reflect on the city's current condition and collaborate to find a fundamentally different alternative.

Key Words: Planning, slope land, urban renewal, power, politics

Subject Terms: Taipei (Taiwan); City planning -- Taiwan – Taipei; Urban Policy Asia; Municipal Government Asia; Urban Ecology Asia; Cities And Towns Growth Environmental Aspects

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INTRODUCTION

Geographical Context

“Taipei has always remained one of the world’s most intriguing yet least understood major cities...” (Sir Peter Hall as quoted in Kwok 2005, back cover) I would like to contribute academically with this study and add understanding to this intriguing city. This research project explores urban planning and conflicts among interests in Taipei City. This project presents a unique and special case with the intention of finding general applications to the world around it. Before beginning this journey however, one must have a firm understanding of the geographical and historical context of the case I am presenting because what will be discussed later in the project is the result of the influence of the geographical and historical context.

Taipei is the capital city of Taiwan and the financial, political and cultural centre of the island nation. Moreover, in 1967 it was designated as one of two special municipalities in Taiwan. The special municipality status is granted to cities that exceed 1.25 million in population and have special needs in political, economic and cultural developments. The status gives more power to the city and helps Taipei generate revenues and modernize more quickly (Selya, 1995). Situated within the Taipei Basin, it stretches 18 kilometres from east to west and 27 kilometres from north to south – covering over 271 square kilometres of land (City of Taipei, 2000b). There are 12 administrative districts in Taipei. The City of Taipei is much constrained by its surrounding topography. Two rivers – Dan-Sui and Kee-Long surround the city from the

West and the South, while mountain ranges rise steeply eastward in the north, east and south sides of the city (City of Taipei, 2000b). The physical constraints limit the city to merely 134 square kilometres (49.3% of total land areas) of suitable development land. This has in turn created a very densely populated urban area. By the end of 2003, the population of the city is about 2.63 million yielding an overall population density in the city of 9,666¹ people per square kilometres. In the most populated district, density may reach 28,000 people per km² (City of Taipei, 2004c). This is much higher than the overall average of 625 people per square kilometres for the entire island nation.

Apart from steady population growth, Taipei has also experienced a decline in the number of people per household. At the end of 2003, there are about 915,220 households residing in Taipei with 2.87 people per household (City of Taipei, 2004c). In addition to smaller families, Taipei has experienced an increase in elderly population (residents over 65 years of age). These trends add up to more demands for not only housing, but also appropriate housing. In addition, problems like over-population, inadequate living space, lack of green space, crowding, sanitation related issues and traffic congestion have all come to the forefront over the years (Liao, 2005). As a result, slums of illegal squatter houses formed and pressure to find more space for people intensified. Pressure of developments plus challenges of finding appropriate sites of developments result in discussions of the “best use of the land” for the city. This debate is currently going on.

¹ Hong Kong's population density sits at 6,380 (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, 2006); Shanghai has a density of 2,588 (Shanghai Daily, 2004) and GVRD has a density of 2,220 with the City of Vancouver sitting at 5,270 (GVRD, 2003).

Historical Context in Brief

Taipei's early development has everything to do with the overall direction the entire island was going toward at the time. Taiwan, a name given by the Japanese meaning "big bay" is a de facto island nation located only 165 kilometres off the shore of China (Weightman, 2002). Its shape is like that of a long oval approximately 240 miles long and 98 miles wide (Hsieh, 1964). This is the place where the retrocede Kuomintang (KMT) party made their home after being defeated by the Communist Party. The KMT then established an authoritarian state and a specific state apparatus (Chen 1995) in Taiwan in the hopes of regrouping and taking the "mainland" back. This establishment of the state apparatus had a lot to do with Taiwan's (and thus Taipei's) developments throughout the second half of the 20th century (particularly from the 50's to the 70's). First, such motivation led the KMT to centralize production by working closely with (or in some cases directly taking over) many corporations that controlled the production of goods. Secondly, the KMT government administered strict control of the economy, allowing Taiwan to gain advantage over other countries (i.e. lowering the value of the dollar for more profitable trades). Thirdly, land was used and allocated according to the need of the state apparatus instead of according to the actual needs of the people. Finally, the state apparatus created an elitist society where people with wealth and power became more powerful. As more interest groups joined the state apparatus, it grew stronger, firmly entrenching politics with corporations (Chen, 1995). The state apparatus never helped the KMT to retake China, but it successfully achieved what later became the Taiwan miracle, which included major national infrastructure upgrades, export processing zones and improvements on technology (Selya, 1995). However, this came at

a price. First of all, the population of the island continued to increase over time. An annual rate of natural population increase of 3.6% took population from around 11.1 million in 1961 to 20.4 million in 1990. This is especially noteworthy considering that over two-thirds of the island is composed of steep, rugged foothill ranges (Chang², 2002). Secondly, the focus on economic development fuelled the already powerful elites (i.e. developers, corporations). This resulted in a lack of consideration for the public's interests, as well as any long-term visions for the island (B1³). Although the authoritative state apparatus era is now over, its effects remain quite prevalent.

As a result of rapid population increase, Taiwan's planning bureaucrats began to articulate nature as a resource to be exploited in the 70's (Hsiao, 1999). As a result, people started to sprawl into the more ecologically sensitive slope land. This was especially the case in Taipei. The municipal government rolled out a plan under request from the national government (D1) in 1979 to re-zone 25 pieces of land in its ecologically sensitive fringe area (totalling 4.6 square kilometres) from "protected" to "residential" in order to alleviate the housing pressure (See Figure 1).

² This and other sources edited by Academia Sinica includes interview transcriptions from 14 different prominent figures in urban planning from former Taipei City mayor to other high-ranking government officials and academic experts. It is a precious historic overview of urban planning in Taiwan and Taipei. Although it serves as a secondary resource, it does contain aspects of a primary resource. The publication covers the people who I may not be able to receive permission for an interview. Academia Sinica was founded in 1928 and is the most prominent academic institution in the Republic of China. Academia Sinica enjoys independence and autonomy in formulating its own research objectives. Its major tasks are to undertake in-depth academic research on various subjects in the sciences and humanities.

³ A major part of the project consists of primary data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Taipei in 2006. To protect the identities of the interviewees, their names and positions cannot be revealed. I have instead chosen to use corresponding numbers to represent the identities and qualifications of the interviewees with A1-A5 being academic researchers, B1-B4 being members of non-profit groups, C1-C2 being central government staff members, D1-D5 being municipal government staff members and E1 being an individual. See appendix B for more details.

Figure 1: The 23 Pieces of Re-zoned Land and Their Locations in the City of Taipei



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These 25 pieces of land are all located in two administrative districts in Taipei City - Beitou and Shilin. These two districts have a larger total land area as compared to the

other ten districts (59.5 square kilometres on average versus 15.3 square kilometres). As such, the average population density in these two districts now stand at 4,508 people per square kilometre, while the population density in the other ten districts average out to be 17,366 people per square kilometre. Nevertheless, because of the geographical challenges of developing these pieces of land and the constant struggles around the development of these pieces of land, only two of the 25 pieces of land were actually fully converted into residential dwellings with the rest in the process of either planning or development.

Lack of space for residential development and the subsequent opening up of these pieces of land created a not so surprising side effect – it made investments in real estate more lucrative. Taipei took off as a city because of the real estate boom (Hsiao and Liu, 2004). In fact, some scholars in Taiwan argued that every big corporation (no matter what it does) take land development as a side business (Chen, 1995). Not surprisingly, once the 25 pieces of land became available, some were strategically bought by large corporations (Chen, 1995). Despite studies that showed over 70 percent of the hillsides around Taipei are improper development sites and the rest of the 30 percent need to be carefully planned before development, once developers got into these areas, they side-stepped many regulations and put both local residents and ecology in jeopardy. Liao (2005) argued that although the municipal government currently has good policies and regulations set up for proper development of the ecologically sensitive fringe area, the actual enforcement of the regulations remains a problem. Unfortunately, the municipal government has stayed (and is still staying) silent because of the relationships it has built up with corporations during the authoritative state apparatus era (Hsiao and Liu, 2004).

Purpose, Methodology and Methods

I hypothesize that different people in Taipei hold different positions regarding the question of what the “best use of land” is in different areas of Taipei. Indeed, it is a struggle of not only the physical land, but of a struggle of mental landscapes that exist in different people as well (Protas, 2003). As such, Taipei Municipal government faces pressures from all sides (Huang, 2005). The purpose of this project is to use the 25 pieces of re-zoned land in the ecologically sensitive areas on the edge of city and efforts for urban renewal closer to the centre of the city as case examples to probe into conflicts of interest in land-use of the whole city and to find out the planning processes when dealing with divided interests. I would like to find out the following: How do different groups champion their causes and how do the strategies they adopt influence the planning processes? How much weight do these groups carry in relation to each other? Then, by pointing to similar problems in both cases, I would like to discuss and shine light upon the following questions: In the planning processes, what (or who) tends to find favour in the sight of the municipal government? What kind of gap exists between the envisioned policy and the actual execution of the policy? What are the institutional problems and flaws that exist in the municipal government (especially the planning processes)? I conclude after the above explorations that current planning in Taipei does not cater to the general residents’ needs nor is it ecologically sustainable.

The overall methodology for this project is phenomenological research in which thick descriptions are provided in regards to how people construct their own meaning in different ways (according to who they are), even in relation to the same phenomenon in order that new meanings might emerge (Gray, 2004). Since this project intends to

demonstrate people's opinions, subjective accounts, interpretations and competing interests, a sampling of attitudes and opinions needs to be obtained. To do this, semi-structured interviews were utilized as the main data collection method. Such a method is sometimes criticized for the validity of its data set and its interpretive challenges, namely conscious/subconscious interviewer bias, imperfect recall of respondents, influence of researchers on the respondents and personal bias of researchers. Nonetheless, I believe semi-structured interview is the most appropriate because it "draws out" whatever attitudes and opinions the respondents may have and it provides the basic data for the development of an understanding of the relations between social actors and their situation (Gaskell, 2000). Although surveys and questionnaires can also do this to an extent while allowing for a wider sample and a more generalised data set with less bias involved, the level of sophistication in the responses cannot match that of what is obtained from a semi-structured interview. As phenomenological research's reliability comes from confirmation by participants (Gray, 2004), I feel confident about the data I was able to collect and analyse. Furthermore, as Gaskell (2000) notes, in analysing the data, one has to do it in an imaginative and a methodical manner. I have done both in my analysis. I admit that the imaginative part of my analysis may contain bias (as no research is without value, even quantitative ones). However, the methodical part of the analysis - consisting of examining the data in the light of my research questions (while weeding out more value charged opinions in the interviews that may lead to value laden reactions from researchers), do neutralize the bias and validate the method.

Three groups of people were interviewed as relevant to the research. They are: planners and associated staff in the municipal government, advocacy groups and

academic researchers. Planners and other city staff help this project by sharing their experiences in drafting and modifying plans, and how these processes present a challenge because of conflicting interests. Advocacy groups help this project by putting forth their opinions and presenting how they have gone about influencing planners' activities. Academic researchers help this project as mostly the observers who have insights on different aspects of the conflicts. Their inputs are valuable because their observations are more in-depth and multi-faceted. I believe in Hsiao's (1999, Pg. 31) statement that "The best studies...have been produced by researchers who are local scholars with direct contacts with environmental groups" and this is what I have done. I do recognize that there is limited input by councillors, land owners and developers in this research paper due to their relative inaccessibility to the general public (there was also a by-election going on during the period of research that may have prevented interviews with councillors). I have however attempted to make up for this lack by talking to non-profit organizations and academic researchers who work with developers and councillors. In addition, I have paid close attention to presentations given by land owners during a government meeting to gain insights on their perspectives. While the data set may not be totally complete, I believe it presents a clear picture of what I seek to demonstrate.

THE CASE OF RE-ZONING – CONFLICTS AND STRUGGLES

The Case of Re-zoning – Orientation, Progression and Vision

Before delving into the conflicts and struggles with the re-zone case, it is necessary to give a more detailed description of the plan as a starting point. The orientation of the plan is not surprising to many for at least a couple of reasons. First, people in Taiwan very much respect property rights and they have the concept that “to have land is to have wealth” (B4). Because of this, even tax related laws favour owning land or housing (Chen, 1995). If there is a chance to develop more land, people will incline to do so. Secondly, out of political need, Taiwan was forced to develop economically in a short period. Available land was mostly exploited despite the known ecological consequences (Liao unpublished, 2005). As such, cities in Taiwan (including Taipei) began to leapfrog to the periphery and impinge upon ecologically sensitive land (Selya, 1995). Farmlands and protected land were sacrificed during the early rounds of frantic developments as they produced the most windfalls (Chen and Huang, 1998). The re-zone case was conceived when all these were going on at the time. Taipei Municipal government actually had different options at the time but chose to go along with the re-zoning.

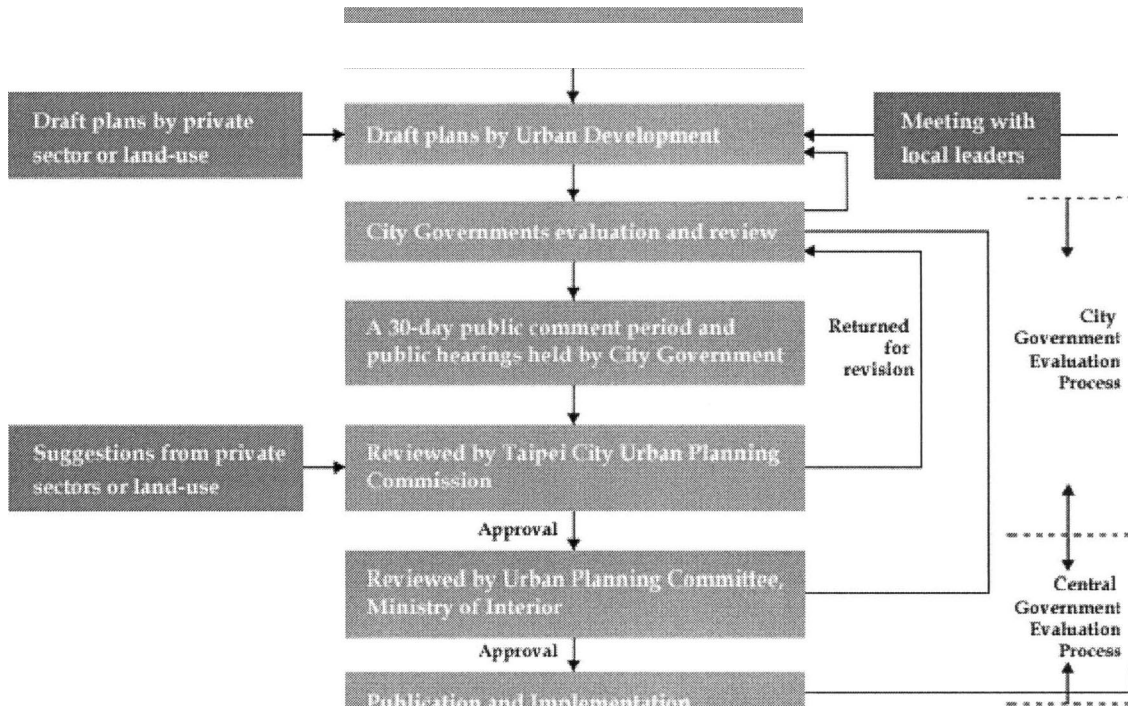
The municipal government started to consider re-zoning the 25 pieces of land after the central government requested the municipal government in 1974 to expand in order to accommodate more growth as a capital city and to lead to regional growth in the northern part of Taiwan (D1). After 5 years of consideration, the municipal government

decided to re-zone the 25 pieces of land in the Beitou and Shilin districts for residential use based on ten evaluation factors in order to alleviate pressure from population growth, to provide affordable housing and to find better living conditions for residents (D2). These 25 pieces of land total 466.6 hectares, an average of 18.7 hectares per piece. Some pieces, such as piece 6-6 are larger than others and are thus more lucrative for land owners and developers. The feature of these 25 pieces of land (actually a feature of land ownership in Taiwan and especially Taipei) however is they were owned by many people, each possessing only a small portion of the land. According to a planner in the municipal government (D2), there were over 4,000 owners for these 25 pieces of land at the time of re-zoning. Everyone had a belief on what is the best use of these pieces but hardly anyone could get everyone to agree.

Before going further, it is appropriate here to briefly describe the urban planning procedures in the City of Taipei. In Figure 2, one can see that an idea for the plan will first have a public exhibition for suggestions. Then after the Department of Urban Development (DUD) has prepared the plan and the other departments in the municipal government have reviewed the plan, there will be another 30 days of public exhibition and public hearings. The staff in DUD will pool all the ideas and opinions from the public and send them to the Urban Planning Commission (UPC) for final review by the municipal government. There, people will have another opportunity to voice their opinions in 3 minute presentations to the committee. It should be noted here that for developing sensitive slope land, the plan has to go through reviews by the

Figure 2: Urban Planning Procedure in the City of Taipei

The Urban Planning Procedure



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Environmental Impact Assessment Commission (EIAC) first before being sent to the UPC (D3). Both the UPC and the EIAC are composed of representatives from different departments in the municipal government, various advocacy groups and experts from different professions as best suited to the needs of the cases the commissions are reviewing at the time (D3). Some of the early applications for re-zoning sent in were stuck in the process of EIAC review as some members of the EIAC felt the plan for developing these sensitive pieces of land did not contain enough information and some information that existed was vague and too general.

Taipei's Development Story

Owners and developers in Taipei have had and still have considerable influence on planning in the city. Since they have certain expectations about the development of these re-zoned land, it is important to understand where they are coming from and what they want the municipal government to do on their behalf. Just like in other large Asia cities, land owners and developers in Taipei have had the perception that rural, undeveloped land on the edge of expanding cities are neutral, require no planning and thus is free for the taking (Choe, 2004). People in Taiwan in general, inherently support development of these pieces of land too (Hsiao and Stone, 2002). This is especially true because Taipei has become a more “capitalist” city because of KMT’s rapid early developments. Taipei depends on the market to do many things. Therefore, as the market continued to seek profits, slope land development became inevitable because of mounting expectations from owners and developers (Daniels, 1999). The municipal government knew when they re-zoned the 25 pieces of land that these would eventually be developed one way or another. What they could do was to put in as many regulations as possible and tried to lessen the effects of development, showing to the public that perhaps they still have a surface and artificial concern for the environment (B1).

Other than population pressure and expected profits, there are a few other reasons to develop the slopes. First, at the time the planners felt it was the right time to put the re-zoning in place. They felt that doing this any later would jeopardize the success of the plan and delay solution of the problems in the inner city created by population growth (Yin, 1990). As well, up to that point, Taiwan’s economic growth had been contributed mostly by industrial developments in the central and southern part of Taiwan. Taipei

wanted to contribute as well. The municipal government felt that a real estate boom could act as the locomotive for rapid economic developments in Taipei (A2). Thirdly, although slope land are usually ecologically sensitive and require a lot of planning and assessment, they are also attractive and scenic locations (Olshansky, 1998). According to one planner in the City of Taipei (D1), “If planned well, why can’t we allow development on slope land? It affords an opportunity for people to engage nature and to live harmoniously with it.” Thirdly, some argue that by bringing residential developments to the rural, not as developed areas around cities, the people crowded in city centre can find affordable housing and the few people that originally live out on the fringe may become better serviced (Daniels, 1999). It assumed that development of a new area would spontaneously bring more affordable housing, jobs, services and infrastructures. This according to the municipal government could ensure economic sustainability (Chi and Hsiao, 2003).

Perhaps the most prominent reason for re-zoning and allowing development was the respect people in Taiwan (and Taipei) have for property rights of land owners⁴. In an interview (D1), a high-ranking planning specialist in the municipal government said, “We cannot deny the land owners’ right to live on the slope and develop their land. To eliminate these pieces’ opportunities for development because of some simple ecological limitations is not wise.” Land owners especially agreed with this assessment, citing that they have already had certain expectations for the land and it is always right for them to do whatever they want on their own land. What fuelled their anger more was the fact that since their land were re-zoned into “residential” status, they had paid a higher tax without

⁴ Blomley (2004) noted that the concept of right and private power of property owners are also quite prominent in other North American cities like Vancouver

gaining anything from it (A4). During a meeting at the UPC on May 15, 2006, land owners and developers criticized the municipal government of all the limitations over developments of their land during their three minute presentations. One owner said, “Over the last twenty years, I have put in a lot of money and energy into developing my own land yet it has not been done the way it should have. Because of this I am in danger of losing my mortgage from my bank. I understand that the municipal government has to have regulations, but at least give us a chance...” At least some departments in the municipal government agree to this assessment. In an EIAC meeting in 1996, the representative from the Department of Land stated, “We are here to help the developers. We know that the situation has changed since the re-zone plan first began. However, we do not want to see the developers being stuck in their position.” (City of Taipei unpublished 1996, Pg. 5) In addition, some members of the UPC now agree that the best solution is that land should be developed on a conditional basis and land owners should be well compensated if development is impossible. This appeases both the land owners and the environmental advocacy groups and it prevents illegal and sporadic developments on the hillside which are hard to regulate (A4). Nevertheless, this does not really work.

Taipei’s Environment Story

The above reasons cannot quite satisfy advocacy groups and the people who consider development on the hillside an assault on nature. In these people’s eyes, the re-zone case is another illustration of the historic mad dash of developers in gobbling up available land in Taipei, even through illegal means. There are two principal arguments for these parties. First, the reasons for developments are not good enough as compared to the destruction that such development will cause. Secondly, the municipal government

has not been doing the things it promised, namely, to oversee and strictly carry out the plans and regulations being set forth and to monitor the conditions of developments in place and to foster a real community for the regular residents (instead of only profits for the corporations) living in the area.

There are many environmental problems that people on this side point out. These problems do not only pose trouble individually, but they also add up and make the comprehensive difficulties more complicated (B2). Below is a summary of all the individual problems and how they relate to each other. However, this is by far not exhaustive:

- Water shortage was already a problem before these pieces of land were re-zoned. Fierce disputes often broke out between different residents over water (City of Taipei unpublished, 2004a). The area simply will not have enough water if all the foreseen developments were to go through because water sources are in pockets and they are far away from each other (B2). Some developers have the idea of turning some of the land into a hot springs resort, which will put more pressure on finding water for residents. One option is to build water pipes and use pressure to ship water up hill. However, this is costly and it influences water delivery to other parts of the city (City of Taipei unpublished, 1996). The municipal government may have to end up shipping water by water tanker to the residents – an extra cost that will be paid by tax dollars.
- Increased development will put more pressure on the already weak wastewater treatment operation. Retention ponds already in place often had problems of mud clogging and thus produced odours and have been a source of mosquitoes and other bugs. In addition, 80 percent of the wastewater treatment plants on the slope land are built on sites that

have an over 30-degree slope gradient (City of Taipei unpublished, 2004a). Finally, pipelines for wastewater treatment have not been properly laid down together with the building of the water treatment plants as firstly planned. Developers have also considered individual waste water treatment scheme for separate buildings in order to cut down on their required planning efforts but a non-comprehensive waste water treatment scheme made many quite worried so the plan was eventually left hanging.

- Most of the re-zoned land are close to or right at geologically sensitive areas on the slope of Yangmin Mountain Range. According to a pamphlet published by the municipal government (2002), the hillside can create problems of landslide, landslip, mudslide, sinking ground level. Cutting down the trees for development will only lead to soil erosion and add to the potential for disaster (A5). These problems can then be exacerbated during typhoon season when torrential rain and wind beat on the already sensitive hillside. From the destruction recent typhoons have wrought, one can easily see that the municipal government and developers have room for improvement in terms of conservation of water and soil.
- In order to develop some of the land, developers need to dig the elevated areas of the land flat. Not only will this damage the already sensitive geological landscape of the land, but it will also destroy some valuable ecological resources that cannot be replaced (i.e. plant species). The enforcement on the regulation on the maximum that developers can dig has been weak, often allowing the developers to dig more than they are allowed (B2)
- The effects of developments extend far beyond the re-zoned areas. The people who are really affected by the changing geological and ecological conditions on the hillside are those who live downstream to

these pieces of land. Some of these people are often warned to leave their homes when storms come because the conditions upstream can no longer cope with the stormy conditions (B2). Furthermore, the people downstream can also be affected by the wastewater that is expelled upstream during and after development has been completed. According to the meeting minutes of the EIA Commission (City of Taipei unpublished, 1996), some committee members repeatedly mentioned that they do not see the plan addressing the issue of wastewater in a satisfactory way.

- Roads in these re-zoned areas are narrow and insufficient. This is also not taking into account the increased traffic these areas will experience during weekends as people in Taipei flood to the mountain resorts. Traffic would be in gridlock all the time if all the planned developments occurred. Furthermore, if population would rise in these areas, there needs to be an increase in parking spots (City of Taipei unpublished, 1996). The people on the environment's side foresee that wider roads and more parking spaces will lead to more environmental destruction. What one advocacy group found out may justify these people's concern: "After a mudslide buried four people alive on the Yangmin Mountain Range, we set out to explore just what caused the slide. Do you know what we found? We just found an industrial road that has been illegally built. You would never imagine that one road could do such damage, but it did." (B2)

The municipal government does have regulations binding them to oversee development activities damaging to the environment. First of all, the 33rd article in the Urban Planning Law (Department of Interior, 2002) states that "Each city should preserve farmlands and ecologically sensitive areas and restrict development activities." Secondly, article 49-1 in the Non-Urban Land Use Regulations (Department of Interior,

2004) outlines that “Steep slopes, slopes prone to mudslide, landslide and landslip should not be developed”. Finally, the municipal government’s own Guidelines for Slope Land Re-zone Development (City of Taipei, 1994) note that “Slopes that have a gradient of more than 30 degrees should not be developed and should be zoned as protected”. Nevertheless, though some land owners and developers argue that the municipal government has good enough regulations to allow for developments without damaging the environment, even the municipal government itself admitted (City of Taipei, 2001) that its earlier regulations were vague, not strict enough and the value the municipal government put on the environment was too low. Furthermore, the municipal government has not been carrying out the regulations but instead allowed developers to sneak around the regulations when possible and necessary.

Planners often have little influence upon the implementation of the plans that they produce (Forester, 1982). It is more so in Taipei as the planning and implementation have long been separated (Selya, 1995). The separation perhaps would allow for quicker and smoother implementation without constant distractions from planners (this is the original argument by the government). However, it has instead widened the gap between what is on the plan and what is actually on the ground. What has been criticized the most about planning in Taipei over the years is not whether good plans and regulations exist in Taipei, but rather the implementation of these plans and regulations⁵ (Selya, 1995). In fact, one of the most fundamental problems in planning in Taipei is once the plans are made, the planners usually will not review them or follow up with the plans’ progress,

⁵ Through reading through hundreds of pages of various city plans, I actually feel that at least some plans in Taipei are comprehensive (some people call it rhetoric), visionary and fair. It is the way DUD acts after the plan is made that dissatisfies many people.

thus leaving the plans in an out of date situation caused by shifts in time and space (B3). Today, there are more environmental groups monitoring the municipal government's actions, especially in Taipei. For them, not enforcing the plan means the municipal government is breaking its promise to the people (A5). It is no wonder that the former mayor of Taipei in the 50's recognized after his tenure that, "If enforcement is not properly carried out, city planning has only been half accomplished." (Kao, 2002)

According to Liao (unpublished, 2005), Taiwan ranks high (at number 25 out of 146 countries) for social and institutional capacity on the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI)⁶ but ranks very low in other environment related categories. The capacity in the municipal government is there but the result on the ground is not. This means implementation and enforcement in Taiwan is a big issue. If people dig a bit deeper, problems with implementation may have originated from the gap between vision and practice, and society's willingness for change, amongst other things (Liao, 2005). Indeed, ideas can be powerful and full of impact in imagination but can be relatively insignificant in practice in the real world (Whatmore and Boucher, 1992). For example, Taipei has been trying to develop into a sustainable city for a while now with limited success. In a document released in 2001, the Sustainable Development Commission admitted that recommending policies that fit with the other departments under the municipal government's current institutional structure has been difficult and time consuming (City of Taipei, 2001). Wang (2005) found that scholars who have attempted to develop sustainable indicators in Taipei and Taiwan have often become frustrated because the gap between vision and reality is so wide that these indicators are often rendered impractical.

⁶ The study was done by the Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy and Columbia University Earth Science Information Network Centre

This is mostly due to the fact that the idea of “making the most profits in the shortest amount of time by utilizing every means possible” (a concept born out of necessity in the early KMT regime), is still prevalent in Taiwan today (Wang 2005, Pg. 195). In the process of turning ideas into practice, everyone has different opinions. This may lead to non-actions from the municipal government to avoid the potential of making unnecessary mistakes, especially before an election. As Olsson (1977, Pg. 354) put it, “[The] mismatch of ideology [vision] and methodology [practice] has contributed to discontent and alienation which is becoming more and more visible. The proof of the pudding is in the election results; under the heat of methodology, ideology lost its flavour.”

During a personal interview (B2), one member of an advocacy group shared an experience that she had while visiting the re-zoned areas on the Yangmin Mountain Range: “I saw all the many restaurants on the side of the roads as my friend and I were driving and I said to my friend, ‘the municipal government should really make sure these restaurants are not doing anything detrimental to the environment.’ You know what my friend told me? She said, ‘you know, according to the regulations set out by the central government, these restaurants are not even supposed to be there!’ I then started to wonder why there are so many of these restaurants”. The municipal government of course knew of the regulation but allowed restaurants to continue their existence because they were a source for tax and they drew tourists to the mountain. Furthermore, Chen (1995) discovered that large corporations would often collaborate with local farmers or loggers who had limited but legal access to the protected land. These corporations would first let the farmers or loggers apply for license to use the land and to apply for a temporary address on these sites. After a while, these corporations would buy the land from these

people and applied for a permanent address. With the permanent address in hand, even though their actions were still illegal, these corporations obtained the legal ground to claim right to their own properties. Finally, during another interview (A5), an academic researcher in a local university pointed out another example of the discrepancy between what the municipal government said it would do and what it actually did. He noted that according to the regulations of the municipal government's Environment Impact Assessment Commission (EIAC), a development case can be applied again by developers or owners if it is rejected the first time. However, the second application cannot have anything contradictory to the reasons that warrant the first rejection. With this in mind, he pointed out that the second application to develop piece #12 in the re-zone case clearly broke this rule. Yet, the city staff that was supposed to oversee the process wound up still letting the case go to the EIAC. The EIAC did block the case for the second time, but this academic researcher was strongly critical that the municipal government did not stop the case from even going to the EIAC.

What worries the people on the environment's side more is the fact that even the EIAC may not hold to their professional integrity while facing political manoeuvring. The case of piece #6-6 clearly demonstrates their concerns. The 6-6 case was one of the earliest cases that went to the municipal government in 1996 after owners of this piece agreed to the proper way to develop this site. As one of the biggest pieces out of all the 25 pieces, 6-6 was very lucrative for owners and developers. As such, the resources and energy they put in were also quite substantial. The problem was, with over 36 percent of the total area having a slope gradient of more than 30 degree, piece 6-6 is very ecologically sensitive. The conflicts of interest the case created led to a series of

problems as the case progressed. The case went into the EIAC in 1996 and received a conditional approval for development. The building started on piece 6-6 in 1999 but in 2000 when the EIAC did an on site examination, members of the EIAC noticed that the developers had not built according to the plan it presented to the EIAC, including digging more soil than it was allowed to make the elevated slope flat, insufficient sewage treatment, and insufficient water supply. This sparked a round of reassessments from 2000-2003 with many details that I will not go into. I will just use the example of the nine new roads the developers illegally put in at areas of the 6-6 piece that are too steep to illustrate the people's concern for the municipal government's ability to oversee. The EIAC in early 2004 asked the developers to undo these 9 roads based on guidelines set up and agreed upon back in 1996. Instead of following through with forcing the developers through heavy fines to undo the roads already put in (as outlined in the Urban Planning Law), the municipal government, after an apparent roundtable with the "experts" in late 2004, decided that the roads do not have to be undone, thus overstepping the jurisdiction of the EIAC in decision-making. Furthermore (and perhaps as a result), a new batch of members on the EIAC decided to re-examine the roads again in 2005 as long as the developers send in a discrepancy report from the last application. One member even stated that allowing the 9 roads to stay "Is not the end of the world" (B2). Such language "...is easily exploited by key political actors, who construct particular meanings...for their own ends..." (Taylor 2002, Pg. 110). It is such kind of screened discourse from an objective "expert" which creates the assumption that these political players most certainly can deliver every time in bringing into being the very realities they claim to describe (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001). No wonder this local academic researcher claimed

during a personal interview (A5) that, “I phoned my classmates in grad school who work for the municipal government and they all told me off the record that they thought this is quite absurd!”

Over time, such language will become embedded in society and people will develop implicit assumptions about how things should be organized, what people are like and what they can do (Healey, 1997). Indeed, language does not form reality, but it shapes reality (Olsson, 1977). At this point, political players have successfully achieved a discursive framework in which they have “convinced others of the merits of their particular understanding of how the world is, how it should be, and the policies that will make it better in the future” (McCann 2003, Pg. 160). Most often however, the discursive framework is an oversimplification that excludes other possibilities outside of its boundary and quite a few think of this as a problem. The municipal government still hoped to maintain itself as democratic. The use of discursive language is a subtle way to get its citizens to accept its values, thus legitimizing what may be considered illegal activities by the municipal government (Chen, 1995). It is a form of self-justification that serves to sugar-coat the selfish intentions of the elites.

The re-zone plan and its subsequent progression have another fundamental problem. The plan was publicized to generate affordable housing, provide better living conditions and foster community living with adequate infrastructures. However, in an EIAC meeting in 1996, a representative from the DUD revealed that the municipal government wanted high-end resorts and luxury apartments to be built on these pieces of land. In 2000 in an EIAC meeting, one member pointed out that social welfare related infrastructures have in fact decreased, not increased (City of Taipei unpublished, 2000a).

DUD never spoke openly about its original (and not so hidden) intention for re-zoning but it is perhaps not too difficult to see that affordable housing and healthy community were not the priority (A5). The reasons are simple. First, up until 1995, public housing only occupied a mere 6 percent of the housing stock in Taipei City with none of the 6 percent on any of the 25 pieces of re-zoned land (Selya, 1995).

Secondly, Tienmu - a big sub-district in the Shilin District is Taipei's famous high-end residential area. Many foreign consulates are located in this sub-district and foreign diplomats and their families often choose to settle in the same area because of its comfortable living conditions. Over time, they have drawn fancy restaurants and trendy department stores that cannot be found anywhere else in the city. Thirdly, the other district that contains the re-zoned land – Beitou District, is famous not as a residential neighbourhood, but a get-away place for tourists and local residents. Beitou is famous for its hot springs and as such, many resorts, cottages and small cabins dot the landscape instead of practical residential apartments or condominiums. With cable cars expected to be built in the next couple of years to accommodate more tourists, it is hard to believe that the re-zoned land will be mostly for residential purposes as the plan proposed.

One example of the discursive language is from a document released by the DUD in 2001. At one point in the document, the DUD argued that the projected population in 2020 will be about 3.14-3.25 million, approximately 0.6 million more than the current population. As such, the developments of the new towns on the edge of the city are necessary. Furthermore, the re-zone case in Beitou and Shilin is not only necessary but also will have positive impacts for the city. Just a mere 4 pages later, the document cited statistics showing that the current population is in fact 20,000 less than that of 1994,

when population was at the peak – a sign that Taipei’s population may be stabilizing and even in decline. As already argued, some of the land in the re-zoned area are not for residential use but for resorts, cottages and tourism related activities. With the population possibly in decline, it is hard not to be suspicious that the municipal government may be pushing the re-zone case as a residential project when in fact it has been trying to satisfy the wants of the corporations and developers.

What suffers the most from such manipulation is the so-called democracy in Taipei. Apparently, the policies are for providing the public with better lives but as illustrated in the re-zone case and the urban renewal case (to be discussed later), the public often physically and psychologically lose their places to the elites. Although public suggestions and participation are part of the procedures of urban planning in Taipei (see figure 2), they remain mostly as a formality. Huang (2005, Pg. 82) described the process perfectly: “Even if the citizens managed to voice opposition and send their opinions...their input would not be seriously reviewed, let alone overturn a planning decision because the planning board was notoriously manipulated by administrative officials⁷, councillors and developers.” It is no wonder that a local scholar shook his head when asked about public participation in Taipei. He observed that people in Taipei are usually like a plate of sand, only caring for their own affairs and extremely difficult to integrate (A1).

⁷ When I was doing my research for this paper, I received great help from a planner in the DUD, who provided some of the citizens’ responses to the re-zone case as a source of secondary data. However, he proceeded to warn me that this is not to be seen by any other citizens (at the time I was about to attend a UPC meeting, which is open to the public) because the city does not want citizens to share knowledge. I suspect this measure is more than anything to prevent the citizens to unite and form a stronger voice against what the City is doing.

Indeed, the people on the environment's side are not only dissatisfied with the actions of the municipal government and the developers, but they are especially critical with the attitudes of these people. As an executive of an advocacy group stated in a personal interview (B2), "People sometimes told me that they just do not have money to follow through with the EIAC's requirements and that they certainly do not have the resource to undo what they have already done. We are not sympathetic with these people at all because for us, if they cannot do the development properly, they should not be doing them at all. Their excuses do not satisfy us." For her, these irresponsible developers who develop before considering all the details will eventually leave the mess to the municipal government, who in turn will cover up the problems with tax dollars gathered from residents of the entire City of Taipei. In other words, the environmental problem has turned into a problem of social justice as developers reap the benefits without having to pay for the destructions they incurred (Chen, 1995). Moreover, for some scholars (A5), the society is not only paying with their tax dollars, but they are also paying with their ethics and moral standard as such a case of development has set a bad precedent for developments that are to come as Taipei and Taiwan continue to struggle to find land.

The Environmental Sustainability Index in 2005 ranked Taiwan 145 out of 146 countries (Liao unpublished, 2005). Of the things to note, Taiwan came in second last on the "land" category, which measures the amount of anthropocentric impact, and last on the category of "reducing environment related natural disaster", which measures deaths by natural disasters in a country. Both are very telling and highly related to the re-zoning case on the hillsides of Taipei City. The Index indicates that Taiwan has had a history of problems with human activities affecting land and has been paying with people's lives.

Taipei has not been a part of the problems as much but this is slowly changing with the re-zoning case (i.e. typhoons in the past few years have buried and killed quite a few people and have caused unprecedented destructions). For some advocacy groups (B2), the central government and Taipei municipal government have developed knowledge of the importance of a more ecologically sustainable environment in recent years. However, the knowledge needs to be operationalized. As one academic researcher in an interview (A5) noted, “The 25 pieces of land were in the ‘protected’ status for a reason. The re-zoning case in Taipei affords an opportunity to either set the operation forward or hinder the furtherance of the effort for sustainability. The municipal government cannot just allow developments to happen first then clean up the mess afterward.” Instead, people on the environment’s side generally will make a few suggestions. First, they suggest that the municipal government be firm and does what it says will do. This includes putting the heavy fine on illegal developments and follow through with the suggestions of the EIAC (i.e. to undo the 9 roads that were illegally built) instead of trying to find loopholes for the developers. Secondly, they will suggest that the municipal government look at all the problems together. The municipal government has not been very comprehensive in their problem solving, but instead tried to solve each problem individually as it came. It should instead examine the carrying capacity of the entire ecosystem within the re-zoned land and go from there to determine whether developments should allowed (B2). Finally, they will recommend that the municipal government look long term and value the natural assets as something that cannot be recovered after their destruction (Daniels, 1999). They will urge the municipal government to follow through with the central government’s request and revisit the re-zoning plan once every five years (B2). If it is decided that

these pieces of land are simply too sensitive to develop, these people will recommend reverting the land back to the “protected” status.

Discussion and Analysis of the Case

Current Conditions and Shortcomings

The municipal government has realized that it is impossible to satisfy everyone 100 percent by stating that pressure to develop will in fact threaten the health of the environment (City of Taipei, 2001). Each side seems to think that a solution can be easily worked out without considering (or tend to ignore) that their “solutions” will come at the expense of the other’s sacrifice. Planning and governance can never be as easy as the people on either side claim them to be. During a series of interviews done, I noticed an interesting phenomenon - that both sides used the same reasons to justify their cause. In one interview (A5), an academic researcher advocating for the preservation of the slope said, “The natural environment suffered because of the municipal government’s mistake.” While during another interview (A4) a couple weeks later, another academic researcher sympathetic to developers said, “The municipal government cannot sacrifice the promise it made to the land owners’ just because it realized it may have made a mistake on the environmental side.” Which one of these two academic researchers is making the right argument? Perhaps both have a valid point. Furthermore, there are many interests involved even within the municipal government between different departments. In an interview (D1), a staff member of the Department of Environmental Protection claimed that, “For us, protecting the slope is still the number one priority.” However, later in the week, a staff member at the Department of Urban Renewal admitted that if an opportunity presents itself to carry out their mandate on the hillside, he probably would

not consider protecting the environment. Conflicts without and within have perhaps led to the municipal government to take an ambiguous position in this case.

The municipal government's ambiguous stance may have something to do with the position it is in – a quagmire. The UPC and EIAC are still mostly for protecting these pieces of land as much as possible. The municipal government agrees for the most part and in a report published in June 2005, stated that it has plans to revert some of the 25 pieces back to protected status. The first phase of the plan was to categorize the pieces of land in the re-zone area into four groups. The first group would be re-zoned back to the “protected” category. The second and the third group would undergo careful planning and scrutiny before developed and the development will stay on the small scale. The final group would be developed as originally planned in 1979. A year has passed however and in a recent interview (D2), a planner overseeing the re-zoning plan in the DUD said that the Department may drop the idea “since we have achieved balance with most parties on the re-zone case, we may consider stopping our current reassessment to save us some trouble.” This is again perhaps because of a strong re-zone committee working behind the scenes. The municipal government has not been able to come up with a good package of compensation for the wasted resources the owners and developers have put in. There are three basic reasons for this. First, the municipal government has no money to buy all the land from land owners as that would cost 5 billion New Taiwanese Dollars (approximately 150 million CAD). Secondly, the municipal government cannot return the higher property tax that land owners used to pay because a part of the tax has been remitted to the central government. Finally, the municipal government cannot allow transfer of floor space for development into the other parts of Taipei because the other

usable tracts of land in the city are mostly being considered for public infrastructures or other more urgent transfer of floor space (i.e. national monuments). The owners and developers claimed that since the municipal government has no way to give them a good compensation package, they insist on keeping the land in residential status, which will keep the opportunity for development alive.

A high-ranking planner in the DUD (D1) called the situation a “delicate balance” that is not going anywhere at the moment. It seems like the municipal government does not mind the stalemate situation (or balanced situation as sugar coated by some municipal government officials) now because the municipal government simply does not want to deal with the controversies anymore. When asked about the conflicts currently present, a planner replied, “In fact, each side of the conflicts knows where each other’s bottom line is, so our job is actually quite easy...” Later on, when asked about the municipal government’s plan if the developers keep coming up with new packages, this planner answered, “People higher up have a plan and the associate mayor heads up the meetings. We simply do what is asked of us. We are not stupid, we do not want to be the bad guy. We will let the EIAC block the development.” (D2). With such an attitude, it is not a surprise that after discussing the re-zone case, the UPC meeting on May 15, 2006 concluded with no real decision made⁸. Instead, different parties will come back in the next meeting with more evidence.

The above quote from this planner shines light on the municipal government’s strategy in dealing with balancing the two main interests in the re-zone case. As Hsu (2001) stated, EIAC is the “weapon” the municipal government uses to appease both

⁸ The decision was to do more on site examinations before the case is re-discussed in the future meetings. The UPC has had 4 more meetings since May 15th but none of the meetings discussed the re-zone case.

sides. On the one hand, the municipal government will have an answer to the environmental groups when they question its actions because impacts to the environment have been assessed by the EIAC. On the other hand, the municipal government can rid itself of developers' criticisms because it is the EIAC – an objective, fair, impartial and professional body that has rejected the proposal for development. In other words, the EIAC has become the municipal government's mouthpiece and scapegoat when either side has a complaint against the municipal government (Chen, 1995). EIAC has the advantage and the ability to be used this way because it relies on pure science and technology and as such is widely considered as objective and rational. It is effective in rejecting citizen opinions, criticizing these as irrational and against the public interests (Hsu,2001). Nevertheless, even the naming of the members on the commissions can prove to be unfair and partial. Both the UPC and the EIAC are to be composed of 21 members from the municipal government, non-profit organizations and different professionals. Seven of the 21 will be represented by different departments in the municipal government. Whether or not seven occupies too much of the commission "pie" is up for debate (Hsu, 2001). However, it is really the naming of the other 14 members that raises the eyebrows of the critics. The chair of the commission (by default has always been the associate mayor) in cooperation with the different departments in the city names the other 14 members and his/her final decision does not have to be reviewed by the public (Hsu, 2001). This allows the municipal government to freely choose those who they think will support its agenda. Even if the municipal government does choose the members of the commission fairly, the political pressure may still influence the attitudes of the members of the commission. An example unveiled during a personal interview (A5)

with a local academic researcher is especially striking and appropriate to prove the above statement. He said, “I have received a phone call before from a member of the EIAC telling me that he will be absent from the meeting on that day. He said he knew the case and he knew what the right decision should be. However, because he also knew the outcome would be manipulated and the wrong decision would be made, he would much rather not go to the meeting. He felt that he could not do a thing in that meeting.”

Even a high-ranking planner in the DUD admitted that the EIAC was quite narrow-focused in the early years right up until the late 1990’s (D1). The EIAC has depended on scientific examinations and assessments and has shown a strong disapproval of local people’s opinions and concerns because they are biased and they lack thorough information to make rational suggestions. This naturally has led the EIAC to miss most of the different aspects it is supposed to cover (i.e. cultural or social impacts of development). Hsu (2001) examined many EIA reports of different cases in past decades and noticed that the “citizen concerns” section is either missing or only occupies less than 5 percent of the entire report in most cases. Even though EIAC reports more recently would tend to include citizen surveys, Hsu (2001) found that these surveys are usually misleading and they sent certain messages to residents who answered the survey. For example, one question in a survey asking residents whether they would like to see an industrial park developed asked, “Do you look forward to a booming economy created by the industrial park?” (Hsu 2001, Pg. 242)

Indeed, “EIAs are not science, [they] always contain unexamined and unexplained value assumptions... Value judgements revealed themselves in impact research that was *not* conducted... The goal of a completely objective EIA document is illusory because

science itself is socially constructed” (Gismondi 1997, Pg. 457, 462, 465). There is no pure science because hidden values always hide behind it. EIA often has its own assumptions and does not want to be disturbed by any externality (Gismondi, 1997). Complicating the situation is the fact that critics, even members of the Taipei EIAC themselves have pointed out that the procedures in the EIAC are inherently flawed (City of Taipei unpublished, 2000a). The EIAC is a voluntary commission, with most of its members holding on to regular day jobs. The amount of time allowed for the members of the Commission is insufficient for thorough considerations (B1). Furthermore, private consultants hired by the developers prepare the reports that are sent to the EIAC. As these consultants are paid by the developers, the objectivity of their judgements is in doubt. Some members of the EIAC have already noticed certain information missing or wrongly stated in the reports produced by the private consultants (City of Taipei unpublished, 1996). Because of the flaws in the procedures and the embedded values, some members of the EIAC feel their own integrity has been affected as the EIAC failed to properly do its job. In an interview (A5) with a local academic researcher, he revealed that “Some members of the EIAC called me and told me they have to be absent for a certain meeting because they knew the re-zone case will go in a certain direction and that is not what they really think it should be.” In another interview (B2) with a local advocacy group, an executive revealed, “Some members of the EIAC knew of the power of the corporations and their influence on certain pro-development members on the EIAC, so they chose not to go against the tide.”

The Influence of Power and Politics on Planning

Planning has been weak and passive in Taipei for many reasons. The influence of power and politics is certainly one of the main reasons. Power is not just about the ability to force another party to comply. In general and more specifically in planning, power is the ability to participate in decision making while limiting the scope of deciding factors to fit his/her own purposes, eventually culminating in a deeply rooted institution with certain structure and ideology (Vasu, 1979). Politics is about struggles for power and politics is the means by which power is manifested. Politics is a pervasive activity. It is the exercise of power over who gets what, when and how (Healey, 1997). Even deeper, politics is the authoritative allocation of values through the interpretations of the elites (Vasu, 1979). Planning is the “collective management of shared concerns about spatial and environmental qualities...” (Healey 1997, Pg. 82). Planning mediates and negotiates differences, conflicts, contested values and a set of different ideologies and practices within cities (Richardson, 2005). This is of course easier said than done. It is hard for planners to come up with something that captures the full view of the society yet is flexible and responsive for individuals (Perry, 2003). Trade offs still exist when planners do their job as politics and conflicts of power do play the role as the subtle undercurrents directing where planners go (Jayal, 2001). After all, planning constantly occupies the grey area (Richardson, 2005). Both the nature of planning process and the actual recommendations by planners are inescapably political (Vasu, 1979). Lefebvre (1977, Pg. 355) summed all these up by saying, “The purpose [of planning is] to adjust society to change, but the analytical techniques by which the solutions [are] determined [are] more geared towards the preservation of status quo.”

The power dynamics and political manipulations together formed an institutional structure that is hard to break through and change. What I mean by institutional structure is the deep ideological appreciation for growth, development, ownership and large corporations of the people in Taiwan. The institutional structure is subtle yet it controls and manipulates the practice of planning in Taipei and in many ways has increased, rather than decreased people's problems – the opposite of planning's general goal (Olsson, 1977). Planners in Taipei are often forced by their superiors to work with and within deep structures of human and social relations. For example, during a personal interview with a high-ranking planner in the DUD, I asked if he considers planners to be the medium between the residents in Taipei and the plans DUD drafted. His reply was, "You can say that, but it depends on who the planners take as the boss – their superior, developers or the public." As such, planners are not neutral technicians as early scholars thought but are instead value-laden (Vasu, 1979). Planning can be used to provide a non-political veneer when politicians are drawing up policy because planners have the power to organize attention of the public with the amount and type of "expert" information that they choose to release (Forester, 1982; Vasu, 1979). Misinforming the public with distorted information will affect the public's ability for appropriate response (Forester, 1982). When asked about the environmental groups' actions on the re-zone case, a clearly frustrated planner pointed out that, "They do not know what they are doing." When pressed further for the reason, she simply replied, "Because they do not have all the information." It is no wonder Olsson (1977) pointed out that spatial planning can become an attack on the fundamental rights (such as fair participation and right to information) of people.

State apparatus is a good illustration of the institutional structure that I am referring to. Principles of the state apparatus adopted during the authoritative period⁹ are still visible in Taipei with the municipal government, corporations and councillors forming a formidable coalition. The municipal government, especially the planners in the DUD have granted corporations and developers favours. In the re-zone case, the municipal government repeatedly turned a blind eye on the illegal activities of developers without assessing any fines or even attempting to regulate these activities (Liao, 2005). One local academic researcher said in an interview (A5) that “A lot of politicians are inevitably still involved with the developers” while the other academic researcher exclaimed (A2), “some politicians are notorious for their connections with the larger corporations and developers.” Later on in the same interview, when asked whether or not the DUD has its own autonomy, the scholar paused for a while before answering, “No, I don’t think it does.”

A part of the reason for the municipal government’s soft approach may be the councillors’ involvements. Councillors are elected by district every 4 years. There are currently 52 councillors in Taipei. When council is in session, the mayor must submit a report periodically and must be available for oral questioning. He/she must also report to council on the progress of any special plan (Selya, 1995). Furthermore, council has the power to approve budget and is free to increase or decrease budgets of any department in the municipal government (Taipei City Council, 2003). Councillors in Taipei possess great influence because they have power (especially because of their control on the

⁹ These principles are quite close to the growth machine concept as documented by Logan and Molotch in 2002, which states that growth will create consensus because not many will discount growth or disagree with the need for growth

budget) to lobby support from the bureaucrats. In 1998, 42 percent of the Taipei council members were directly engaged in real estate, redevelopment and construction (Hsiao and Liu, 2004). It is no wonder that a former staff person in the municipal government quit his post because “councillors sometimes do not know any better, they make doing our job harder with all their personal requests.” (E1).

There is yet another reason for weak planning in the City of Taipei. The municipal government’s bureaucratic system is very complicated with many departments, special task forces and commissions. At present, the municipal government hires more than 52,000 employees in total including all the municipal departments, units and task groups (excluding all 3,000 contract workers, guards, etc.), a rate of about 1 employee for every 50 citizens (E1). Each of Taipei’s departments focuses on very narrow tasks. If one department notices it is doing things beyond its own measure, it will tend to pass the task on to the appropriate department or task group. If none exists for a task, a new department may be formed. As each department has its own self-emphasized agenda, it is hard to have all the departments to agree on a city plan (D5). The DUD has been struggling trying to push a plan across with the different departments in the municipal government agreeing on it¹⁰. Even the central government sometimes will get involved in city matters under its jurisdiction as provided by the constitution (Chen, 1995). This is like a never-ending nightmare because each department will usually have some

¹⁰ I had a first hand experience with the heavy bureaucracy of the City of Taipei while researching this project. One of the most often repeated phrases when I posed a question in an interview is, “this is not the responsibility of my department/section.” Even in the re-zone case, one task group can oversee just one piece of land. This task group will then receive help from various departments, each responsible for one aspect of the land (i.e. Department of Environmental Protection with EIA and Development Team – a part of the Department of Land with building and license). This is in addition to the senior analysts who work closely with each Department’s head and form formidable inner circles of power, which, as I later found out, compete with one another for attention and resources.

objections to some parts of the plan. As one academic researcher puts it, “Planning in this way is like asking someone to perform a chore with their hands bound together.” (A4) On the one hand, each department does not want to lose their say over certain tasks. On the other hand, each department does not want to be responsible when it fails to meet people’s expectations. Poor coordination between departments will often lead to the waste of time and resources in planning. This affords different profit groups (i.e. developers) the opportunity to manipulate each department individually, further weakening the effectiveness of the planning agency (Chen, 1995).

This is perhaps why the municipal government does not mind hiding in the shell of the “delicate balance” it finds itself right now. On the one hand, it realizes the consequences of developments on these pieces of land, but on the other hand, it does not want to openly oppose the developers that hold certain power in society. As such, though the municipal government has a set of strict slope land development guidelines, it does not infuse *active* education or ideas of preservation to the land owners and the developers. Moreover, it turns a blind eye on illegal developments on the slopes and blames the problem on inadequate man-power, resources and information (Chen, 1995). At the same time, it recommends a “soft” approach on developers’ activities in order to “give everyone more flexibility” (City of Taipei 2001, Pg. 7-2).

Some critics go a bit farther and point out that it is not just that the planners in Taipei have to work within the institutional structure, it is that some planners agree with and orient from that institutional structure. In fact, it is the people along with their values that make up the institutional structures. One scholar in a personal interview (B3) said, “A lot of problems come from the people, not from the system. You set the rules, which

means you agree with the rules you set.” He went on to point out that, education is an important factor that few have paid attention to. The key people in society today such as government employees, consultants and even teachers are mostly educated in the 60’s or 70’s. At the time, education was centred on economic development, being a productive citizen (financially speaking) and taking back the mainland. As such, people became self-centred narrow in focus. As one staff member of the central government observed, “I feel like the problem with Taipei today is not that we do not have enough physical space. It is our education and our culture. London is crowded too but people there will not add extra floor space through illegal expansion. Our citizens just feel they are always one room short.” (C2).

Suggestions and Recommendations in Brief

I have three recommendations that may work as a starting point for fixing the problems (if the municipal government is in fact willing to fix the problems). The first recommendation is to build up a fair, objective and comprehensive information database about these 25 pieces of land. Some of the advocacy groups I interviewed repeatedly explained that they are not totally against developments but they are against developments that are only for profits and without knowledge and considerations for the *place* and the *community* at which they are taking place. In an interview in 2002, a retired planner in the City of Taipei regretted that a basic database about the ecological, economical, social and cultural conditions of these re-zoned land was not established. This led to inadequate planning in the proceeding years (Lin, 2002). If the municipal government and various environmental groups can begin to produce an adequate information database, a set of more comprehensive development guidelines can

materialize. More comprehensive development guidelines empowered by better knowledge will not only give the municipal government more clout in enforcement, it will also provide citizens more tools to oversee the municipal government's actions (Hsu, 2001).

Secondly, I echo what Beatley (2004, Pg. 330) calls the new politics, which "nurtures transparency and openness [and] one dimension of transparency is public knowledge about current environmental and social conditions." Planners need to foster and work within the new politics by becoming a positive actor rather than implementing passively the bureaucrats and politicians' requests (Liao, 2005). Planners in Taipei must provide all the relevant information instead of keeping it from the public, even in the early stages of any plan (Forester, 1982). This will allow them to interact with the public (not out of formality such as the 30-day open exhibition), genuinely consider their opinions, and incorporate the public's knowledge about planning in their own thought processes; not as separate individual elites but as a member of society. This will then lead to planning that is the result of debating, understanding and learning from different values (Hsu, 2001).

The third recommendation for the City of Taipei is to put the re-zone case back into the other endeavours the municipal government is currently working on in other parts of the city. The re-zone case was originally part of the whole city plan aimed at making Taipei a better, more productive capital city and the effects the case creates do influence the other parts of the city (i.e. the owner proposed transfer of floor space will put more pressure on land use of other parts of the city). Moreover, the municipal government's planning focus and the direction it has for the whole city affects the re-zone

case (i.e. it was originally the population pressure in city centre that led to the re-zone case). However, planning in Taipei is narrow and on a case-by-case basis and it has gone away from city-wide planning in recent years (Huang, 2005). Planning often just considers only the conditions of the site and its development potential and fail to link this up to the entire direction of the city is a risky move (Lai, 1997). Joel Garreau (as quoted in Daniels 1999, Pg. 185) stated well that “Only if life is perceived as pleasant and affordable by the real human beings living farther in, will there be any hope of relieving pressure on the land farthest out.” As one scholar observed, Taipei does not and should not seek continual growth in quantity because of its geographic restrictions. Instead, it should seek qualitative changes in infrastructures, services and design (A1). I will turn to one example of the municipal government’s attempt for a better urban centre in the following chapter.

URBAN RENEWAL – A POTENTIAL SOLUTION OR THE LAST STRAW?

Reasons for Renewal – Taipei’s Housing Woes

Urban renewal¹¹ is one potential policy that may have great influence on the future of these re-zoned land on the edge of Taipei. The City of Taipei is currently pushing for more renewal to happen in order to provide more housing and better living conditions toward the city centre (D5). This makes sense for a couple of reasons. First, focusing on developing the edge of cities such as the ecologically sensitive slope land may have increased the speed of degeneration in the crowded city centre (Chen and Huang, 1998). On the other hand, if planning policy can guide housing developments toward the urban, green field land will be preserved (Golland and Blake, 2004). Urban centre is important for urban conditions of the entire city (Lefebvre, 1977). There are still many reasons for residents to stay closer to the centre of the city as it has better schools, more convenient transportation and easier access to different services. The catch for living closer to the centre of the city though is affordability and living conditions, which are traditionally the reasons that push the residents into the edge of cities or beyond. At the end of 2003, Taipei City had 775,000 units of housing, adding up to about 21 percent

¹¹ For this project, I have adopted Blake and Golland’s (2004) definition of urban renewal, which is similar to what the City of Taipei is doing. According to these two authors, urban renewal is to maintain the supply of housing (or even to increase it) and to create a pleasant housing environment for the people. Renewal can change the built housing form or can change the environment in which housing is located. At any rate, renewal implies an improvement from a less desirable situation to a more desirable situation. These two authors argue that rehabilitation of the old is just as important as clearing everything and rebuilding as some people see renewal solely is. Such definition of renewal is leaning closer toward the “rehabilitation” side. Taipei does both rehabilitation and mass clearance although it does the former more than the latter

of the total floor space in the city (City of Taipei, 2004b). Demand for housing in Taipei is expected to keep up in the years to come with changing demographics (i.e. smaller family units, more elderly citizens) and continuing growth of the city as the capital of Taiwan. Providing the housing (and even appropriate housing) however, is not as simple as it touches upon fabrics of social relations and structures (Li, 1998).

According to the Urban Renewal Regulation, renewal is to rebuild, renovate or maintain existing buildings (according to the conditions of the buildings) that are within the urban renewal zones. To rebuild means to tear down the original buildings on a renewal site and build with up to date building codes while changing the density of the site if necessary. To renovate means to force the owners to fix their buildings and to supply necessary equipment in cases of natural disasters (i.e. electronic water pump in case of a typhoon since many low-lying areas in Taipei have always been flooded when typhoons hit). In some cases, such measures are more practical and effective than the clear and build approach (Blake and Golland, 2004). To maintain means to monitor land use in the renewal site and to constantly improve necessary infrastructures. Furthermore, renewal includes reconsiderations of turning the empty or low-use lots in the city into residential use.

One challenge that the city faces is, because of the history of collaboration between the central and municipal government and large corporations, the developers mostly drive Taipei's real estate market. The rise of neo-liberalism (which focuses on market economy and reduced state intervention) has increased the power of these developers and reduced the responsibility of the government (Chen, 2005). Over time, the real estate market has gradually come under the control of a small number of large

business groups. Critics point out that because these groups are powerful, municipal government has had almost no regulations on the real estate market for many years (Moore, 1989). Even most recently, in an interview (D5), a housing planner in the municipal government explained, “We usually do not meddle in what the market is doing.” Having market mechanisms act as a major solution to housing demands has led to high housing price, exclusion, segregation and shortage of low-income housing in Taipei, which forced many to rely on the informal sectors to solve their housing problems (Chen, 2005).

Adding fuel to the fire is Taipei’s historic pre-sale housing system (Li, 1998). Many housing units in Taipei have been sold through the pre-sale system. The pre-sale system may give homebuyers an opportunity to work out their finance, but it also may become a source of housing speculation. As the contracting deposits have historically been very low, the pre-sale system has been used as a leverage for investment (Chang and Lin, 1999). These investors would then hold on to the housing units until the price peaked at the point where they became willing to sell. Such investments have led to empty housing units that took away residential floor space without actually servicing any residents that may be in need (Chen, 2005). Furthermore, some large companies bought up many housing units then requested changes in designated site uses. By changing residential units into offices or hotels, they would make a lot of profits yet further reduce regular residents’ opportunities to afford housing closer to city centres (Selya, 1995).

At the peak of housing speculation in the late 1980’s, housing prices in Taipei rose by 250 percent in two and a half years (Moore, 1989). Prices have stayed up since then with large corporations bidding up the land prices continually – leading the

developers to claim (rightly or falsely) that they do not have any room to lower their prices (Chang, Kao and Lin, 2001). A vacancy rate of about 11 percent in Taipei (as compared to about 3 percent in Western cities) has pushed housing affordability even farther away as a reality for residents who want to live in Taipei. The statistics from the first season in 2006 indicates that the ratio of average housing price to average income is about 9.5 in Taipei (Institute for Physical Planning & Information, 2006), which is not far from Los Angeles' 11.5 (one of North America's highest ratios) and higher than Sydney Australia's 8.5 (Anderson, 2006). Even Vancouver's figure of 6.6 (lower than Taipei's 9.5) is described as absurd by some experts (Anderson, 2006). Unfortunately, residents in the city will not be able to rely on public housing either. The municipal government has a history of problems providing public housing (Li, 1998) and it recently decided to cancel all public housing programs and fired or reassigned many of its public housing staff (A2). Even a planner in the municipal government himself exclaimed that he does not have the ability to live in Taipei City anymore. It is somewhat ironic that housing was one of the 12 major projects of Taiwan in the early 1980's (Li, 1998) yet it is receiving limited attentions from the central and municipal government at this time.

The market driven nature of housing provision in Taipei has another problem – it affects the right distribution in the range of housing price (Chang, Kao and Lin, 2001). As mentioned, the pre-sale system and speculation have inflated housing prices in Taipei. As there would always be richer people who would buy housing in Taipei as an investment, the market over time also has turned to focus on providing higher-end housing. This leaves the middle to low income families in Taipei with two choices – to either move away from the city centre into the edge or beyond or to stay close to the centre and live in

less than ideal conditions. As Taipei still has many amenities and services that cannot be found elsewhere, a fair amount of these people will choose to stay close to the city centre if possible. This choice leaves them with two equally difficult options. The first option is to purchase housing that is actually beyond what they can afford. Since 1980, housing related expenditures have occupied the biggest share on the family expenditure “pie” in Taiwan (Chang, Kao and Lin, 2001). For these people, the housing share of their expenditure pie will have to be even larger, forcing them to make a sacrifice on the other necessities such as clothing or food. They are willing to take on the risk because they see owning a housing unit as a status symbol and they are hopeful that the investment will bring them a return in the future. The second option is for these people to flock to the older parts of the city (that are still within the city’s limit) and live in older, smaller and higher density apartments neatly named “haunted ghost houses” (because of its age and messiness) by a volunteer for a non-profit organization advocating for better housing in Taipei (B4). In the same interview, she shared a case to prove this point. A single mother with three kids chose to stay close to the city centre for her children who were in high school and junior high because schools there were better. In return, she sacrificed adequate living conditions for her and her children. The family of four had to live in an old, crowded apartment that only gave them approximately 400 square feet of living space. Most of these older parts in the city have many illegal housing units too as a result of more loose regulations and lack of enforcements in the early years when the KMT first moved to Taiwan (Lin, 2002). Indeed, the housing problems in the City of Taipei are not only that of quantity, but of quality as well (Chang and Tseng, 1991). The issue of quantity has led to the issue of quality

The inclination for Taiwanese people to own housing is a big problem that has become manifested even more in Taipei¹². Critics however, pointed out that owning does not equal everything. Instead, the municipal government policy should focus on the quality of housing as well (Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service, 1999). The problem with the Taipei municipal government is, it does not have any mechanism to assess quality of housing at this time. As a result, illegal residential buildings and squatter houses still are features of the Taipei landscape (Li, 1998). It may not be quite as readily visible as the municipal government has taken steps to beautify urban landscapes in the last decade. However, in some smaller lanes and side-streets, they are still prevalent (See Figure 3). These illegal buildings and squatter houses are a source of public safety issues (Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service, 1999). One example is the apartment units rented to the university students in Taipei. Some owners have illegally renovated the units and split up a unit of about 700 square feet into seven different rooms with extremely narrow hallways. Despite the fact that the Urban Planning Regulations state that building codes must be followed (article 40), and all illegal units should be re-built and owners have to be punished (article 79, 80), the municipal government's lack of enforcement is still evident. Most recently, a fire of one such illegal unit killed two students in one local university (B4).

¹² Taipei's home ownership rate is at 78 percent (Collier International, 2005) as compared to 56 percent in Tokyo (Statistics Bureau, 2005) and 66 percent in British Columbia (Lampert, 2003)

Figure 3: A Squatter House on a Narrow Side Street in Taipei



Source: Tien Sheng (Tony) Tam

The housing conditions described above certainly do not fit the social aspect of the municipal government's march toward a sustainable city and urban renewal is suggested as the way to solve the problems (City of Taipei, 2005). The municipal government has made urban renewal one of its most important agendas in most recent years as evidenced by the new Urban Renewal Regulations enacted in 1998 and the municipal government's formation of the Urban Redevelopment Office. After the municipal government cancelled all public housing programs, part of the staff were redirected into this newly formed office. Clearly, the municipal government believes that urban renewal can solve problems of urban blight. The municipal government has a set of criteria in determining which method to use and which areas in the city constitute suitable renewal sites (Department of Interior, 2006). The municipal government encourages the land owners in the renewal sites to unite and prepare a proposal to be sent to the Urban Redevelopment Office for reviews. Once modified and approved, the owners can go ahead with the renewal. The reward for going along with the renewal for land owners is extra floor space for land owners (D4). The municipal government wishes to cover the parts of Taipei that are most in need of renewal first and to use urban renewal as a springboard to set up a system of housing provision that is an improvement both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, urban renewal is not without its own problems in Taipei.

The Problems of Urban Renewal in Taipei

The purpose of urban renewal for the municipal government is to provide housing to the needy and to have a more balanced, healthy living condition in areas closer to the city centre (City of Taipei, 2005). Urban renewal is supposed to have the benefits of the

whole city in view (rather than pockets of urban developments for the rich such as the rezone plan towards the edge of the city). It also makes sense since brownfield sites closer to the city centre have been developed longer and would have most necessary infrastructures (Chang and Tseng, 1991). However, “redevelopment of brownfield sites is currently a big challenge in Taipei.” (Chang and Lin, 1999, Pg. 104). After strongly encouraging urban renewal for the last decade, City of Taipei has not yet come close to achieving its goal. The first problem urban renewal inevitably ran into was having all the owners to agree on a master plan. The Urban Renewal Act (Department of Interior, 2006) outlined that over 60 percent of the property owners within the renewal zones will have to agree to the master plan before any development commences. Property owners have a lot of say in what the municipal government can do to their properties. Furthermore, property owners usually have different visions of the best use of their properties and it is a struggle to have everyone agree to a plan. Further complicating the problem is the fact that each property owner usually does not own too much land. In other Asian countries like Japan, a piece of property is usually passed down to the oldest child only. In Taiwan, a small piece of land can be further divided and passed down to all the children a person may have (A1). Even if the first 60 percent of the owners agree, there is still the problem of the rest of the 40 percent. The municipal government can force them to comply according to the law but as a planner in the DUD revealed, the municipal government usually does not want to do this due to respect for property owners (A4). As a result, lengthy negotiations may further delay the renewal and push the case beyond the time of its optimal development as judged by the government.

In terms of urban renewal, the municipal government has had a limited role. Instead, it has been allowing the owners and developers to play the leading role (D4). Housing provision in Taiwan in general has not been state-directed and it has reflected in the statistics on governmental direct intervention on housing output (Li, 1998). This market driven nature constitutes the second main problem of urban renewal in Taipei. Urban renewal was originally meant for brownfield sites in the west and southwest parts of the city (such as Wanhua or Datong, see figure 1). These sites are often older, more run down and more in need of renewal. However, to encourage developers to convert buildings in the brownfield sites is no simple task. The market, being drawn by the potentials in the newer parts of the city toward the East, moved their focus and resources away from the needy areas. The developers in recent years have been able to obtain sites in the Eastern part of the city (for example, in the most highly regarded Hsinyi District) and misrepresented direct development as acts of urban renewal. As such, they would receive the extra floor space as the reward promised by the municipal government and make lucrative profits (B4). The result is further appreciation of land in the newer parts of the city, pushing more people into the more crowded, older parts of the city (or to the edge of the city and beyond). This fits exactly with Blake and Golland's concerns that (2004, Pg. 293), "Slums areas cleared for new housing failed to provide a higher quality of life for many...[as] grants aimed to assist the most needy in poor-quality older housing were fully exploited only by speculators and more wealthy housing occupants." Hence, urban renewal may have accomplished the opposite of its original intention. It has made parts of the city more unhealthy. The market will spontaneously look for the most profitable sites for urban development. However, urban development does not equal

urban renewal (Chang, 2002). The municipal government should play a more prominent role in urban renewal and direct resources to the parts of the city that will benefit the most from urban renewal.

Even if the developers are willing to develop in the less optimal areas in the city, there is a third fundamental problem with urban renewal in Taipei. The municipal government has not been directly involved in the renewal process. Hence, it does not have funding for aiding the less advantaged people with the cost of renewal. As many people in the renewal zones do not have extra resources to pay the developers for renewal, very few renewal cases that have been approved are actually carried through. In a personal interview (D4), a planner in the municipal government revealed that he has seen “a 90 year old man who has been trying for many years to have his property renewed for his children and grandchildren failed on many attempts simply because residents in his zone do not have enough resources”. Later in the interview, he admitted that there is an inherent flaw in the renewal process that has made it nearly impossible for the less advantaged people. An academic researcher believed that the municipal government “Cares more for the economic effects of renewal more than actually providing housing for the poor.” (A4). Even if the renewal were to be carried through, the municipal government would have no way of knowing if it has achieved its intended effects. The government until today has an incomplete set of criteria for housing standards such as crowding ratio, doubling-up, light, or noise¹³ (Chen, 2005).

¹³ A quick browse of the Statistics Yearbook (City of Taipei, 2006) confirmed that Taipei does not keep these statistics. However, some other statistics show that housing conditions in districts like Wanhua and Datong are in need of renewal and improvements. Population density in these two districts is over 20,000 people per square kilometres – way above the city average of around 9,000. As older districts with older buildings, such a high population density does not present a very good prospect for healthy

Urban renewal policies are also quite inconsiderate of the different categories of less advantaged people that live in the city. For example, elderly people constitute 33 percent of the total population in the city. The city however, is critically lacking suitable housing for elderly people (Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service, 1999). Other disadvantaged residents such as physically and mentally handicapped people and single-parent families have different needs as well such as having to find housing close to hospitals or rehab centres. The needs of these people should be considered first and considered carefully but urban renewal policies are not as flexible and multi-faceted for this (Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service, 1999). In fact, a volunteer in a housing advocacy organization revealed how inconsiderate the municipal government is in a personal interview (B4). She described her experience trying to help a man in his seventies after he was removed from his original place of residence. The man has enjoyed staying in the original place – a subsidized facility for retired veterans, before he was displaced and moved to a residence away from the city centre in the name of urban renewal. He often complained about inconvenience away from the city and loneliness away from his older companions who dwelt in the city. Although his original residence may have become a good place to live for other people, what this man had to go through may still allow people to question the justification of urban renewal. Such is a case that makes one wonder if there are more disadvantaged people becoming victims of gentrification in the name of urban renewal (and if urban renewal is simply the guise for urban development).

living. Furthermore, the District of Wanhua has the most low income families among the 12 districts in Taipei, indicating that people may live in less than ideal condition in this district.

Such a phenomenon is by no means new but has played out many times in other parts of the world. In a study done in hundreds of cities in the U.S. in the 1970's, almost three-quarters of them reported some degree of private-market non-subsidized housing renovation in older, deteriorated areas (London and Palen, 1984). Such endeavours increased property values and the tax revenues for the city but they also imposed adverse effects on residents (owners or renters) who lived in the renewed areas before but could not afford increases in the cost of housing after because even the houses that remained untouched by renewal were assessed at a much higher rate (DeGiovanni, 1984). The same thing happened right in Vancouver in the 1960's and 70's. For example, in Kitsilano, almost 1,000 dwelling units were demolished and more expensive condominiums and strata title units were built (Ley, 1984). A majority of those removed from Kitsilano wanted to stay in the area but could not find affordable housing (Ley, 1984). Taipei shows signs of following such path as it has displaced tens and thousands so far by "beautifying" the older districts with city parks (Hsiao and Liu, 2004). Just as the cases elsewhere years ago, the municipal government perhaps feels that displacement is lamentable, but inevitable (London and Palen, 1984).

To fix these above problems, the municipal government will have to produce them with effective and fair land-use policies (Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service, 1999). Yet, Taipei municipal government's role in housing provision is becoming increasingly smaller with revenues on housing being moved to other investments in the city (Selya, 1995; Chen, 2005). Furthermore, a part of the revenues for housing is supposed to come from the central government. However, since there is no clear articles on the remediation of the funds for housing collected by the

central government in the law, the central government often has kept the funds for itself (C1). Nevertheless, the central government is currently trying to finalize a new housing law¹⁴ that will hopefully allow more proactive planning, effective implementations and a more stable source of funding for the local governments (C1). As Golland and Blake (2004) argued, the municipal government needs to guide investment in housing through good planning in order to capture the planning gain that may otherwise accrue to private interests.

Housing, Governance and Planning – A Discussion

As with any other policies in the city, good governance and careful planning are imperative for providing suitable housing. So far, I have presented two main planning challenges in Taipei – the re-zone case towards the edge of the city and the attempts of urban renewal closer to the centre of the city. On the surface, these two do not relate to each other. In fact, these two not only relate but they interact with and influence each other. As Golland and Blake (2004, Pg. 252) fittingly put it, “[F]or sustainable development policies to be successful, it is necessary that the urban development itself is successful. This requires a careful balancing out of market forces, planning policies on density and the physical challenge of sites themselves. Unsuccessful urban regeneration schemes will feed through very quickly into increased pressures on greenfield sites, thereby negating the objectives of the whole policy.” Through studying the two challenges through personal interviews, I found that both enlighten the fact that the City of Taipei currently lacks good governance and careful planning. Two examples are

¹⁴ The drafting of the new law began in January, 2006 and the first draft was produced about 4 months later after 8 meetings with experts, government officials and different advocacy groups. The draft has since been reviewed 6 times in separate meetings. A 7th meeting will be held soon.

especially glaring. First of all, critics of both cases pointed out that while planning for these two cases, municipal government officials in fact did not do so keeping the benefits of the local residents sufficiently in mind. Such harmonious echoes prove that the municipal government may not be trying hard enough to plan in line with the residents' needs (if indeed they have tried at all). Secondly, for both cases critics and sometimes even members of the staff in the municipal government pointed out that it does not have enough vital statistics, there are holes in the planning processes and it is short of staff to enforce and implement the plans.

I believe the municipal government has all the good intentions for encouraging urban renewal but through the above discussions, one can clearly notice that it may have instead made living conditions in Taipei (around the edge or close to the city centre) worse for most residents. This is very ironic but hardly surprising. Gentrification is one example of this opposite effect. Breugmann (2005) interestingly argued that gentrification at the centre is the flip side of the same coin as sprawl at the edge. He argued that affluent families have been increasingly less willing to move outward because the centre offers more prestigious jobs and more specialized services.¹⁵ As they displace the original residents, they are at the same time preventing others from moving in (in order to reduce density) by using zoning ordinances, historic preservation measure and environmental regulation (Breugmann, 2005). Renewal may be just another episode of those better off seeking to make their lives better at the expense of other residents in the city except this episode is taking place in the centre instead of at the edge. Renewal may

¹⁵ In some interviews conducted, I found this to be true for residents in Taipei too

be a different case as compared to the re-zone case, in principle the challenges stem from the same source.

The central and municipal government has long been influenced by the early state apparatus regime and in a sense, it has not stopped serving the large corporations ever since (A5). In their making of public policy, they have often made things easy for large corporations to make lucrative profits while sacrificing the needs of the public in general (Chen, 1995). The planners had contradictory choices to make and the results of such decision making were manifested in space (Lefebvre, 1977). The state used to have absolute autonomy over its people in Taiwan but people have increasingly stood up for themselves through waves of movements to fight for their own rights and even their own values (Hsu, 2001). A good illustration of such took place on August 26th, 1989 when over 40,000 residents in Taipei took the street and stayed there over the night to protest against rising housing prices. As the democratic movements snowballed in Taiwan and as people became more educated, there were more citizens paying attention to and analyzing the City of Taipei's actions based on policy decisions that have led to manifested results in space. The result is more civil autonomy and a more "demanding" society (Hsiao 1992, Pg. 70). For example, citizens of Taiwan have become increasingly more conscious of environmental protection (Hsiao and Stone, 2002). The municipal government is now trying to pay closer attention to the voices coming from the grass-roots. Its newly inaugurated community planner selection campaign is one example of such. Nevertheless, how will this satisfy the large corporations and the developers at the same time? As one planner in the municipal government revealed in a personal interview (D4), "We know that residents in Taipei need more affordable housing but the developers will grill us if

we try to put too many non-market housing in potentially areas of lucrative developments.”

Successful delivery and implementation of any housing related policy depends on the cooperation between planners and developers to ride out the fluctuations in the housing market (Golland and Blake, 2004). According to a staff member of the central government, it is currently focusing on helping the cities integrate the needs of the developers and the needs of the residents. The plan is to “market” the needs of residents as something closely related to the developers’ own interests (C2). For example, one strategy is for the municipal government to make contacts with the developers (or the umbrella association that represents them) and present statistics which show the rapid increase in the elderly population in the last twenty years in the city. The municipal government hopes that by seeing the statistics, the developers will recognize the potential and be encouraged (instead of forced) to build housing that caters more to the needs of this group. This may be a good start but there are still many grounds for improvements in terms of the municipal government’s approach to governance and planning if Taipei were to become a truly sustainable and viable city for the long term. A few areas for improvement include better coordination between different departments in the municipal government, more forward-looking attitudes and stronger inclination toward citizen-oriented planning (Chen, 1995; Huang, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

Brief Summary

So far, I have examined the conflicts in land-use for the 25 pieces of re-zoned land and used it as a springboard to probe into urban renewal as a solution to fringe development. The approach and emphasis for governance in Taipei has gradually (although not completely or satisfactorily) moved from absolute autonomy to economy centred to social centred (Hsiao, 1992). However, economic downturns in the early 2000's turned the central and municipal government's attention back to economic development and away from social issues, thus further reducing the availability of affordable housing in the city in favour of office buildings (Chen, 2005). Given its geographical and historical context, I will even argue that trying to find a place for all the residents and businesses in Taipei (and all those who still intend to move into the city) is especially a tall order. As one staff member in the municipal government observed, "Taipei simply does not have enough space to do everything we would like to do." (D5)

So far, I have shown that the municipal government has not been successful in managing the re-zone case or its attempts for urban renewal. This though is mostly not for a lack of attempts.

Where can the City of Taipei go from here? What kind of a plan (or plans) does the city need? How does it go about solving its current problems in planning for people and for the environment? Before going on to the potential starting points for a solution, it

is necessary to further summarize the problems in a more concentrated form and point to the city's needs:

1. People in Taipei historically have placed little value on nature (or place only monetary value on nature – Hsu, 2001). In fact, nature's other functions are often ignored as people build on and build over nature (Beatley, 2004; Huang, 2005). The city needs plan(s) that will respect nature and go according to, instead of breaking the limitations of, nature, thus reducing the impacts on nature to a minimum (Yin, 1990). The plan(s) must be practical and beyond a mere slogan.
2. Taipei, like many other cities in the world has become a capitalist city. This alone may not be a problem. However, it has also become quite growth oriented, elitist and dependent on technology (Hsu, 2001). These are the rational and neutral means to get people to prosperity. A singular focus on corporate power, globalisation and technological wonders may be dangerous because they really are not for local residents and it can be quite fragile and extremely unstable (Carr, 2004). Finally, such an approach pits society directly against nature (Chi and Hsiao, 2003). Taipei needs plan(s) that will cater to people and nature's real needs, serve local residents, balance development and conservation, honour the influence of the particular context in the city and treasure the city's use value.
3. Taipei, like many Asian cities, has been relatively successful in developing under the "top-down" governance approach (Choe, 2004). The top-town approach is however quite narrow in focus. Along the way, the municipal government has developed the city in pockets and has lacked a coordinated plan that benefits the whole city. Taipei needs plan(s) that will take a city-wide, or even a regional approach instead of merely looking at specific benefits for particular communities or districts.

Current Conditions and Concluding Statement

The City of Taipei has quickly become one of the more recognizable cities in Asia and even around the world. However, most only have an understanding of the physical or quantitative realm of the city such as its natural beauty, its design, its economic output or competitiveness in the global economy. This research project delves deeper and discovers that although Taipei is indeed successful in certain areas of its development and planning, it does have some fundamental problems that limit its potential ability to truly serve its residents and the environment. The Taipei municipal government has had many visions (i.e. a healthy, eco-city) but those often turn out to be mere propaganda. For example, in 1997, total investments by developers on development projects on supposedly sensitive and inappropriate hillsides in Taipei were almost identical to the total expenditure on environment protection from *national* revenue (Hsiao and Liu, 2004). The first article of the Urban Planning Law (Department of Interior, 2002) the municipal government goes by clearly states that urban planning is to improve the lives of residents living in a city, town or village. This research project clearly shows that there is room for improvement. The municipal government and many non-profit organizations are now trying to reverse the trend, but the pace of destruction is always quicker than the pace of education (B3).

Taipei has not quite shed the “development first” mentality that has entangled it. Indeed, anticipation of the potential for developments can be powerful and dangerous (Adams, 1990). Two other projects considered for the slope land in Taipei serve as an illustration and a stern reminder that perhaps the re-zone case has already set a bad precedence. The first project currently in the planning and EIA process is to build cable cars to bring tourists up the mountains in order to reduce the problems of traffic jams and

pollution created by idle cars. The project however is currently under a lot of criticism because it has just been revealed during the writing of this research project that the major developer for this project has bribed a high-ranking official in the central government in order to get by the EIA process. Apparently, the project is to serve people but massive corporate benefits hide behind the scene. The developer's plan include not just the cable cars but also high end resorts, hotels, coffee shops, Japanese restaurants, organic farms and buffets with international cuisines around the cable car station. It is estimated that the developer can make up to nine billion New Taiwanese Dollars in profit (approximately 300 millions CAD) over the next thirty years (Wang, 2006). Eventually about five or six licenses for developments were granted without the EIAC's approval (Wang, 2006).

The second case was even more subtle and it was revealed through a personal interview (A5) conducted with an active local academic researcher. Tzu Chi Foundation is a national (even international) Buddhist organization in Taiwan that does a lot of works to better social and community services, medical care, education and humanism. In the early 2000's, the organization had the thought of converting a piece of land in the slope area of Neihu District for humanitarian work. The major use for the land is to build a new hospital for serving the city's poor. The problem is, the EIAC unanimously agreed that the piece of land is not suitable for building anything (not to mention a hospital) because it is located in an ecologically sensitive area. Not only is the geology of the area unstable, it has been destabilized once already for underground mining. One geology academic researcher from National Taiwan University said after an on-site examination that it is not a matter of whether problems would occur with building a hospital there, but a matter of when. Still, the case almost passed because the former Associate Mayor of the City of

Taipei was a member of the powerful and influential organization. One of the members of EIAC had to secretly call the academic researcher I interviewed to quickly get the environmental groups involved to block the case! This shows the deficiency of the EIAC and the UPC. In addition, it shows how power and politics are still the most influential force in planning in Taipei.

This research project started with a case that is apparently the battle between development and conservation – something that most cities are struggling with today. Urban sustainable development and the balance between development and conservation have been approved internationally as the lessons to tackle with for cities nowadays but not enough people have seen that traditional values and institutional structures act as the major barriers to moving that forward (Lee, 2002). As one scholar passionately stated in a personal interview (B3), “I will tell you what’s wrong with planning in Taipei. Planning can be about politics, it can be about giving each other favours. Planners in Taipei however, do not take their jobs seriously. They do not research before drafting a plan and they do not follow up or try to learn from their mistakes once the plan is drafted. I will remind you again, it is a problem with people. It is all about having little resolution in us to change our attitudes, concepts and behaviours. People, even teachers and professionals need to be under a different kind of education. We need a core group of people to rise up and fight against such trend!”

The new institution should focus on achieving a balanced situation. First, ecological environment and economic development in Taipei must be adjusted to a more harmonious relationship (Chen and Huang, 1998). The new institution should escape from the traditional mentality that pits human against nature and vice versa. However, it

should not mix the two in a way that one spontaneously takes over the other, such as commercializing the “green” to get more developments done (Beatley, 2004). Secondly, there needs to be the balance between quantitative and qualitative knowledge. Taipei has depended on the technical, scientific and quantifiable data in the past (i.e. EIA) but it cannot go very far with this approach (A4). The municipal government needs to collect qualitative information about its people, its community and social relationships. This information is intangible and harder to collect and analyze but it is important for better sound assessment in making a planning decision (Gismondi, 1997). This research project takes a mostly qualitative approach in order to make up for such lack in Taipei right now.

The seed of a paradigm shift and an institutional makeover often is planted from activities of a group of people or an organization on the community scale. However, the real institutional change has to go from centre to circumference. Active leadership is very important for change (Beatley, 2004). Leaders, politicians and decision makers in the municipal government and the council in Taipei need to have a change in value and develop a sense of place first. They can exert tremendous influence on the entire society by “shifting their resources, service decisions, investments, and purchasing power...” (Beatley 2000, Pg. 360). To strengthen the centre to circumference effect, the municipal government should also work more closely with instead of for or even against the will of the public (Chang, 2002). These all involve revolution in people’s thinking and while such revolution sounds straightforward, it is a long, even intergenerational process (Carr, 2004).

This is not a research project calling for the opposition for development simply for the sake of opposing it. It is however, calling for the planners, politicians and decision

makers in Taipei to deeply reflect on the city's current condition and see that it is neither serving people nor the environment. People do need, in one sense or another, some kind of development. There needs to be balance in the city. Balance between quantitative data and qualitative data, balance between the fringe and the centre and most importantly, balance between people and the environment, development and conservation. Planners in Taipei should not just plan for people, neither should they just plan for the environment. They need to find a way to plan for and with people and the environment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: A List of Interview Questions

1. What is your position with _____ organization? What do you do for this organization? How long have you worked for _____ organization?
2. If you work for _____ organization on a voluntary basis, what do you do for a living?
3. As just a citizen of Taipei, what do you enjoy about the city the most? What do you enjoy about the city the least?
4. First of all, do you have any general reactions on the rezoning of these 25 pieces of land?
5. Tell me a bit more about the City's plan in 1979 to rezone 25 pieces of land in the Beitou and Shilin Districts from "protected" status to "residential" status
6. I understand from what I have read that the rezoning of some parcels has generated some controversy. Piece #6 in particular seems to have raised some opposition?
7. Some scholars have suggested that development of these fringe areas is just an easy way out of pressure to develop more housing. How can the City show that such development is the appropriate decision?
8. In various articles scholars have suggested that gaps exist between the vision of a plan and the actual implementation. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? How do you deal with this if the answer is yes?
9. How has public input influenced the rezoning and its subsequent plans?
10. I am going to ask you some specific questions about Taipei's 3 goals, 7 visions, and 4 promises for Sustainable Development.
11. Taipei's Sustainable Development Committee has mapped out 7 task groups in accordance to the 7 visions. Can you elaborate on the tasks specifically related to the "sustainability vision" and "sustainability community" task groups?
12. As the functions of the land increase, so will the burden on the land. Can Taipei successfully cater to all the strategies it plans to implement at the same time?
13. How influential is Taipei's Sustainable Development Committee? Has the theme of sustainable development been "caught on" to the different departments within the Taipei government? How are the working relationships between different departments for this cause? Can you provide evidence to back up the statement?
14. Is the plan to rezone these 25 parcels of land going to harmoniously coexist with or even generate help to Taipei's eco-city movement? Why or why not?
15. Do you see housing shortage as a major problem facing Taipei's future? Why or why not?
16. City of Taipei's sustainable development strategic plan points out that it intends to foster a sustainable community and healthy living condition. Do you see this happening in current residential neighbourhoods in city centre? Do you see this happening in the fringe areas such as the 25 pieces of land rezoned in Beitou and Shilin District?
17. In your opinion, what should the City do to solve the problem of speculation and empty housing units so as to keep land/housing prices down?
18. How can the City keep the housing price stable in general in the long run?
19. The City has plans to solve housing problems with urban infill and redevelopment. How do you see this as a solution and a possible alternative to the development on the

- fringe?
20. Taiwan came in second last on the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI) developed at Yale University. Some scholars feel that Taipei encapsulates the problem of Taiwan as a whole. Can Taipei contribute in changing this?
 21. Do you see a lack of public input especially in terms of participation by NGO and local grass root organizations?
 22. Tell me a bit about your strategies in promoting and getting your ideas and points across? What will you do if someone right now expresses an opposite view of what you believe in?
 23. Has the council bought into the idea and the need of sustainable development?
 24. Can you talk a bit about Taipei's plan to establish a sustainable development database which will feature a pool of indicators?
 25. Can you suggest anyone who will be interested in conducting an interview with me or will have useful information around these issues? Do you have/can you provide any useful secondary data for my project?

Appendix B: A List of Interviewee Qualifications

Number	Subjects' Related Institution
A1	National Taiwan University
A2	National Chengchi University
A3	National Chengchi University
A4	National Taipei University
A5	National Taipei University
B1	Taiwan Academy of Ecology
B2	Tsao-Shan Ecological, Cultural and Historical Union
B3	Tsao-Shan Ecological, Cultural and Historical Union
B4	Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Service
C1	Construction and Planning Agency, Ministry of Interior
C2	Construction and Planning Agency, Ministry of Interior
D1	Taipei Department of Urban Development
D2	Taipei Department of Urban Development
D3	Taipei Department of Urban Development
D4	Taipei Department of Urban Development
D5	Taipei Department of Urban Development
E1	Individual

REFERENCE LIST

A major part of the project consists of primary data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Taipei in 2006. To protect the identities of the interviewees, their names and positions cannot be revealed.

I have instead chosen to use corresponding numbers to represent the identities and qualifications of the interviewees with A1-A5 being academic researchers, B1-B4 being members of non-profit groups, C1-C2 being central government staff members, D1-D5 being municipal government staff members and E1 being an individual. See appendix B for more details.

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