

Tangbu, Taiwan

Creating Change from the Bottom Up

Introduction

Tangbu - an ancient riverside settlement located in Monga, a bustling town southwest of Taipei - measures at 0.3423 square kilometer in size. The settlement began as a sugarcane refinery community. Cone-like bamboo sheds - the top covered with hays - were built alongside the sugarcane farms. The harvested sugarcanes were shipped to these sheds for further processing. These sheds began to be known as "sugar huts," or "Tangbu." The community weathered several seismic historic events in the 20th century, and at the dawn of the new millennium, a social movement rose against the establishment of a large nursing home in the already-downtrodden community, thus setting an array of enhancement projects in motion. Aware of the voice that they have forged, the residents worked as one united front, demanding the Taiwan Sugar Corporation to designate pockets of property as park and other public facilities, mobilizing community members to address these issues in public interest, taking responsibilities for the outcome, and soliciting support from the public sector to support the campaigns.

1. Enhancement of the Natural and Built Landscape

The exodus of manufacturing industries and youths, and the lack of interest from the government agencies seemed to dim all hope for better living in Tangbu. A humongous nursing home construction project, however, triggered an unexpected social movement to turn the corner: public properties were acquisitioned for environmental enhancement programs, streets, sidewalks and the facades of public housing units were given a facelift.

2. Arts, Culture and Heritage

Blessed with a culturally-rich backdrop and a celebrated tradition in sugar production, residents in Tangbu began collecting old photos and documenting narrated accounts from the elders, and amassing old maps to create a collage of community history. The locals also designate November as the annual Sugarcane Festival for community fairs, organize fun-filled sugar production workshops and other heritage initiatives.

3. Environmental Best Practices

Community adoption of small neighborhood parks was supported by residents to ensure effective management. Unused public spaces were renovated to provide friendly, community activity space to raise environmental protection awareness. Volunteers are mobilized to tend to the sugarcane farms organically and sustainably.

4. Community Participation and Empowerment

Using a “bottom-up” approach, changes are afoot: grassroots community members made proposals to build parks that revolve around Tangbu’s sugar production legacy. The government also empowered residents to conduct workshops to hash out a vision shared by the locals. The Department of Culture of the Taipei City Government even commissioned celebrated performance troupe to station in Tangbu, setting a series of community enhancement projects in motion.

5. Healthy Lifestyle

The open space within the Tangbu Cultural Park is now abuzz with citizens of all ages as they walk, line-dance, and play Tai-chi. Children visit the playground and squeal happily in laughter. Residents also form neighborhood watch squads to conduct night patrols. Given the high number of elderly in the community, volunteers also help promote anti-fraud campaigns to protect senior citizens. Choirs and self-growth workshops are set up to encourage community participation.

6. Strategic Planning

The city government, local businesses and the community form a synergy of project campaigners to open up the cultural park strategically, so as to maximize resource use efficiency. The city and the community also joined forces to win budgets for restoring the century-old sugar refinery plants. Ming Hwa Yuan Arts & Cultural Group also set up an outpost there to encourage cultural activities and the training of traditional opera talents.