

The Incubation and Cultivation of Diversified Community Organization: Social Innovation in Dongcheng District of Beijing City

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. The Dilemma of Community Development

With the acceleration of urbanization, the disintegration of the institutional system, and the construction of a multitude of modern residential communities, Chinese neighborhood relationships have gradually moved from closeness to indifference. The moral order and social trust, which are based on traditional, close neighborhood relationships, have been greatly challenged. Fundamentally, community is a system of social life that constitutes of people living within a certain geographic area. Community is not only a place for people to sleep but also a place for people to live their lives. Unfortunately, community development in China has not dealt with the aforementioned issues effectively over the past twenty years.

With economic development, community residents are requiring increasingly diversified and complicated public services, such as pre-school education, emotional support for older adults, cultural and recreational activities, and involvement in the governance of public affairs. Chinese neighborhood committees, which are essentially an extension of the government, can hardly meet the diverse needs of community residents or function as a method of community engagement. This reality not only leads to unfulfilled basic residential needs, such as cultural and recreational development, but also leads to unfulfilled needs related to involvement in public governance.

Nationally and international evidence have shown that diversified community services need to be

provided not only by the government and neighborhood committees but also by a large number of community organizations, such as cultural and recreational development organizations, environmental protection organizations, and community nursing homes. Community organizations are able to provide various public services to meet residential needs, to increase residents' sense of belonging, to improve neighborhood trust and friendship, and to strengthen community cohesion. Therefore, community organization can be considered the foundation of and key to community development.

Currently, many mutual-benefit and public-benefit, community-based social organizations are operating in China. These organizations, however, are usually small in scale and have inadequate in management, poor ability, and limited function. Due to a lack of useful organizational resources in their community, residents have a low level of community governance participation, many unfulfilled needs, and weak community cohesion. An increasing number of governments are beginning to realize the necessity of cultivating and strengthening community organizations in their community development efforts.

Since the Shanghai Pudong Center for Nonprofit Organization Development (also known as NPI) initiated the program Nonprofit Incubator in 2006, a series of social innovation parks, philanthropic organization parks and social organization parks have been established in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Shunde, Nanjing, Suzhou, Ningbo, Nanchang, and

Chengdu to facilitate the cultivation and development of social organizations, particularly community organizations. Although many similar patterns exist in social organization incubation, there are some unique cases. For instance, the distinctive project of community organization incubation in Dongcheng District, Beijing City, has explored a new way of incubating and cultivating community organizations.

II. Case Description

Dongcheng District is located in central Beijing and is a hub for politics, commerce, and culture. For the past few years, the government of Dongcheng District has taken a series of steps to facilitate the development of the community and community organization. In 2009, for instance, the Center for Social Organization Guidance and Service was established. Authorized by the district government, the center began serving as the business oversight department of district-based public-service social organizations, which resolved the issue of district-based social organizations not being able to register as formal organizations under the Chinese dual oversight system. At the same time, the government of Dongcheng District also established a special fund to financially support the establishment, program development, and administrative expenses of social organizations. As a result, long-term, stable incubation funding was secured. In addition to donations from the people, social organizations received government support.

In October 2011 the Dongcheng District Department of Civil

Affairs invested 500,000 yuan to initiate a one-year Community Organization Incubation Project. Through governmental procurement of the supportive services provided by community organizations, the project has helped communities cultivate their own social organizations and has improved their ability to serve community residents.

Unlike incubation approaches in other areas, the government of Dongcheng District has funded three support organizations: the Beijing Social Work Development Center for Facilitators (Beijing Facilitator), Shining Stone Community Action (SSCA), and the Qiaoniang Studio Development Association. These three organizations act as the coordinator between the government and thirteen community organizations from eight streets, such as Jianguomen. Through the assistance of these support organizations, the government aims to improve the capacity of local community organizations and to make community organizations more capable in areas such as elder services, poverty relief, and environmental protection.

1. The Incubation Work of Beijing Facilitator

Beijing Facilitator, governed by Beijing Department of Civil Affairs and established by Beijing Cultural Communication Center for Facilitators, is a professional social work support organization. Founded in 2003, Beijing Facilitator gradually developed its mission from providing services for migrant workers to providing comprehensive public services with professional social workers. In 2009 the

Nanjing Department of Civil Affairs adopted the operational mode of Beijing Facilitator and founded Nanjing Community Development for Facilitators, which was the first professional social work agency working with the migrant population in the Yangtze River Delta area. In the same year, the Zhuhai Department of Civil Affairs, together with Flextronics Industrial Park, introduced the Beijing Facilitator to Zhuhai City and founded the Zhuhai Social Work Education Promotion Center for Facilitators—the first professional social work agency that integrated resources from the government, corporation, and social organizations.

Given Beijing Facilitator's capability and its rich experience as a support organization, the government of Dongcheng District put it in charge of the incubation work of three community organizations at Jianguomen Street in the Community Organization Incubation Project. The three community organizations included Zhaojialou Community Convenient Service Team for the Disadvantaged, Zhaojialou Community Hand-in-Hand Club, and Dayabao Community Green Team for Environmental Protection.

Throughout the project, Beijing Facilitator took six approaches to its work. First, the organization formed a work team with neighborhood committees and community organizations for program management and implementation. Second, the organization developed an implementation plan after discussion and agreement with community organizations and neighborhood committees. Third, the organization conducted a needs assessment to

understand community needs and analyze the problems that were faced by community organizations. Fourth, the organization provided activities such as consultation, training, and experience sharing based on the results of the needs assessment. Fifth, the organization helped community organizations improve on their daily work and management and helped them solve problems. Finally, the organization integrated resources to help community organizations enhance their service capacity. In accordance with the social work philosophy of "helping others help themselves," Beijing Facilitator clearly identified itself as an external facilitator and considered the community organizations a key component of the program.

The Zhaojialou Community Convenient Service Team for the Disadvantaged, which was founded by the neighborhood committee of the Zhaojialou community in 2008, was one of the incubation targets in the project. The team provided services, such as haircuts, blood pressure measurement, and tailoring to community residents, especially the aged and disabled. Services were provided by volunteers. The team, however, faced many challenges due to inadequate experience and skills in volunteer management, including recruiting, maintaining, organizing, and enhancing the service capacity of its volunteers.

First, Beijing Facilitator, together with Zhaojialou's neighborhood committee and the Convenient Service Team, built a program management and implementation team to facilitate the execution of its incubation program. Next, with Beijing Facilitator's help, the con-

venient Service Team held a series of participatory meetings, through which they successfully collected suggestions and opinions regarding program implementation, and then drafted an action plan. Later, Beijing Facilitator developed a detailed interview outline, interviewed leaders of the Convenient Service Team as well as the neighborhood committee, and thoroughly analyzed the challenges and needs of the Convenient Service Team.

After completing the needs assessment and developing a detailed action plan, Beijing Facilitator helped the Convenient Service Team organize some activities. Based on the results of a group discussion, the team purchased some new service equipment, which addressed the volunteers' biggest concern and inspired their passion. Meanwhile, Beijing Facilitator assisted with designing publicity materials to publicize the service and the volunteer spirit of the team, which improved the team's community impact and developed a culture of community volunteer service. In addition, Beijing Facilitator also assisted in outreach and recruitment of new volunteers with certain skills and talents, which enriched the team's services. Afterwards, Beijing Facilitator shared their experience of volunteer management with leaders of the Convenient Service Team and the neighborhood committee and organized volunteer trainings. Additionally, Beijing Facilitator helped the team improve its system and guidelines for managing volunteers, such as forming the procedure of volunteer recruitment, building a system of regular work meetings, hosting the first work meeting of

key volunteers, and standardizing the management of the team.

During the one-year project, the Convenient Service Team greatly improved its service capacity and learned about work methods, such as participatory discussion and group work, as well as management tools, such as program design, needs assessments, self-analysis, and self-diagnosis. More important, through a platform built by Beijing Facilitator and the neighborhood committee, the team got to know more community organizations, which gave the team opportunities to broaden its horizon, increase its confidence, and learn from others. With the support of Beijing Facilitator and the neighborhood committee, the team also had built an external resource network with Tongren Hospital, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, fitness centers, and business shops. These collaborations increased the service content of the team and professionalized the services. With the improvement of its organizational capacity, the team also improved both the quantity and quality of its community public service. During the year, the team carried out services five times, served nearly one thousand residents—particularly the aged, the disabled, and the migrant population—and strengthened community residents' sense of belonging.

2. The Incubation Work of Shining Stone Community Action

Founded in December 2002, SSCA is a nonprofit agency that is dedicated to facilitating the participatory development of urban communities. The agency leader, Qing-

hua Song, is an experienced professional in the NGO sector who used to work at Global Village, one of the first grassroots NGOs in China. SSCA is expert in various tools and methods of urban communities' public participation. SSCA is also skilled in using participatory approaches to provide community service, resolving community conflicts, and solving community problems. SSCA had gained the trust of the Dongcheng District Department of Civil Affairs from past collaborations and this time was delegated to cultivate the development of nine community organizations as part of the department's incubation project. The nine organizations were the Residential Council Administration Committee of Shanglong Community, the Motor Vehicle Self-Governance Committee of Andelu Community, the Parking Self-Governance Committee of Nanchizi Community, the Responsible Dog Care Self-Governance Committee of Jingshandongjie Community, the 35 Dayangyibin Self-Governance Committee of Zhaojialou Community, the Firefighting Safeguard Action Organization of Gulouyuan Community, the Laojiefang Neighborhood Mutual-Aid Cooperative Society, the Zhide Community Mutual-Aid Association (which was later closed), and the Flea Market Governance Group of Yinzha Community.

In the beginning, with the coordination of the Center for Social Organization Guidance and Service, SSCA staff held a series of networking events and built trust with the community organizations and related neighborhood committees. On this basis, SSCA conducted a baseline survey and a needs

assessment. After finding that the commonalities of these community organizations were inadequate management and institutional development, SSCA analyzed relevant organizational structure and systems with key members of these organizations and relevant neighborhood committees. By recruiting new members, building a board of directors, establishing a system of regular meetings, and training organizational leaders, SSCA gradually helped these community organizations be less dependent on neighborhood committees and increase their awareness of self-governance. Additionally, SSCA provided key members of the community organizations and community residents with trainings regarding participatory concepts and approaches. SSCA also offers suggestions and consultations to community organizations regarding specific challenges and issues.

While working with the Residential Council of Qingnianhu Community, for example, SSCA started by actively building trust and collaborative relationships with stakeholders. To ensure smooth communication among all parties, a program management and implementation team was established that included the Community Office, the Qingnianhu community's neighborhood committee, the Residential Council Administration Committee, and SSCA. Then, through a survey, the team found that the main problem of the community was that the neighborhood committee was taking charge of all organization and management jobs for the residential council; at the same time, the council's administration committee did not clearly

identify its own role, which made the administration committee inadequately self-aware, unable to operate independently, and highly dependent on the neighborhood committee.

Based on the results of baseline survey and needs assessment, SSCA initiated a series of discussions with the neighborhood committee and the Residential Council Administration Committee of Qingnianhu Community. These meetings resulted in consensuses on program objectives and an action plan.

To facilitate program implementation, SSCA organized two training sessions on the Qingnianhu Community Residential Council's role. Topics included identifying the preparation work needed for council meetings, the procedures to be used in those meetings (e.g., Robert's rules of order), and management tools (e.g., information dissemination). Through these trainings, the Residential Council Administration Committee had a better idea of how to hold council meetings and how to reach decisions from those meetings.

With the assistance of SSCA, a new administration committee, which involved resident representatives from various professional fields, was elected after multiple discussions. The new committee redefined the nature and role of the Residential Council, reorganized the internal structure, set up a secretariat, and clarified the responsibility of every committee member. As a result, the committee's meetings were no longer unproductive; they were able to organize, lead, coordinate, and implement their management tasks independently.

In addition, the committee also formulated a work system, which includes monthly committee meetings, monthly meetings with the Director and the Associate Director, and guidelines for the content and structure of meetings. At monthly meetings, for instance, attendees should discuss issues proposed from the last meeting, urge the neighborhood committee to address these issues, report unresolved issues to related government departments, confirm the topic of the next activity that was organized by the Residential Council, and inform and invite residents to participate.

In its first year, the Qingnianhu Community Residential Council held ten activities. The activities addressed issues such as the community environment, public security, the development of a house committee, the responsibilities of resident units, the institutional development of the residential council, awards for community volunteers, and the selection of community role models. These activities made the residential council more connected to residents' daily activities; helped the council better meet residents' demands; and improved communication among the residents, the neighborhood committee, and government departments.

3. The Incubation Work of Qiaoniang Studio Development Association

Located in Dongcheng District of Beijing, the Qiaoniang Studio Development Association is a public-service social organization that funds itself through producing and

selling handicrafts. The association, which is considered a relatively strong social enterprise in Dongcheng District, is dedicated to providing employment opportunities to women who are unemployed, disabled, retired, and low income. Meanwhile, by incorporating a business model, the association has achieved financial sustainability.

As a part of the Community Organization Incubation Project, Qiaoniang Studio Development Association took charge of the Knitwork Studio program, which was founded at Jiudaowan Community in 2002. Originally, the studio organized knitting activities every Friday afternoon to increase residents' enthusiasm to participate in community affairs.

Through a survey, it was found that some prominent problems of the studio were a lack of funding, skills, and professional trainers as the studio's participants increased. However, the studio could hardly be further developed due to limited skills and a lack of variety of handicrafts.

In this case, the Qiaoniang Studio Development Association and key members of the Knitwork Studio developed program objectives and an action plan based on actual needs and the studio's current situation. Next, with the assistance of Qiaoniang Studio Development Association, the Knitwork Studio designed a new organizational structure. Managed by the community neighborhood committee in the past, the studio began to develop its own organizational and technical leaders. Later, the Qiaoniang Studio Development Association helped the Knitwork Studio

purchase resources, such as learning tools, raw materials, and showcases, which greatly improved the studio's productivity. At the same time, the association helped the studio mobilize external resources and invited professional trainers who provided the studio's participants with skills training in areas such as silk-flower artwork and kite drawing. In addition, the Qiaoniang Studio Development Association assisted the Knitwork Studio in setting up display platforms to promote and sell its artwork.

Within its first year, Qiaoniang Studio Development Association had helped the Knitwork Studio organize more than 40 training sessions, which benefited over 1,500 people. With the women's new skills, improved product quality, and appropriate marketing campaigns, their personal incomes increased, which also improved their families' quality of life. These improvements not only strengthened the cohesion of Jiudaowan Community but also protected the traditional cultural heritage of Beijing.

III. Case Study

Supporting and developing social organizations have been important parts of the innovation of social administration in many cities. For the past few years, some cities have launched cultivation projects of social organization in which various incubation venues and social innovation parks have been built. Unlike other projects, the Community Organization Incubation Project of Beijing Dongcheng District has been going through bold explorations and innovations, which have resulted in many valuable lessons

and useful experience for society.

1. Innovations of the Incubation Project in Dongcheng District

Learning from other cities, the Community Organization Incubation Project explored a new direction. First, the project focuses on incubating community organizations at the most grassroots level. The majority of projects in other cities involve a variety of social organizations, not just community organizations. The reason for this is that most leaders of grassroots community organizations, who are usually older or a member of a vulnerable group in the community, have a lower level of education and less creativity and need a longer time to accept innovation; as a result, it is often difficult and inefficient to incubate these organizations. On the contrary, it is easier and more effective to incubate other types of social organizations because their leaders are usually younger in age, have a higher level of education and better learning ability, and are more energetic. Therefore, on the one hand, the majority of cities usually incubate these types of social organizations first, and then have those organizations coordinate with the community in providing community services, which is understandable given the aforementioned circumstances. On the other hand, a large number of community organizations are operating in China currently. In Dongcheng District, for instance, approximately 5,000 community organizations are registered in areas such as cultural and recreational development, community wellness, rights protection, and poverty relief. Most of these com-

munity organizations, however, have inadequate management, poor capacity, and limited functions—some of them had even had stirred up intense conflicts in community because of disturbing residents while conducting activities. Consequently, governments are also facing challenges of incubating, motivating, and strengthening the service capacity of what is a considerable number of community organizations. It is commendable that the government of Dongcheng District understands the main contradiction in community development and focuses on the incubation of grassroots community organizations despite the difficulties in achieving progress and work performance.

Second, the incubation project uses multiple incubation approaches. Currently, governments of most Chinese cities, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, choose to delegate a support organization to carry out activities in incubation parks. Since incubating community organizations was a new trial and no similar patterns could be followed, the government of Dongcheng District carefully selected three support organizations with rich experiences in community work. Based on the specialty of these three organizations, different types of community organizations were assigned to and cultivated by each of them. Within the one-year period of exploration, Beijing Facilitator, SSCA, and Qiaoniang Studio Development Association utilized their own strengths to cultivate targeted community organizations in different ways. Drawing on its professional social work background, Beijing Facilitator helped community organizations learn about self-reflection and self-growth by

providing training, sharing experiences, and establishing platforms for networking. Using its strength in participatory approaches, SSCA helped community organizations and neighborhood committees master participatory concepts and methods, which were then applied to improve their management effectiveness and ability to mobilize residents' participation in community affairs, as well as to increase the autonomy of community organizations. Being experts in business operations, Qiaoniang Studio Development Association helped community organizations efficiently improve product quality and economic benefit with the support of facilities, trainers, and sales platforms.

Finally, the project emphasizes incubating and growing together in practice. Currently, the dominating approach to incubation is to build an incubation park with actual buildings to provide social organizations with free office space and then to entrust specific support organizations to manage the park. This approach contributes to centralized training, convenient communication, comprehensive training knowledge, easier publicizing and reporting of the incubation process, and better evaluation from the government. This approach, however, may lead to high financial costs, impractical knowledge, and superficial projects. Breaking the old pattern, instead of building a special incubation park or base, the Community Organization Incubation Project of Dongcheng District delegates support organizations to go into the community and to assist community organizations in diagnosing problems and improving their management and service ca-

pacities. The advantages of this approach are low costs and practical training and assistance. Still, this approach can lead to a hard-to-evaluate process, incomplete training content, a long incubation period, and inconspicuous effectiveness.

2. Experience and Lessons from the Incubation Project in Dongcheng District

Today, the biggest challenge of Chinese community development is the lack of an active and autonomous team of community organizations, of which the key issue is to mobilize internal resources to solve community problems and to provide better public products. The experiences that the Community Organization Incubation Project of Dongcheng District gained from working through these issues provides several lessons for the future.

First, an accurate positioning of the project will tackle the critical issue of community development. Because many community organizations were operating in Dongcheng District, the government decided not to cultivate new social organizations and then ask them to provide services for communities, but to develop community organizations that already existed. The strategy of developing existing community organizations set an example and stimulated the vitality of a large number of organizations, enhanced their service capacity, and produced inestimable power and potential. In sum, for cities in which many community organizations already exist, this approach will better serve the purpose of community development.

Second, support organizations

among the Department of Civil Affairs, community office, neighborhood committee, support organizations, and the community organization in the beginning of the project. The lack of trust stalled the progress of the project, and certain programs were even cancelled because of the tight schedule.

Second, a greater level of freedom should be given to support organizations and community organizations. Because the government was used to leading and guiding the project implementation and provided support organizations with very limited freedom, some support organizations were not able to facilitate programs as they were designed. Meanwhile, some support organizations gave limited freedom to targeted community organizations, undervalued the importance of self-reflection and self-growth of community organizations, and even developed certain programs on the behalf of community organizations, all of which greatly impacted the sustainability of the project.

Finally, the project cycle was relatively short. The successful incubation of a community organization needs a long period of time, but recent projects have usually lasted one year only. Therefore, Dongcheng District is facing challenges with how to continuously assist community organizations after the one-year cycle, how to establish a buffer mechanism, and how to gradually lessen the support for community organizations.

IV. Conclusion and Implications

It has been recognized worldwide that community organization

is the key link of community development. The incubation of community organizations, however, is a complicated and difficult process. Currently, the primary approach is to build social organization incubation parks, entrust support organizations to incubate certain social organizations that are selected into the park, and then have these incubated social organizations work in communities. This approach has indeed had some impacts on incubating social organizations. A large number of community organizations, however, still suffer from weak management, poor capacity, and limited function. Stimulating the vitality and enhancing the service capacity of these community organizations is still a challenge for the government.

With bold creativity, the Community Organization Incubation Project of Dongcheng District explored a new way of incubating community organizations. Instead of building an incubation park, the government of Dongcheng District delegated support organizations with different specialties to go into grassroots communities and help community organizations diagnosis their problems. Through training, consultation, and experience from practice, the support organizations helped targeted community organizations improve their organizational capacity and found solutions to problems. As a result, a diversified incubation approach for community organizations was formed and has already had some preliminary effects. Some implications can be drawn from these early findings.

First, the incubation work should be conducted based on characteristics of the city and specific

demands of local social development. On the one hand, incubation targets can be innovative social organizations with great potential; on the other hand, incubation projects should focus on cultivating exemplary grassroots community organizations to lead the development of general community organizations.

Second, building social organization incubation parks, a common approach that has been used by many cities, often results in high costs or superficial projects. The experience from Dongcheng District demonstrates that incubating social organizations does not require ornate buildings. Particularly for cities that are not economically developed, social organizations can also be incubated even without incubation parks. Furthermore, in practice, social organizations can make greater achievements with support rather than staying in incubation parks.

Third, the process of incubation is a learning and growing process, not only for the organizations being incubated but also for involved support organizations and the local government. SSCA summarized five key points of community work while incubating community organizations; namely, community leaders, a core team, an action plan, a system of regular meetings, and public participation. This model is a valuable reference for community development and the incubation of community organizations.

Finally, the process of incubating community organizations is also the process of establishing a system of modern community organization. Currently, most Chinese community organizations are operating in a

single approach with a low level of autonomy. Incubated by support organizations, the community organizations in Dongcheng District initially founded their own self-governance committees or boards of directors to improve their governance structure. Meanwhile, with the assistance of support organizations, the community organizations in Dongcheng District established an internal management system and a coordination system; facilitated the development of modern community organizations; stimulated the vitality of community; strengthened communities' capacity of self-governance, self-service, and self-monitoring; and finally, contributed to building a harmonious community.

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