



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

Self-organized Group Initiatives in Shenzhen's Urban Parks

Impact on park environment and planning implications

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Important Note

The information in this paper should only be for academic purposes. Aliases for people, organizations and locations are used to protect respondents' privacy.

重要提示

基于隐私原因，此文中的涉及的部分人物与地点已使用化名。文中信息仅供作学术研究。

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Abstract

Parks are a recurring key theme in land use planning in Shenzhen and green space has become an important component constituting the city's landscape. In order to make better-informed planning decisions, the importance of public participation has been acknowledged both in the West and in China. In Shenzhen' parks, various forms of citizens' self-organized initiatives have long existed and have influenced decisions made about parks. In this case study, I explore how these group initiatives act as bottom-up participation measures that have impacted the spatial and non-spatial attributes of urban parks. I use ethnography to investigate these initiatives in order to understand whether, how and for what purposes they have shaped Shenzhen's parks, and reflect on how planning and design of parks might be adapted to this reality. The findings show that these initiatives are deeply engrained in communities, representing particularly retired citizens' desires for socialization, entertainment, fitness and self-expression. It is also strongly rooted in historical and demographic background of this population. Spatial influences of each initiative are generally temporary and limited. They increase with stronger personal relations between core group members and influential personnel in relevant authorities. Non-spatial influences vary significantly among initiatives and generally involve safety, noise, programming or use, management approach and attractiveness of the park. These results reflect the need for flexible park designs that fulfill multiple groups and individuals' needs. While the way these initiatives influence decisions falls short on democratic values of legitimacy and justice, it demonstrates their potentials to serve social stability and effective park management. The phenomenon also reveals the interest and considerable capacity of retiree societal groups to manage of park space for collective good. Authorities are recommended to experiment in incorporating these initiatives into a transparent and participatory planning process to capture the energy of this societal force in order to serve normative policy goals.

Keywords:

Public participation, self-organization, park design, park management, spatial planning, Shenzhen

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Bordering financial hub Hong Kong while benefiting from reforms of China's economic policies, Shenzhen has gone through a drastic economic boom in the past 30 years. Accompanying soaring GDP is urbanization at an unprecedented speed steered by land use planning (Huang & Xie, 2012; Liu & Zhang, 2005; Tan, 2004). Particularly since the 1990s, urban green spaces, mostly in the form of urban parks, have been an unaltered key ingredient of these land use masterplans. For Shenzhen's authorities, "green" is seen as equivalent to the quality of urban environment and – as showcased by Singapore – considered necessary in attracting foreign investment (Ng & Tang, 2004). Following of years of effort in greening the city, Shenzhen's government now claims 50% of "green coverage rate"¹(Bo, 2009). This emphasis on urban green spaces echoes the abundant research on benefits of urban green spaces in related literature (Matsuoka & Kaplan, 2008).

Accompanying this are citizens' self-organized group initiatives in various forms that have increasingly permeated urban parks of Shenzhen. Their activities, represented by no other than collective folk dance or "Dama Square Dance" of hundreds of mid-to-old aged female citizens, is indeed an often mentioned, and sometimes controversial phenomenon² - as these initiatives seemingly constitute an urban culture celebrated by some citizens and repulsed by others. Nevertheless there is a lack of empirical research on this phenomenon in planning literature, despite its apparent impact on urban environment resultant of its sheer popularity. It is worthwhile to know how these initiatives have influenced the park space physically and symbolically in order to better plan, design and manage urban parks. The potential opportunity to utilize the

¹ Green coverage rate (绿化覆盖率) accounts for both green space and projected canopy area of shrubs and trees.

² "Dama" (大妈) can be loosely translated to "old lady". In China it often refers to women aged over 50, often in charge domestic duties and connotes sometimes a derogatory meaning. However studies have shown this dance is also practiced by women in their 30s and 40s. The controversy revolves around the disturbances of loud music played by these groups. More recently "Dama Square Dance" in 2014 and 2015 has appeared in the news in Chinese media for dancing at famous landmarks worldwide such as Louvre in Paris and Federation Square in Melbourne, Australia.

resourcefulness of these citizen groups and generate synergic outcomes serving the needs of the community is undoubtedly an attractive one.

Yet to generate such outcomes likely requires a distribution power to these groups during the decision-making process. The prescriptive planning approach of modernistic origin – one befits the strong state rule in China – is still the dominate rationale of spatial planning (Chen, 2000). While the modernism versus postmodernism debate is a dated one and spatial planning academia in the West has generally endorsed more sociocratic and communicative approaches, Chinese government officials and planners also start to recognize that the pluralizing society demands governance involving the growing civil society. However, despite the popularity of the concept, how public participation should take place is often under debate in urban planning circle.

Some scholars consider self-organized initiatives, originated from the civil society itself and reflecting the desire of communities, possess the potential to break the deadlock of government-led public participation in process robust outcome. (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; van Meerkerk, Boonstra, & Edelenbos, 2013). This thesis is a tenacious first step to investigate this suggested potential by probing at the dynamics of self-organizing phenomena in a Chinese context, their influences on urban parks and their relations with public authorities. It endeavors to cast some light on how policies can be adjusted in relation to the phenomenon for the betterment of urban parks.

The study is organized in a way following the process of my research. Chapter 2 reviews literatures on the recognition of public participation, conceptual origins of self-organization in spatial planning and the context of spatial planning in Shenzhen. Chapter 3 elucidates the problems, research questions and summarizes relations of various elements of research in a conceptual scheme. Based on literatures discussed in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 elaborates some primary steps of methodological choices while Chapter 5 fine-tunes methodology and contextualizes the concepts based on issues raised in data collection. Chapter 6 discusses these issues and the nuances of data collecting process. Chapter 7 and 8 report self-organized initiatives in two dissimilar park contexts. Subsequently Chapter 9 compares and summarizes these results. Finally Chapter 10 offers reflections that enfold relevant literatures and present policy recommendations.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2. 1. Benefits of urban green space and recognition of public participation

The benefits of green spaces to society are widely accepted and discussed within academic circles. These discussions can be broadly divided into two categories: one is the ecological and environmental value of the parks, while another is its value for social and psychological wellbeing of individuals and communities. The latter is often studied in the realm of planning and design, human geography, social psychology and sociology. Matsuoka and Kaplan (2008) summarize literature from *Landscape and Urban Planning* journal from 1991 to 2006 on human needs from urban greens and concluded two over-arching themes: needs related to nature and needs for human-interaction. “Nature needs” include contact with nature, aesthetic experience and recreation, while social needs entitle social interactions and privacy, citizen participation and sense of community. They found these two needs are often mutually supportive in ways that pleasant nature environment encourages human interactions. Other studies found the presence of nature elements and park environment contribute the vitality of community, positive social ties among people and better mental health of the community (Coley, Kuo, & Sullivan, 1997; Kazmierczak, 2013; Shen, 2014; Sullivan, Kuo, & DePooter, 2004).

Notably, Matsuoka and Kaplan (2008) also consider that participation in design and planning of these green spaces is increasingly recognized as an important way to fulfill the needs of people and consolidate community. Studies from different fields have drawn participation into the spotlight. Anthropologists Low, Taplin, and Scheld (2009) consider cultural diversity both essential and normative in building urban parks. In their ethnographic research they argue that the loss of diversity threatens social sustainability and consider citizen participation valuable in increasing cultural diversity in urban parks. Thompson (2002) departs from a landscape design perspective and considers the ever more pluralistic society means multiple and dissimilar demands on our parks, which poses a challenge on planning and design to make parks suited to these various cultural expressions. To cope with potential temporal and spatial conflicts in using urban parks, she asserts that “a truly participatory process” is needed (p.60).

2. 2. Shenzhen: Urban parks in spatial planning and public participation

The planning of Shenzhen's urban environment is done in a highly centralized manner and very effective in terms of regulating urban form (Ng & Tang, 2004). Green spaces have gained considerable amount of emphasis in the recent stages of land use planning (Huang & Xie, 2012). Some of Shenzhen's city planners have given the utmost importance to green spaces, feeling that the preservation and connection of green spaces should steer future urban land use (Tan, 2004).

These researchers' perspectives remain largely technocratic nonetheless, focusing on ecological benefits of parks and less emphasis on the human-interaction side. This imbalance also reflected in the types of research done on parks in China. Plenty of Chinese literature focuses on the ecological and engineering aspect of parks while research on social interaction aspect is comparatively sparse³. In addition, studies related to social aspects are often quantitative and macroscopic. A few recent GIS based studies measured accessibility of urban green spaces in Guangzhou and Shenzhen and found Shenzhen's green spaces distribution very uneven (Jim & Chen, 2006; X. Zhou, Zhang, He, & Zeng, 2013). Ning and Hu (2006) examined the link between scale and function of urban parks and people's recreational and lifestyle routines. This type of research has acquired data in a highly aggregated fashion without addressing geographic or demographic variances. They reflect the common prescriptive planning approach in China, which emphasize on acquiring aggregated data for land use model in order to develop local planning codes and regulations based on national standard.

Meanwhile, notions of community parks and public participation are also getting more attentions in the recent land use plan of Shenzhen (Tan, 2004). Park researchers J. Wang and Xie (2009) recognize the importance of self-management from the community and local knowledge, although they have not detailed an approach to achieve this. To plan, design and manage these niche spaces tied closely to the community, it is widely considered input of expertise from the public is required (Jim &

³ A search on using keywords "green spaces" (绿地) yields over 20000 results in the discipline of applied science and less than 300 results in social science combined in biggest academic database CNKI (retrieved 15th Feb 2015).

Chen, 2009; Leikkila, Faehnle, & Galanakis, 2013; Low et al., 2009; Nordh & Ostby, 2013).

Admittedly, some Chinese planners and authorities both have acknowledged the need for participation in urban spatial planning (Cai, 2010; Chen, 2000; Qi & Zhou, 2005; Sun & Zhu, 2010; L. Zhou & Lin, 2000). The concept of public participation has been enthusiastically discussed in Chinese urban planning field and experimented since 1990s, yet many researchers agree it is still at an early stage and lacking substance in planning practice in China (Cai, 2010; Chen, 2000; Qin & Miao, 2015; Xu & Tao, 2012). Criticisms often point to the passive mode of participation tools deployed, such as public hearings, expert discussions and 30-day-notification and display of draft plans, are ineffective and sometimes tokenistic. (Cai, 2010; Sun & Zhu, 2010) Researchers consider the lack of legal and normalized procedures of participation, unclear and untimely responses and lack of transparency in decision-making and organized participation groups in the communities are challenges in participation in planning today (Cai, 2010; Qi & Zhou, 2005; Sun & Zhu, 2010; L. Zhou & Lin, 2000). Cai (2010) argues participation is far from being embedded universally in urban planning practice – since without compulsory policies that enforce and regulate participation process, participations only happen in fragments when public officials in charge permit them.

Shenzhen in comparison to other Chinese cities has industrialized in both endorsing public participation's legal status and experimenting possible forms of participation (L. Zhou & Lin, 2000). A recent significant "fragment" of participation is the making of Shenzhen's Comprehensive Urban Plan 2010-2020, during which authorities hired a private consultancy to design a large scale participation process (Zou, Fan, Zhang, & Wang, 2011). Yet admittedly participation in Shenzhen is still unavoidably mediated by strong government control and decision-making power remain in the authorities (Qin & Miao, 2015; L. Zhou & Lin, 2000).

Meanwhile, the public has shown great interest in participating in planning issues. Using survey methods, Shan (2012) found in nearby city Guangzhou that a large majority of people is willing to participate in the designing and planning of urban parks. This enthusiasm was also shown in the making of Comprehensive Plan and another similar participation project in Nanjing (Xu & Tao, 2012). Researchers also point out one

crucial factor in participation is to introduce more independent societal groups, community organizations and third-party organizations which can effectively mobilize the communities to synthesize public opinions (Qin & Miao, 2015; Xu & Tao, 2012).

2. 3. Self-organization: Moving beyond public participation

In urban planning field in the West, public participation has been widely regarded as a normative way to supplement to electoral democracy (Arnstein, 1969; Campbell & Marshall, 2000; Fung, 2006). The importance of public participation is particularly recognized by the planning theorists of “communicative turn”, who emphasize deliberation and interaction for concerted actions and planners’ faded roles of as neutral experts (Healey, 1998; Innes, 1995; Innes & Booher, 2004).

However, despite theoretical and practical development since the 1960s, a normative public participation mode is still challenged and what entitles a “truly participatory process” is still contested and elusive. Some scholars consider that the notion of participation still fails in yielding convincing results (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). Innes and Booher (2004) argue this is largely due to the passive nature of most participation procedures, which often antagonizes authority and citizens and leads to unsatisfactory performances.

Some scholars consider the challenges faced during participation of planning in China and the West both has much to do with pluralization or fragmentation of culture and societal forces, in which dissimilar spatial interests need to be reconciled. Yet the reality is the authority controls too much of this participation process (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Cai, 2010). Chen (2000) argues that government being both the sole rule maker and biggest player of the planning process leads to infringement of interests of various kinds and escalating urban conflicts in contemporary Chinese society. Similarly, Boonstra and Boelens (2011) consider that the paralysis of participation in the West is because the government defines and controls the subject, location, process and eligible bodies of participation.

As a response to this participatory impasse, planning researchers find aspirations in post-structuralist view of geography, which consider places and spaces are not just platforms of social practice but an integral part of it (Balducci, Boelens, Hillier, Nyseth,

& Wilkinson, 2011; Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; van Meerkerk et al., 2013). Boonstra and Boelens (2011) argue, within this highly sophisticated relational network of people and people, people and space, space and space, the dichotomy between authority and civil society does not conceptualize today's society well. The changes and collective actions within society should be understood as *emergence*⁴ due to actions and feedbacks both within and among myriads of networks of human actors and non-human actors and is beyond the control of any single source. This notion of self-organization derives from complexity theory that considers "a continuous movement results in patterns and unforeseen initiatives emerging spontaneously, without being controlled by one central manager or director." – thus the process of creating order out of chaos (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p. 109). This relationalism view of society is also close related to Actor Network Theory (ANT) – an ontology that rejects pre-conceived concepts such as nations and class and considers "the social" is only made of networks. Analysis following ANT highlights the agency of non-human actors and treats them equally as human-actors (Callon & Blackwell, 2007; Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009; Latour, 1996; Law, 2009).

Relating these insights to spatial planning, Boonstra and Boelens (2011) urge planners to develop a more progressive view on participation and to look beyond predefined systems and problem definitions. Current participation, in which problem definitions, locations and processes are set up by the government, cannot fully address the complexity and uncertainty of urban issues. Instead of dictating the unplanned, they consider that planners should join and facilitate the self-organizing force of the community that reflects in the community's specific interests and needs. Instead of trying to define the actors, networks and problems beforehand to reduce complexity, planners should embrace the complexity and involve as many actors as needed following this self-organizing tendency in order to create reflexive, resilient and robust results. They define self-organization as "initiatives that originate in civil society from autonomous community-based networks of citizens, who are part of the urban system but independent of government procedures" (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011, p113).

⁴ They consider *Emergence* non-linear, evolving and self-organized phenomenon that involves both human and non-human agencies.

Interestingly, Cai (2010) observed one relevant pattern in China that, rather than initiated by authorities, significant participation processes were often forced to start by societal groups, experts, media and sometimes ordinary citizens. They manage to raise public awareness of certain issues to a level that cannot be ignored by the authority, thus forcibly start participatory processes. This makes pronounced self-organizing group initiatives found in urban parks particularly interesting for participatory potentials.

Self-organization is also relatively new notion in spatial planning. Only a handful of empirical studies are found. van Meerkerk et al. (2013) built on Boonstra and Boelens (2011) and explored the nature of self-organization behaviors and their facilitating condition. They analyzed the formation of two initiatives, a community trust and a business improvement district (BID) plan, and found that self-organization behaviors helped the formation and upkeep of vital networks, in which actors are positively interdependent and ideas and problem definitions are constantly exchanged. These vital networks in term contribute to robust planning projects.

Independent from Boonstra and Boelens (2011)'s thought and exhibiting certain commonalities in the concept, Morales (2010) examined self-organization as a way of governance of a marketplace in Chicago in an ethnographic study. Community self-initiation was the origin of market and social networks played an important role distributing resources (e.g. space for stalls) and keeping order. Reflecting on the hidden mechanisms or unspoken rules that keep the marketplace running, he considers self-organization may be incorporated into planning policy as an economical and effective governance mode in certain urban context. Yet planners need to understand what this urban context entitles.

Lange, Kalandides, Stober, and Mieg (2008) studied Berlin's creative sector self-organization process and identified a complex network of resource utilization when governmental resources are absent. They find that "culturepreneurs" use flexible social networks to gather resources and self-regulates to satisfy people's evolving cultural needs.

Although these conceptualizations of self-organization phenomena stem from different theories and vary in details, two common aspects are emphasized in these researches.

One is the origin of self-organization initiatives, which is concerned with the motives, objectives and facilitating condition of the initiatives. Another is the formation and development of networks or associations to obtain resources, create bonds of collectiveness and sustain the activity. These form the basis of the analytical framework in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3. Problem Definitions and Research Questions

3. 1. Problems and relevance

As discussed, Shenzhen has achieved its “garden city” status as a result of many years of planning efforts. The benefits of green spaces are well recognized and planning of green space continues to receive much attention in strategic plans of the planning authority. Nevertheless, whether the current park environment actually befits the needs of the community is at least questionable because of top-down planning culture and absence of communities in the making of these parks. Scholar such as Miao (2011) argues that the greening in Chinese city is often a rhetorical “window dressing” effort which focuses on the aesthetic value and taste of authority. With heavy public investment and nested public interest attached to urban parks, it is normative for parks to suit the needs Shenzhen’s citizen’s demand. And naturally planners have a role to play in deliver them.

The current planning system in Shenzhen might not be capable in addressing these issues due to the lack of meaningful participation procedures. While the need for public participation is widely recognized, a normative approach of participation it is still contested in theory and the practice. Some scholars inspired by post-structuralism thinking argue that self-organization, during which goals, problems definitions and means of planning are all set independently from government’s agenda, resonate with inherent needs of communities and thus can produce better planning decisions.

While whether self-organization does generate better decisions is arguable, the reality is that the institutional condition of China is not and probably will not be easily altered in a short run. That means power will remain centralized and the authority will likely mediate the final outcome in all planning decisions. Concurrent to this is the growing interest of the public in participating in relevant policy-making and decision-making of spatial planning. In addition, Chinese government seemingly start to recognize the need to

incorporate societal and market players into a form of “innovative governance”⁵ for the stability and “harmony” of the local community (Xi, 2014).

Combined with the relatively more open-minded citizens and more progressive authorities of Shenzhen, these contextual conditions makes the existing self-organized initiatives found in Shenzhen’s urban park particularly noteworthy. How do they influence planning decisions? What kind of spatial outcome do they produce and how is it done? How do we evaluate these outcomes? Should, and if so how do planners address this phenomenon? And crucially, how do we compare it with the norms and goals of public participation? The satisfying answers to all of these questions might not be achievable in the scope of this thesis. However a clear and audacious step towards that answer is to understand the nature of these self-organized initiatives – to understand how and in what aspects they alter the park environment.

Therefore the main question of this study is **how do citizen self-organized group initiatives operate and influence attributes of urban parks in Shenzhen?**

Apart from its relevance in relation to public participation, these insights from this issue might extend beyond the geographic boundary of parks and inspire the governance of other common resources. The relations between space and activities are also particularly interesting and under-addressed in other research in sociology. It is an attempt to examine the agency of these non-human actors and their relation with the people. This study also aims to generate nuanced qualitative data that is currently lacking in the spatial planning literature for planning, design and management of parks.

3. 2. Sub-questions and conceptual scheme

This sub-questions cluster in three dimensions derived from relevant literatures. Investigation on the first dimension forms the basis of the research by shedding light on the in-depth knowledge of self-organization phenomena. The second dimension links spatial and non-spatial attributes of the park to the activities of self-organization initiatives. The third dimension situates self-organization phenomena in current institutional and planning context to understand its implications. Chapter 7 to 9 focus

⁵ “创新社会治理” in Chinese. Phrased by president Xi Jinping.

on first 7 sub-questions while sub-question 8 is discussed in the last chapter. The conceptual relations between these dimensions of sub-questions of my research are illustrated in Figure 1. In Chapter 4 I will further discuss it in details

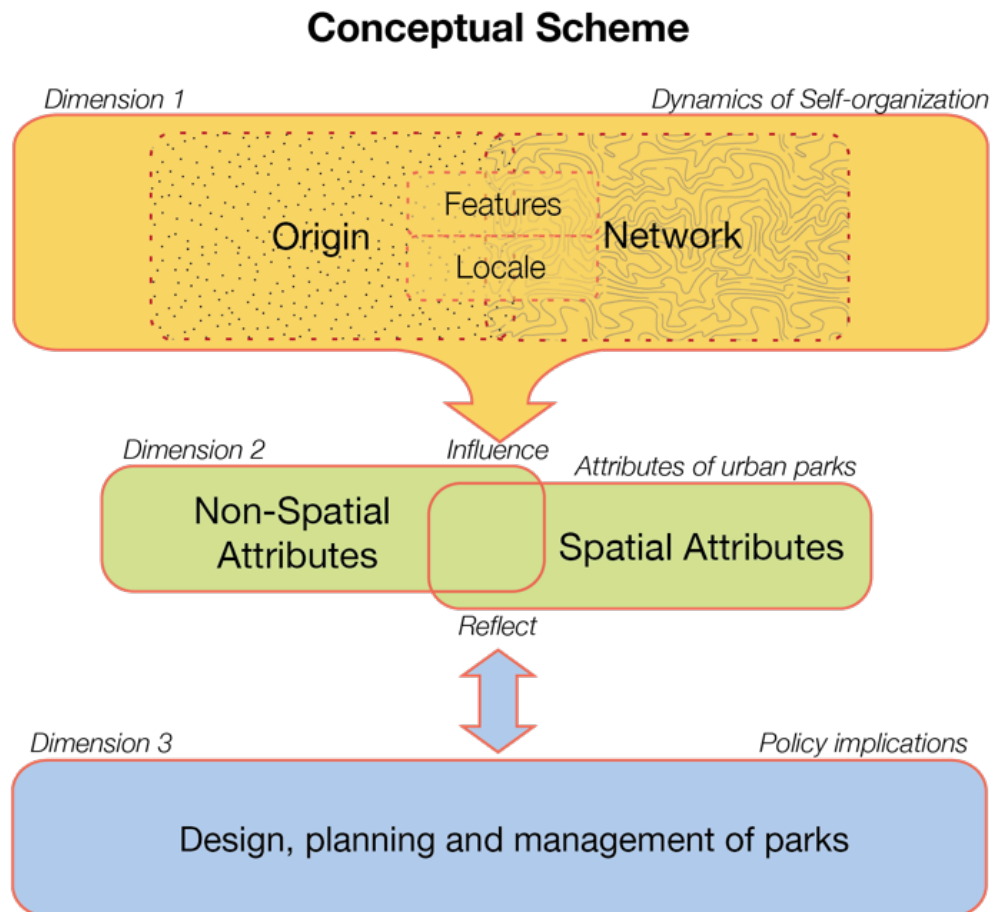


Figure 1 Conceptual diagram

Dimension 1: dynamics of self-organized initiatives

1. How do the initiatives start? (Origin)
2. What is the role of network or networking in the self-organizing process? (Network)
3. What are some notable characteristics of these initiatives? (Features)
4. Why do these initiatives choose parks as their venues? (Locale)

Dimension 2: self-organization and its impacts on attributes of urban parks

5. What spatial impact these initiatives have on the parks and how do they achieve it?
6. What non-spatial impact these initiatives have on the parks and how do they achieve it?

Dimension 3: policy implications

7. What is the planning context for public participation and how do the relevant authorities perceive these initiatives?
8. What are some preliminary implications of these initiatives on design, planning and management of urban parks?

Chapter 4. Analytical Framework and Research Design

Table 1 summarizes data collection methods and some primary operationalization, following the three clusters of sub-questions and conceptual diagram in Chapter 3.

Table 1 Summary of preliminary methodology

Date Collection Methods	Categories of Investigations		
Dimension 1: Dynamics of Self-organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured expert Interviews; • Focus group interviews; • Observation; • Participant observation; • On-site impromptu interviews 	Origin	Motives of initiators/participants	
		Objectives of the initiatives	
		Contextual conditions	
	Network	Composition of actors	
		Behavior	Expansion
			Strengthening
			Connection to key non-human actors (resources)
	Outcome	Resultant relations in general	
		Relations with authorities	
		Features	Contents of initiatives
Demographics: Age, gender etc.			
Other notable features			
Choice of location		Spatial factors	
		Non – spatial factors	
Dimension 2: Impacts on attributes of parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured expert Interviews; • Focus group interviews; • Observations; • Participant observations; • On-site impromptu interviews • Physical Artifacts; • Behavior Mapping 	Spatial Influences:		Micro-climate, Furniture, Materials, Scales, Features, Amenities, Cleanness, and other relevant found during investigation
	Non-Spatial Influences:		Safety, Management, Programing and other relevant found during investigation
Dimension 3: Policy Implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured expert Interviews; • Archival documents • Policy documents 	Policy framework		State level
			Local level

4. 1. Analytical framework and operationalization

Dimension 1: dynamics of self-organization

Dynamics of self-organization as the first dimension of investigation serves to generate in-depth knowledge of these initiatives. As derived from the theories, the origins of self-organization and their networks are two overarching and interrelated components in this phenomenon. Related to both origin and network, the notable features of initiatives and their choices of location are two other categories investigated separately for their relevance to the topic.

To study the origin empirically Boonstra and Boelens (2011) pointed out three areas of investigation, which are motives, objectives and facilitating conditions. These comprise the three sub-categories of my investigation of the initiatives. It is further noted during the research that initiators and participants can have different motives and objectives, thus this distinction is also given attention in analysis.

To investigate how networks function in self-organized initiatives three main categories are developed from the theories: composition, behavior and outcome. Here the networks denote not merely the social network in a general sense but one that has taken actor-networks into consideration. Though strictly speaking the analysis does not follow the ontology of “general symmetry” of ANT, which treat human and non-human actors using same analytical framework (Latour, 1996). It is still influenced by ANT in two ways: one is the recognition of agency of non-human actors, particular places; a second is the attention paid on the active sense of actor-network – that network is always in a state of morphing, redefining and thus needs to be reinforced. Yet the focus leans towards the human actors and the relations within them.

Boonstra and Boelens (2011) consider one of the primary tasks to understand the composition of the actor-networks is to identify networks’ actors and basis of collectiveness. This is summarized under the category “composition of actors” and only refers only human actors.

The active sense of networks is considered as various behaviors initiated by actors to keep the initiative alive and running. In van Meerkerk et al. (2013)’s study, they categorize two types of self-organizing behaviors related to complexity theory:

dissipative behaviors that increase of complexity and interconnectedness; autopoietic behavior that maintain and reproduce the system or network. I term these two types of behavior “expansion” and “strengthening” (also a sense of sustaining) for simplicity. Morales (2010) and Lange et al. (2008) also found similar behaviors in their studies and recognized the importance of utilizing various resources through connections generated in the networks to achieve certain objectives. Inspired by ANT, these key resources are listed as a separate analytical category to identify the essential non-human actors in the network other than the actor “place” or “location” that is already identified. These non-human actors can be anything that is relevant: from a discourse to financial capital.

van Meerkerk et al. (2013) also discuss the formation of vital networks and actor relations as outcomes of self-organizing behaviors. In the particular context of China, relations with authorities are of crucial importance for the strong state rule. Thus the last category “outcome” focuses on the relations and associations generated through the network and lists relations with authority as a separate category.

Two other categories related to both origin and network of self-organization are listed separately for their particular relevance to the research questions. One category is basic features including scale, gender, age and structure of these initiatives – to give descriptive accounts to and form a basic understanding of the initiatives. Location is of particular importance since the focus is on the attributes of parks. This non-human actor links closely to origin of the initiatives and influences the formation of networks. Thus “choice of location” is listed as a separate category.

Dimension 2: self-organization and its impacts on attributes of urban parks:

The second dimension analyzes the influences of self-organization on park attributes. Lo, Yiu, and Lo (2003) summarize 23 attributes that were commonly found in the literature on urban open spaces and evaluated the importance of 12 attributes in one park in Hong Kong. These 23 attributes can be logically divided into spatial and non-spatial ones, with the former being more directly observable and thus comprising my observation protocol. 7 sub-categories for spatial qualities and 3 for non-spatial qualities are derived from these attributes, which are summarized in Table 1. It is also

noted that other relevant categories might rise during data collection so this part is also left open for induction.

Dimension 3: policy implications

Since authorities in China possess the final decision-making power, in order to generate meaningful policy recommendations it is important to understand the current policy context for participation and perceptions of authorities towards these self-organized initiatives. This is further categorized into local and state level in correspondence to governmental structure of China.

Finally, policy implications are based on reflections on all three dimensions of sub-questions. A bottom-up inductive approach is used to incorporate relevant theories based on the findings to elucidate and support the arguments.

4. 2. Research design

This research employs an approach similar to embedded multiple case design using qualitative methods (Yin, 2013). Case study approach is chosen to do an in-depth study of the self-organization phenomenon within its natural context. In addition, since much of these self-organization phenomena are largely unaccounted in literature, I consider case study research appropriated as it allows me to use various data collecting methods to explore the problem. By studying the observable elements of the phenomenon I aim to gain some insights of the internal dynamics of self-organization. The reason for choosing multiple cases is to cover a diverse range of the phenomena and helps bolster external validity of the study. I also assert self-organization phenomena need be understood from the perspective of their participants, therefore befitting the qualitative methods I choose.

Case selection criteria

Here case selection denotes two levels of choices, first on which parks to investigate and second on which initiatives. For selections of parks, I adopt a diverse case selection strategy in which a variety of self-organization initiatives are represented within the park. The categories of diversity include forms of initiatives and demographics of participating groups. Another important factor for Park Selection is the diverse styles of physical design. I want to study parks with both traditional Chinese garden style and

more modernistic style to investigate how different spatial elements relate to different initiatives. The details of case selection are also elaborated in next chapter.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection strategy adopted here is inspired by the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Approach (REAP) used by Low et al. (2009) in their study of urban parks, which triangulates data collection by using multiple data collection methods and multiple observers. This allows them to gain insights of the park in a relatively short time of a few weeks. Gehl and Svarre (2013) also elaborate a comprehensive method to study people's behaviors in public space and in which many approaches can be transferred to this study on urban parks. One crucial factor in this case is to link behaviors to localities and physical elements of the park. They stress the importance of mapping. Golicnik and Thompson (2010) follow a similar approach of Gehl and Svarre (2013) and uses GIS to summarize and aggregate the spatial data. Behavior mapping is likely to be useful in representing spatial elements of the data. I also want to conduct participant observation when possible to personally experience the initiatives closely.

In terms of data analysis, field notes, observation results and transcribed interviews are to be coded both deductively based the theories and inductively based on interpretations of data collected. This also implies an iterative process of collecting data in several stages in order to create more categories or codes.

Perceivable difficulties

One difficulty that are perceivable is the amount the data handling that might be required by using different types data collecting method. Two measures to cope with this is to prepare a systematic case study database and detailed observation and interview protocols (Yin, 2013), which potentially reduces the amount of disorganization of data. I also kept my focus on one case before starting another. Another difficulty might be in getting interviews on the key personnel in the government. The alternative strategy to that is to gather information from a reliable third source. If the decision makers are not directly available I interview people involved in the decision making process (such as planners from government and lower-tier officials).

Chapter 5. Refinement of Methodology and Concepts

Unavoidably, there were issues encountered on site that was unaccounted in the original proposal, which demands some fine-tuning during the empirical research process. This chapter elaborates on some further methodological choices and refinement in research design based on site conditions and feedback during data collection. I also clarify a few concepts in the Shenzhen's specific context, and discuss some adjustment in study approach due to practical reasons.

5. 1. Selection of study areas

As discussed in the last chapter I choose a diverse case selection strategy in order to cover a variety of both initiatives and park design styles. However it was imprudent to choose the cases prior to arrival in Shenzhen since detailed information on local conditions is lacking. Upon arrival, I started to search for my study sites based on background information research already gathered and sought more local knowledge.

I relied mainly on three sources for the case selection and synthesized them to make the decision. First source was the local newspaper, Internet and social media. These provided me some related news on self-organized initiatives and some anecdotal background information on urban parks. The authority's website such as Shenzhen Park Management Bureau and Greening Commission⁶ provided some basic information on parks such as size, location, built year and number of visitors. And a third source is my personal contacts living in Shenzhen and knowledgeable people introduced by our master program during the orientation week. Reflecting on this information I narrowed down my search for study sites to four parks. These four parks vary considerably in scale, administration, media exposure, style in design, years in use and types of initiatives known for and therefore comprise a good diversity.

I visited all four parks twice on weekdays and once during weekend for some preliminary observations. Eventually I decide on Park S in Futian District and Park L in Guishan District for the diversity I needed and feasibility reasons. Built 10 years apart,

⁶ The Chinese names are “深圳公园管理处” and “深圳绿化委员会” respectively.

these two parks vary significant in physical layouts and host a wide range of dissimilar initiatives. It also turned out that they have very different administrative structure, which was not expected in the early stage of investigation. The details these two parks are reported in the Chapter 7.

5.2. Focusing on initiatives as main units of analysis

During the preliminary observations, I have found an immense amount of initiatives in both parks. Although the original intent is to study an entire park, this turned out to be unfeasible and unfitting to the qualitative research I intended due to both the quantity of initiatives and the size of the areas. Instead of being all-encompassing and investigating every initiative, I considered it more productive to choose some representative ones that were more relevant to my research topic. Again I adopted a diverse case selection strategy in choosing initiatives based on some factors I could already observe such as number and gender of participants, starting time and duration, frequency of activities and park facilities used.

Accordingly, instead of seeing the parks conceptually as cases and assuming each type of initiatives were treated similarly in the same park, each initiative's relationships with the park environment and management was investigated individually. Therefore the primary units of analysis are the initiatives. The two parks are in fact two dissimilar "platforms" where initiatives occur and recede into background contexts.

This conceptual change meant some minor adjustment in the methods. Behavior mapping as a data collection measure was less emphasized since the original intention of studying initiatives' spatial distributive pattern in the park at a macro scale, was of less relevance since all initiatives observed only interact with their immediate environment. And this data was also collected in observations and interviews.

I also note that some initiatives, such as Taichi groups and "Dama Dance" groups were very similar in both parks and did add much to the above-mentioned diversity.

Therefore in the second study site Park L, I focused on the initiatives that are not found in Park S.

5. 3. Refined concepts in the context

Self-organized Initiatives

As discussed in the theoretical section, the conceptualizations of self-organization of are of different academic origins. It demands clarification how the concept fit in the specific context of Shenzhen. Therefore at the early stage of my investigation, I was compelled to distinguish self-organized initiatives from other initiatives in the park for a sharper focus on the phenomenon. Based on the key components that constitutes self-organization underlain by the literatures, I considered the concept of self-organized initiatives in Shenzhen's urban parks includes two crucial factor:

- The initiatives are created and by citizens. Government or other authorities might assist in managing the initiatives but they are not directly involved in creating it;
- They organize recurring group initiatives utilizing a specific space or facility of the park.

Under this definition, participants in self-organized initiatives distinguish themselves from other individual users in ways that they comprise identifiable groups. They also distinguish themselves from casual group activities of family or close friends by having a fixed routine and locale.

Spatial and non-spatial attributes

Another concept refined is the attributes of urban parks. The non-spatial attributes of park cannot be assumed of neutral quality. As discussed above each initiative has its own dynamics and formulates its own opinions. The views on non-spatial attributes of urban parks are in fact often at odds. For instance the view on noise vary between different initiatives, between participants and non-participants, and between users and managers.

The more valid way to measure non-spatial attributes of the Park space might involve a different research design that can target both participants and non-participants.

However the focus of this study is on the initiative groups. The non-spatial attributes studied here mostly reflect these groups' views and my interpretation of it. On the other hand, the spatial attributes of parks are more of neutral value since they involves tangible physical alternation of the spaces. Therefore the spatial attributes were given

more attention during the observation whereas data on non-spatial attributes were mainly gathered through interviews.

Chapter 6. Data Collection

This part of the thesis discusses the data collection process and described the nuances encountered during this process. As discussed in the methodological part, I combined a few types of qualitative data collection methods for triangulation. The following methods were used as my main measures of gathering data: observation and participant observation, on-site impromptu interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews, semi-structured elite Interviews and documents. This chapter discusses each of these data collection process in details.

6. 1. Observations and participant observation

Observation was the first data collecting method I used and served a pivotal role. Based on different purposes these observations can be roughly divided into to three phases. The first round of observation provided me an overall impression of the range of initiatives I could find in the parks and its associated physical environment. This contributed to the selection of both parks and initiatives to study. The second phase were observations within certain area of the park where many different initiatives use. This phase focused on the physical elements of park and their relation with initiative groups. Finally the most important type was intensive observations on specific initiatives following a detailed protocol developed from theoretical framework and previous two rounds of observation. When suitable, I also conducted participant observations on some of the initiatives.

Not including the observation conducted for case selection purpose. I have conducted 10 times of observations in Park S and 4 times of observation in Park L. The duration of each observation ranged from 2 to 6 hours. Observation protocols for each initiative was developed and refined during the process. Appendix 1 is the final concise form of this protocol. I varied observations time under different conditions of weather, temperature, time of the day and day in the week.

As shown in the protocol I searched for characterizing elements that constitute each initiative and how initiatives interact with the park environment. Some of the key information gained by observations provided me basis for later interviews with both

initiative organizers and park administrators. For instance, in Park S there were some marks on the paving of removed seats and tables. Raising the question with park manager, I was informed some of this was a measure to restrict loud activities near a school. The information gathered in observation is later compared with those gathered in interview for corroboration.

People generally reacted undisturbed by my presence and my observations went smoothly. I carried an A3 sized board to the park and wrote down notes as I walked and sat. Few people were interested in what I was writing. Occasionally other parker users peeked at my notepad but they never prompted to start a conversation. Meanwhile, the initiative participants in general are very comfortable of me observing them in relatively close distances. On another note, I often joined other spectators and tried not to stand out. In general I remained quite anonymous during the first and second phase of observation, which enabled me to observe initiatives in their natural settings.

Almost all initiatives happen very regularly. As later confirmed in the interviews of the participants and park managers, many initiatives take place routinely except for days of extreme weather conditions or traditional Chinese holidays. This factor reduces the need of repetitive observations on a single initiative, as they are limited variation in their contents.

I participated in three initiatives that allowed me to join unnoticed and remain a level of anonymity. This gave me chances to observe the participants at a closer distance and gain some on-site interviews. However most other initiatives have regular participants of an elder age and I consider it difficult to join without attracting undesired attention, which might in term generate some biased views.

6.2. On-site impromptu interviews

During second and third phase of observations and after I developed some basic understandings of the initiatives, I started to conduct impromptu on-site interviews with initiators, participants, and occasionally some non-participants who have long time park users. I joined the spectators to watch them or participated in the activities, and often talked to them during breaks or after the activities finished.

Most of these interviews were conducted in a casual manner in a conversational form and therefore not recorded. After each interview I had quickly recalled the discussion and noted down the key points. Since most of these interviews are short so it was not difficult to recall and write down notes. I chose this approach to engage people in conversation in a natural way and not to raise an alert – since most of my interviewees were very unfamiliar with sociological research and some were very cautious about it. In a few occasions at the early stage of my research some people had immediately changed their tones and became alerted when I mentioned I was a researcher from a university overseas. A typical incident is when I was talking to the organizer of the Big Stage Dance (See Section 8.5) Mr. Z. He was very open to discuss the activities but refused my interview agitatedly when I mentioned that I wanted to do a research about it. Although reactions towards being interviewed varied and some were more willing to discuss the matter in length and showed some interest in my research, most people were not trusting.

Adjusting to this situation I decided to approach people first as a spectator who was interested in what they were doing and gradually engaged them in a casual conversation. Generally people were willing to discuss their initiatives and themselves, but it was often difficult to direct them to the topic such as how they have used personal connections. I interviewed 36 people from 14 initiatives, of which 12 were initial organizers. I also interviewed 5 long time park users. The length of these interviews ranges from 3 minutes to 20 minutes. The average interview is estimated at 5-8 minutes.

6. 3. In-depth interviews and focus group

After a more thorough understanding of initiatives and the park context I carried out a few In-depth interviews and one focus group targeting expert on the topic. I have conducted one focus group with a large-scale Jiamusi Dance Group with the organizer and two of its core participants, an in-depth interview of one with the founders of a community charitable fund, two park administrators and one former planner who worked in the researched area.

In the process of soliciting interviews, I adjusted the strategy of approaching people giving consideration to people's distrust found previously and relied on my own

personal connection and contacts provided by the Shenzhen Center for Design. This proved to be a more workable approach. I found that my interviewees were considerably trusting and very relaxed. However obtaining interviews from authorities proved to be very difficult. My attempt to interview relevant people in park administration in Futian District government failed, as they would require official “red head⁷” documents from another governmental unit, which I was not able to obtain in time. Another potential interviewee who used to hold a key role in a large state enterprise quoted the incidents of popular television host Bi Fujian’s who criticized on Mao Zedong in an anonymous video during a private event, which was a headlining news during that period, and declined my request to record a conversation, despite I have reiterated that it was only for research purposes and would not be disclosed openly. Concerned about the attempts to record the interviews might again raise some distrust, I did not request to record the interviews with park administrators and made notes instead. In retrospect both interviews went well and the atmospheres of the interview were amiable.

6. 4. Documents

During the time of observation and interview I have also gathered some documents from three sources. In three occasions my interviewees provided me with some of their own publications. These generally supplemented and enriched the data from interviews and observations. Some of the documents also showcased some useful contextual and historical information both about parks and initiatives. Another source was the archived news articles about relevant subjects. The data collected during interviews and observations provide good leads on keywords for further archival search. Digital archives of two local newspapers Shenzhen Special Zone Daily and Shekou News⁸ provide some useful information on popular initiatives such as Matchmaking Corner and Park L Singing Group. They also provide information on previous policies changes. The final source was state and local governments publications, which include state policy guidelines and planning regulations.

⁷ “Red Headed Files” or “红头文件” usually refer to official documents from a governmental office or state owned company, with signatures from people in charge.

Chapter 7. Case Study: The Contexts

7. 1. Study Area 1: Park S

Overview

Park S is located in the heart of Shekou Industrial District (SPD) in Futian District and covers an area of approximately 12.5 hectare today. The design follows a traditional Cantonese-style Chinese garden, with occasional modern influences. It features conventional garden elements such as lakes, pavilions, lookouts, bridges, lily ponds and meandering paths. It also contains some more newly added more western park features such as open lawn and boardwalk. Some commercial activities using park facilities such as fishing, bumper cars and boating have long existed in the park, although it is now being shut down due the recent changes in management. It is a very popular park for the local residents today throughout the week. Notably, there are both a great amount and variety of self-organized initiatives in the park every day.

History

Construction of Park S started in 1987 in accordance to the early stage land use planning of CM Shekou Industrial District (SPD). The park was built during the time when workers come from all over China to Shekou and Shenzhen and is surrounded by subsidized residential compounds.

Park S's land was purchased by SPD from the villagers in the area. Utilizing of the two existing ponds the villagers built, the park designers of the time transformed the ponds into artificial lakes and designed a park in tradition Chinese style. The original lychee groves were also largely kept untouched. Both these two features remain much largely unchanged today. Lychee groves today are maintained, harvested and sold by private contractors, which generate some income for park's maintenance.

Administration and changes

The evolution of administration of Park S is linked closely to the development of Shekou Industrial District (SPD) – a key sub-company of state-owned company CM Group. From the 1979 to 1992, SPD was a quasi-government that possessed many governmental rights such as planning and authorizing land use plan, building and

managing public facilities such as school and hospitals, and construction of large civil infrastructure. SPD set up a department⁹ specifically for municipal administrative tasks such as managing Park S. The regular maintenance, security and cleaning were also operated by the sub-companies of SPD and supervised by this office. This was exceptional since parks in Shenzhen were commonly under the management of ‘Chengguan’ or Municipal Bureau of City Administration¹⁰, which is a government authority. This led to the later ambiguity of management when municipal administration tasks were transferred to Futian District Government.

In 1979 – 1992, a “Golden Era” of SPD regarded by Shekou residents, the extent of reform was pervasive. A crucial theme in this reform was democratic decision-making. High officials – the management commission of SPD – were unprecedentedly selected through election rather than direct appointment from communist party. Similarly, undemocratic decision made on Park S attracted Shekou residents’ strong oppositions as showcased by a protest against the building of residential compounds for CM Group’s retirees in 1988. Although after 1992 the political reform of SPD largely came to a halt, some consider the democratic legacy well alive and local residents today still voice out their opinions through means such as hanging big banners on buildings.

After 1992, governmental function of SPD is being gradually transferred to Futian District Government (BDG). Municipal administrative functions such as sanitation and landscape maintenance were among the last to be transferred and still is ongoing today. There are inherent complications in this handover. All of the leasing contracts were signed between private parties and the SPD would have to be renewed with BDG. However the NDS has its own land use plan that might differ from current land use. Renewing or terminating the contracts thus become a complicated matter since many private tenants, including SPD itself, have already invested in many areas for long term use – compensation for this investment became problematic as shown in the Community Foundation case to be discussed in Section 8.4.1. Partly due to this complication, the this transfer prolonged from 2003 till today, which rendered the

⁹ 公共事业办 in Chinese.

administration of Park S with a shade of ambiguity. Some interviewees have the impression for some time that “no one is managing the park”, quoting the 2009 murder incident and occasional robberies happened at the park,

Self-organized initiatives in Park S

Parks in general have a long tradition hosting these various types of morning exercises. Park S is no exception. Even before the park opened for free to the public in the mid-1990s, there had been a few exercise Groups of a few dozen participants. The aforementioned semi-anarchical managerial period seemingly allowed more initiatives to move in since 2009. Nowadays from 6am till 10 pm except lunch and dinner breaks, self-organized initiatives can be seen in a few hot spots dispersed throughout the park. Mornings are still traditionally the most popular time periods while afternoon and evening activities have increased significantly in recent years. A majority of initiatives concentrate in the northeastern part of the park in a swathe of brick paved area covered by lychees trees. The prominent types in the Lychee Grove area are social dance groups, “square dance” groups, Taichi groups and other fitness groups of various sizes. Other notable areas are the Big Stage near the southwestern gate where ballroom dance events are held twice a day (Section 8.2.2); some parts around the lake for “square dance” groups; the paved area near west entrance where a Latin dance group convenes; and most recently, the teahouse where Community Welfare Foundation uses it for community events (Section 8.1.1).

7. 2. Study Area 2: Park L

Overview

The construction of Park L started in 1992 and was first opened in 1997 a few days before Hong Kong's handover to Chinese government. The park is located near CBD area and is one of the largest parks in Shenzhen. It was built around one of the remaining hills of Shenzhen original landscape. The park is enormously popular both with Shenzhen citizens and domestic tourists. A 6-meter high bronze statue of an important political leader is erected on the top of the hill, facing a panoramic view towards CBD area.

Differing from the earlier era of park design in Shenzhen, Park L was built with a much more eclectic influences, in which traditional Chinese garden landscape features are blended with tropical and western elements such as palm tree groves and undulating lawns. This fusion of design styles is represented by the different landscaping themes given to various parts of the park. Although local residents visit the park throughout the week, Park L is bustling with significantly more people over the weekends as visitors from other districts of Shenzhen and outside Shenzhen come to visit. Initiatives in small groups can be found throughout many areas close to the park entrances while a few initiatives with hundreds of participants gather routinely in a few spots. Park L is both an important place for locals' everyday leisure and a popular weekend destination.

Political significance

Besides being a popular recreational park, a peculiar condition of Park L is its symbolic importance to Shenzhen and Communist Party of China. This is exemplified by the statue, one of only two with central government endorsement, which was officially inaugurated by former president Jiang Zeming. Many high state officials have come to pay tribute to the statue. Current president Xi Jinping visited in 2012, while current premier Li Keqiang visited it in January 2015 on a busy weekend. The square surrounding the statue is also a popular locale where communist party candidates take

their oaths to join the party. Former secretary of Shenzhen unreservedly called the hill in the park “sacred”.¹¹

Administration and empowered administrators

This unusual political undertone means that one major task of park’s administrators is to protect the “sacredness” of the park. The managers of the park are vigilant on preventing occurrences of initiatives that might frame the meaning of the park differently. The park is monitored for undesirable activities. All group initiative organizers are required to be registered with the police and to be held accountable if any of their participants misbehave.

This also empowers the managers of park. Possessing first-hand knowledge about the park, they have the power to frame decisions for purpose of achieving “harmony”. Albeit the important decisions on the Park L are usually still made in a top-down fashion by officials in higher authorities such as city and district MBCA and other higher-up officials. Park administrators sometimes are able to uphold their own opinions. This is further demonstrated in the case of Park L Singing Group in Section 8.2.3. Park administration also has taken a proactive role in discovering and meeting the demands from the park users, which are demonstrated by cases of Matchmaking Corner in Section 8.4.1. Park administration often receives demands from park users, particularly from group initiatives to make adjustment of certain space of facilities. However whether these requested are realized depends heavily on chief administrators’ own judgment.

Self-organized initiatives in Park L

Though with relatively strict control initiatives that are considered appropriate for the park still flourished. Throughout the park there are many initiatives similar to ones found in Park S, yet initiatives with clear religious or commercial undertones are absent. As the park is visited by thousands of visitors daily, some of the initiatives grew rapidly and into large-scale of a few hundred people. Sometimes groups have different ideas on how certain areas of the park can be used. Groups using the hilltop square for their “square dance” is very much frowned upon by the administration. The conflict is

¹¹ In this ex-mayor’s preface for a book the park published.

exemplified in the cases of Park L Singing Group (Section 8.2.3). In case of Matchmaking Corner (Section 8.4.1), interests of the group and the administration aligned well and the initiative received support from the administration.

Chapter 8. Case Study: Self-organized Initiatives

This chapter reports on the first two dimensions of the research sub-questions, namely on the dynamic of self-organized initiatives and their influences on park environment. According to their distinctive feature, these initiatives are divided into four types for comparison and analysis. Type 1 includes one case of community events organized by a community charitable fund in Shekou. It distinguishes itself from all other initiatives by having a very structured group organization and less reliance about park environment for its formation. Type 2 includes three large-scale initiatives heavily relied on the park environment for their formation and subsequent expansion. Yet these three initiatives had contrastingly different results in terms of influencing decisions made on the park. Type 3 includes various smaller scale initiatives in Park S. They have much less influences on the park environment yet display similar networking patterns as other large scale initiatives while exhibiting interesting inter-group dynamics. Type 4 is an initiative first organized by a citizen and then managed by the authorities. A summary and comparison of these types are further provided in Chapter 9.

8. 1. Type 1: Formal organization

The group in this initiative was already formed before holding its activities in the park therefore they did not rely on park as a platform for its formation. However the park environment played an important part in its subsequent development. The group also has the most formal organization structures. The location it attempts to utilize is also the most contested.

8. 1. 1. Community Welfare Foundation (Park S)

Features and overview

Since early 2015, the newly formed Community Welfare Foundation (Community Foundation or the Foundation in the following texts) has been using a previously commercial teahouse located in the heart of Park S for their community events such as community salons, local societal groups gatherings and photo exhibitions. This teahouse is an exceptional place within Park S where more diverse interests collide.

This is a revealing case that demonstrates how a self-organized initiative endeavors to use park space differently.

Table 2: Summary of community events of Community Welfare Foundation

Dynamics of self-organized initiatives	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nostalgia about the democratic reforms and bloom of societal groups in 1980s Interest in serving the local community
Objectives of the initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community self-governance, Making better use of common resources, managing public goods Promoting Shekou's livability Promoting the culture and solidarity of local societal groups
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many retired and retiring influential local liberal intellectuals Democratic reform in 1980s WeChat emerges as a convenient communication platform Park handover from SPD to Futian District Government State policies call for innovation in local governance Setting up of the Shekou Free Trade Zone
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community foundation, various societal groups, teahouse leaseholder, CM Charitable Foundation, CM Real Estate, Shekou Street Government
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holding salon meetings of various societal groups, Establishing connections with key public and private personnel
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular salon discussions of various societal groups Creating WeChat Group for societal groups Public relation and self-promotional work through local news and internet media
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through another NGO obtained information about availability of the venue Consent from both the leaseholder and authority to use the venue through personal social network Money provided by CM companies and raise among participants
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good relation with CM companies A collection of various societal groups The Foundation as a network of passionate volunteers
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial support from some local officials yet later become ambivalent Opposition from MBCA
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing teahouse buildings and amenities ideal for activities intended
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park is a public space and the teahouse should be public too Collective memories about the teahouse Current leaseholder of the teahouse being an acquaintance
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited influence on the park bonded to teahouse area
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made park more attractive by diversifying its programs Potential to alter the management approach of the park

Origins: motives

Community Foundation was resultant of the thought exchanges in two WeChat¹² groups made of current or previous Shekou liberal minded residents. They held strong nostalgic feelings towards the democratic atmosphere of 1980s, during which various societal groups prevailed. The core members of the groups, a handful of mutually acquainted intellectuals retired or approaching retirement, had been organizing meetings and salon discussions since 2013. These longtime residents of Shekou were passionate about serving the local community and preserving local culture. The idea of creating a charitable foundation similar to the ones they had in 1980s thus emerged.

Origins: objectives

After a period of indecision in regards to the kind of events the Foundation should organize, "...we later learnt and agreed," one councilor told me, "the existing need of our community is what we should focused on." and "this group should not become a closed small circle for the rich and the cultured." On the official motto of the brochure, they stated their core goal is "to make Shekou the mostly livable place for people". The Foundation intended to act as a non-governmental organization supporting "participatory governance of the community, environmental protection, heritage preservation, and promote local culture activities and education"¹³. However as the chief councilor concluded, "that is our grand visions for the future," and "the current tasks should be bringing other experienced NGOs and local societal group together in Shekou to support each other, since we are still young and inexperienced".

Origins: contextual conditions

The group considered that a favorable sign is that the current state government has started to accept various societal groups in governance of local affairs – therefore there could be opportunities for them to play a role in self-governance of Shekou Free Trade

¹² WeChat or Wen Xin (微信) is a very popular mobile social network app in China combining social network, instant messaging and other functions.

¹³ This is translated from the fundraising brochure of the Foundation.

Zone¹⁴. They considered their help can add great substances to the “innovative governance” the authority desired for.

A few other conditions that facilitated the growth of the initiative can be identified. There was much latent energy from the growing number of retiring and retired local intellectuals. Their interests in public service led their attentions to common welfare of local community. Meanwhile, mobile application WeChat emerges as a convenient communication platform that preserves certain level of privacy, allowing for quick and secure interchange of ideas among these people. In addition, the handover of municipal administration from Shekou Industrial District to Futian District Government and the setting-up of free trade zone meant a window of opportunity for potential changes in governance of local affairs.

Network composition: actors and formation of the group

In 2014 the core members of the WeChat groups started to seek support to build the foundation. One former SPD employee from the group knew there was a considerable sum in CM Charitable Foundation (CMCF) that was reserved for local community building. After negotiation CMCF agreed to support them with a third of one million yuan needed to get the Foundation officially registered. CMCF also garnered support from CM Property Development, another sub-company of CM Group, to provide



Figure 2 Opening of a photo exhibition at teahouse organized by the Foundation

another third of the fund. The last third was to be raised by the organizers themselves. Subsequent to sorting the financial part, the group also gained support from Shekou Street Government¹⁵ and the authority that manages societal groups¹⁶ in order to become registered. Some officials in these governmental agencies are personally acquainted with the organizers.

In October these 13 initial organizers mobilized 89 people, who were mostly their friends and family, to the first “Founders’ Meeting” to make the initial donation and vote for members of executive council. Eventually 7 local residents aged from late 20s to early 70s, most of who are initial organizers, made up the council. 5 of the councilors held or still hold some influential positions in the SPD and have extensive personal networks.

Choice of location: the teahouse

Three Buddhist monks who were adept in temple and garden design retrofitted the teahouse on existed park structures in 1998. The venue was leased out to private investors and the lease was annually renewed with SPD. Current leaseholder and some long time park users have great appreciations towards its rustic yet elegant style. The teahouse area now covers an area of approximately 2000 m² and is consisted of 8 rooms of various sizes linked by roofed corridors and boardwalks, various landscape features such as stone sculptures and two small ponds surrounded by lush planting.

The teahouse gradually gained popularity among the locals and became celebrated for its good location and tea culture. In 2013, Futian district started to retrieve municipal administration rights from SPD. The management of the teahouse was to be handed to a private landscape service firm. Mr. C, the current leaseholder of teahouse, claimed this firm planned to use the teahouse as their new office, and for that he refused to move out and demanded compensation for his loss of investment. MBCA of Futian forced the closure of teahouse after Mr. C’s contract with SPD expired in early 2014. The situation became a stalemate with teahouse left unused since then.

¹⁵ “Street Government” is the lowest government body in an urban area in China.

¹⁶ Namely Civil Affair Bureau or 民政局.

During the time a NGO that the Foundation introduced to Shekou discovered the disused teahouse. It was soon regarded by the Foundation as an ideal spot its activities. Unsurprisingly, one of the organizers knew the leaseholder Mr. C well from the past experience working for SPD and gained his support to use it.

The Foundation recognized the teahouse's good amenities and rich collective memory attached. They consider that the teahouse is part of the park thus should be public and used for benefit the community. And that is exactly their mission. However there was a considerable amount of work in getting authorities' permission to use it.

Network behaviors: expansion

To get approvals to use the teahouse, the Foundation extended their network into various public and private agencies. Such is made possible through the personal connections of a few organizers who used to hold important positions in SPD.

The Foundation first approached the teahouse's leaseholder Mr. C, who fully supported the idea and let they use it for free. The Foundation further negotiated with various authorities in getting the approval to hold their first event there – a photo exhibition about Park S's history. Importantly, the group also gained additional support from Shekou Street Government, which was already involved in Community Foundation's formation. On the opening day of Community Foundation's first public event, they finally got approval from the chief of district MBCA to use the teahouse for a few weeks through help of Shekou Street Government and restored water and electricity connection.

Network behaviors: strengthening

During the process of network expansion, the group also used local media to promote their name and causes in order to generate pressure on various authorities. After the photo exhibition, the Foundation continued to hold events in the teahouse. Another important activities are regular salon gatherings of some 40 local societal groups at the teahouse, discussing ideas and vision about Shekou community. Through organizing these salon meetings and setting up of an online WeChat group for of these associations, the Foundation attempted to strengthen the bond of these community groups. It also deployed various ways of self-promotion using online and traditional

media, thus creating a recognizable identity and enhancing its influence. One councilor said that these early stage of work aimed at building up the name and creditability of the Foundation for its future development.

Network behaviors: connections to key resources

Three types of resources are found to be essential. Firstly, information about the both availability of fund in CMCF and vacancy in the teahouse was crucial in guiding Foundation's networking. Secondly, financial support from CM sub-organizations and the initial 89 founders was indispensable for the group's subsequent events. Lastly, permissions from both the authority and teahouse leaseholder were pivotal. The organizers' own personal social networks were often the channels to locate or access these resources.

Network outcome: general

After having the exhibitions in the teahouse the Foundation has built stronger ties with both CM companies and various societal groups. The Foundation brought together Shekou residents of various backgrounds into contact of each other and some of them had become devoted volunteers of the group. Through the salon events a recognizable collection of various societies also came into being. These groups interact often in online WeChat groups to exchange information and other resources.

Network outcome: authority

In terms of relation with authorities, there is some ambiguity. Initially the Foundation received much support from local government and other relevant parties. But after the process of getting endorsement to use the teahouse, some old ties were tested and possibly weakened. Clearly MBCA was not supportive of the initiatives, arguing regular community events there would hamper the "holistic management of the park."¹⁷ To avoid confrontation, the initially support of officials in Shekou Street Government also receded due to the undesired pressure from MBCA.

¹⁷ This is an excerpt by from the official response of MBCA on governmental website in response to Mr. C's appeal. Link to this webpage is not provided from privacy concern.

Influences on the park

The events of Community Foundation have made minimal impact on the spatial attributes of the Park So far. Nevertheless, it had some interesting non-spatial impact. Their events have attracted users who rarely visit the parks. The Foundation has plans to introduce different educational programs and workshops run by specialized NGOs to the venue and attract more diverse users.

If the Foundation successfully gains the rights to use the place, it would mean an important change in managing parks. The transfer of management of a public space to a non-governmental third party is unconventional and thus of a high level of significance. As of now, what will be the result and legacy of this struggle among private investors, authorities and third-party organization is still unknown.

8. 2. Type 2: Large scale informal initiatives

This section discusses the large-scale informal initiatives now with more than 200 regular participants. These three initiatives all set their primary focus on entertainment. They all started as small initiatives and relied on park to build its constituency. However they have yielded contrastingly different results in their participatory attempts.

8. 2. 1. Jiamusi Dance (Park S)

Features and overview

Invented as a fitness exercise in Jiamusi city, Jiamusi Dance gained popularity in many other cities. In 2009 Ms. Z who was originally from Jiamusi started practicing it by herself in Shekou Sports Centre near Park S. The initiative grew quickly, but was later expelled from Sports Centre for unspecified reasons in 2010. Ms. Z then decided to relocate to Park S.

This initiative is held daily from 7:30PM to 9 PM in Park S. It attracts about 300 to 400 participants every night. The participants are between 30 to 80 years old and a majority is female. To join the group a very affordable fee monthly fee of ¥5 is charged. However many non-members also join the practice by imitating others' move.

Table 3: Summary of Jiamusi Aerobic Dance

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal hobby • Desire for entertainment • Health and fitness • Seeking companions and friendship
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving fitness of the public as intended in state policy goals • Providing affordable entertainment • Creating a platform for people to socialize
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of retirees and elderly immigrants from other cities • The routine is easy to learn
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents, many of them recent immigrants from rural areas or retired SPD workers
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People join spontaneously • Information spread through word of mouth or upon visit to park
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing performance and trips • Wearing identifiable uniforms
Connection to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relied on volunteer work from and knowledge from participants for upkeep of the initiative • Money collected among group members
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A core group of participants with strong bonds • Little connections outside the group
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sought but received minimal attention from authorities • Desired approval from the authority • Respect park administration's authority
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relatively open and flat area, though not ideal
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and free
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added temporary yet substantial amount of lighting for the park at night
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted safety of the park at night by providing casual surveillance • An moderate amount of noise

Origin: motives

The primary motivation for Ms. Z to start this initiative is a desire for interaction in a group and entertainment. Organizer Ms. Z came to live in Shekou from the city Jiamusi in late 1980s after retirement to stay with her daughter. She felt for a long time there is not many entertainment options in Shenzhen and little social interactions with others for people like her. “We all spoke different dialect and did not dare to speak much to strangers. I’d always to go home to my friends every summer.” She said, “Shenzhen is

beautiful but it could not keep me here.” In 2009, she decided to introduce to the Jiamusi dance Shekou, an exercise she was already very fond of as a hobby in her hometown Jiamusi. The initiative changed her lifestyle and she had not been back to hometown once since 2009. “Through this platform I have made many friends.” She added.

Two core participants who are now friends with Ms. Z and involved in daily organizing tasks seconded her point about the desire for friendship and interactions. However they emphasized more on the health benefits as motives, referring their improved shoulder and other joints.

Origin: objectives

Ms. Z also claimed improving people’s fitness and providing entertainment as main objectives of her initiative. She stated this exercise “gives better health to the whole families” and “adds a bit fun to our common people’s everyday life.” She also emphasized a few times her initiative is closely linked with the well-known policy of “Fitness for Every Citizen”¹⁸.

Origin: contextual condition

Some conditions favored the growth the exercise. People who came to work in SPD earlier were reaching retirement. Combined with parents who came to Shekou to care for their grandchildren, there were increasing amount of elderlies in Shekou. These retirees comprise the bulk of the group’s members. The Jiamusi dance itself is also very simple and accessible in comparison to other forms of “Square Dance”. Respondents think the movements are easier to remember thus felt more confident to do it.

Network: composition of actors

The group is open for everyone to join and is consisted of both male and female elderlies from various backgrounds, which including some retired government officials and higher-income residents. However Ms. Z disclosed predominant ones are from rural regions. And lower income groups are the majority.

¹⁸ “全民健身” used to be a widely implemented policy and a slogan prior to 2008 Olympics in Bering.

Network behavior: expansion

The group relied on people's spontaneity for growth. "It was only me at the beginning, dancing to a small speaker in the morning." Ms. Z recounted. "And people gradually started to follow me... We all met as strangers." Ms. Z said people enjoyed the group atmosphere and very few left once they joined. Many participants would also bring their friends or relatives to join. The group had quadrupled its size since relocation to Park S.

Network behavior: strengthening

Indeed the uniforms of bright red or sky blue tops and white long pants make the participants easily recognizable. Demanded by Ms. Z, the core members of the group all wear the uniform during daily practices to be visually impressive. Ms. Z also organized trips and performances in other venues, in which uniforms are compulsory for the effects she wanted. The participants also quoted doing performance together as a bonding experience for the group.

Network behavior: connecting key resources

Money and voluntary work are two key resources. The initiatives relied much on volunteer work and know-hows among the participants themselves, especially the efforts of Ms. Z herself, for the upkeep. The cost of equipment and uniforms are collected from group members. Ms. Z usually pays upfront for any expense and later distribute the cost among others.

Choice of location and modification to the space

Ms. Z did not consider the park a good option when they were forced to leave Shekou Sports Centre, "I knew there is no large flat area in the park and it's dark at night but we really had no other choice but to accept it. This is a public space after all." The space they use now is roughly a 20-meter-by-30-meter oval shaped area with three lychee trees dotted in the middle. The surface is paved in brick and undulates slightly due to the tree roots growth. The only one lamp in the area is rather dim. The group found the solution of lighting by using electric bicycle battery combined with a voltage convertor, invented by Ms. Z. They hang cables with fluorescence light bulbs through branches of the trees. "We were the first group to do that. They [other initiatives at night] all started to get their own lighting after us." Said Ms. Z proudly.

Network outcome: a strong core group while weak connection with others

The initiative has created a close bonded core group of around 30 people consisted of mainly mid-to-old aged women with similar background. Many of them worked for SPD and are now retired. While this group is in charge of housekeeping tasks of the initiative, other members such as new immigrants from rural parts are less connected to this core group. The group also hardly interacts with other initiatives. Occasional exchanges between them and other groups are disputes about space and volume of music.

Despite its size, the group has a very weak tie to the authorities. In a few instances, the group contacted park authorities and requested more lamps to be installed but to no avail. Ms. Z is both baffled and disappointed. She considers her group has made great impact promoting people's fitness, which goes in accordance with state policies, but still no authority has taken any interest in supporting them. However Ms. Z still holds high hope since the National Sport Bureau recently endorsed Jiamusi Dance officially as a non-competitive sport. She respects park administration's authority in making decision about the park and thinks that her group will receive government's attention in the future.

Influences on the park

Besides the temporary cables and lights added, there were no other physical influences to the venue from the group.

However the addition of light had made the area a lot brighter for all users. According to the participants, this had not only served them but also attracted a great amount of users who would otherwise not be here due to safety concerns. From the archived news there were two reported murder and an abduction case happened in the park during the period of management transition. The group considered their presence at night greatly stemmed the criminal activities.

Although there is loud music from the group, park users think the densely leafed lychee trees filter the sound from the activities well. Ms. Z said she had always been very careful with the volume and never received any complaints.

8. 2. 2. Big Stage Dance (Park S)

Features and overview

Another large scaled self-organized initiative in Park S is the daily ballroom or social dance events at the Big Stage at the southwest corner. Every day from 7:00 to 9:30 both in the morning and evening, approximately 300 people attend these events. The majority of attendants are in forties to sixties while occasionally there a few younger dancers. There are slightly more female participants than males. The decision to build Big Stage is heavily influenced by this group initiative. In comparison to other initiative of similar scale, this one is the most successful in their participation of decision-making.

Table 4: Summary of Big Stage Dance

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal hobby • Desire for entertainment • Seeking companions and friendship
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing healthy entertainment and pastime for the community over religious cult and gambling
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retired population who enjoyed dance culture in the 1980s and 1990s
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents including many retired or working governmental officials Futian District Government, Shekou Street Government, Elderlies' College
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People join out of personal interest in dancing • Gathering support from key personnel in authority
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering people to sign a petition
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Futian District 's "culture infrastructure budget" and later free access to the venue using members' personal connections • Volunteer work from organizer Mr. Z • Membership fees collected from participants
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A loosely structured dance group with mutually acquainted members
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive ties with local government agencies
Choice of location (prior to building stage)	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the construction of Stage: an open and flat area
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and free
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An addition of a large open air amphitheater with tensile roof and rings of stepped seating • Obstructed the southeast entrance to the park
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulated the occurrence of many smaller dance groups in the park • A considerable amount of noise from music

Origin: motives

Mr. Z, who is one of the earliest participants and initiators, now manages the event. He is a retired officer from the army. Dancing was his hobby when serving the military. To rekindle this passion, Mr. Z and some other hobbyists started the predecessor of current dance initiative in late 1990s near the southeastern entrance of Park S. There is a strong sense of getting the people together when discussing his motivation. By 2005 the initial activity had grown into a daily event of over 200 attendees. The participants had long desired a shelter to the site for rainy weather and idea of building a “community stage” thus emerged.

Origin: objectives

In regard to the goals of these dance events, Mr. Z is reserved and spoke with an official tone: “It is a cultural activity, so the common citizens can distance themselves from religious cult such as Falun Gong and gambling. It gives them a place for elderly people to have fun.”

Origin: contextual conditions

During 1980s to early 1990s, ballroom dancing used to be one very popular entertainment option for young people in many Chinese cities with lots of designated venues. Many Big Stage dancers developed the hobby during that era. Another facilitating context is Futian District Government’s budget for “cultural activities infrastructure” which was used to construct the stage.

Network: composition of actors

The group is mainly consisted of retired local residents and many of them are retired governmental officials. Organizer Mr. Z was very reluctant and cautious in giving me information and referred to me higher-up retired officials to interview first. His reaction appeared to me as seeking approval from these more influential figures and avoiding accountability in providing information. Other respondents often mention that dancers at the Big Stage are of “higher quality” in comparison to other small-scale dance initiatives in the park. Many of these former high officials have been participating since the early days of the events.

Network: expansion

This interesting composition is seen in process of getting the endorsement to build the stage. A few key group members gained support through their strong personal ties with key governmental officials. In 2005 a local National People's Congress representative¹⁹ who is also a friend with some members of the dance group, drafted a proposal to Futian District government in building a community stage. Park S at that stage was still under administration of SPD. Ms. C, who used to be a high rank official in the Shekou Street Police Office²⁰, played a key role in liaison SPD and BDG. These outreaching efforts expanded the network and established contacts at Shekou Street Government, Futian District Government and Elderlies' College – a governmental agency that focuses cultural activities for elderlies.



Figure 3 Morning dance event at the Big Stage

¹⁹National People's Congress is the legislature body of China. Its members are able writing official policy or regulation proposal to local government.

²⁰ SPD has its own police office named CM Police Office. The park is located near administrative border of CM Street Government and Shekou Street Government.

Network: strengthening

In early 2006, 188 local elderlies signed a petition and submitted to Futian District Government requesting the construction of the stage. This was a crucial gesture but also a formality, since the budget was almost set side by then. However, as the dance group is largely informal, the petition signing process made gave them a common identity.

Network: expansion connections to key resources

Three key resources can be identified. The most important one is the budget and later free access to the stage provided by the authority. This was obtained through efforts of some key group members' personal networks. Other than that, Mr. Z devoted a lot of voluntary work for housekeeping tasks such as compiling the playlists and watching for thieves. His efforts keep initiative in order. Finally additional financial resources come from the monthly membership fee that covers the electricity and other cost.

Network: outcomes

The events formulated a circled of acquainted hobbyists, though not necessarily a closely bonded group compared with initiative such as Jiamusi Dance. However the group maintains a positive relation with authorities, particularly with Elderlies' College that now manages the venue.

Choice of location and the Big Stage

According to Mr. the original events chose the entrance of Park S for it provided them a relatively flat area without obstacles that are suitable for dancing. But they wanted a roof since their activities sometimes were cancelled by rain. They were also consulted in the design of current stage.

The venue is now managed by Elderlies' College and used for many of their teaching programs and some commercial activities. The stage is open to public use through application but usually Elderlies' College charges a fee to other users. Big Stage Dance however continues to use the stage free of charge.

Influences on the park

The stage built is amphitheater-like space with three rows of stepped seating surrounding 30-meter radius paved area. Towards the north of the paved area is a half

a meter high semicircular podium with 3-meter tall concrete wall used for hanging banners or posters. The dance floor, seating steps and podium are all sheltered in a cone-shaped tensile roof. During the events the dance floor is filled to its capacity while the sitting steps are half filled. The roof structure is surrounded by dense vegetation on park-facing side where a few large fig trees can be found. To the south an 8-meter wide footpath leads to a busy street corner.

It is rather obvious the stage is not integrated into the design of park. Once a main entrance to the park, the stage and the wall now partially blocks this entrance, leaving two 1.5-meter narrow pathways connected with the park. During the events one has to walk pass through the dancers to enter the park.

The biggest non-spatial influence is noise. In 2014 there have been three formal public complaints submitted to District Secretary's mailbox ²¹. Unlikely the lychee Grove area inside the park, the stage is located in close proximity to street and high-rise residences. In 2014 during the renovation of the tensile roof, the group continued their events on the street corner and appropriated part of the pedestrian paths. The increased noise raised some strong complaints.

Another influence of the initiative is the dance culture Big Stage promoted, attracting dance instructors and new dancers of younger age to the park.

8. 2. 3. Park L Singing (Park L)

Features and overview

Every Sunday roughly between 7:30 to 11:30AM, a large group of over 400 people made of mostly mid-to-old aged retirees gather regularly in pavilion on the southern side of an artificial lake of Park L, where they sing and play a variety of Chinese songs in an informal orchestra of both Chinese folk and western instrument. Their team is with approximately equally numbers of men and women. Most people appeared to be above 50 years old. At the very back, some members also promote the initiative by

²¹ 区长信箱 or District Governor's Mailbox: a recently set-up measure to receive people's complain and demands in Futian District. District governor would handwrite his comments on this complains and give it to related official departments to solve the specific issues.

selling songbooks to people passing and recruiting ones that are interested. Many visitors stop to watch the group and sometimes join them to sing with them.

Table 5 Summary of Park L Sing Group

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal hobby to play music and sing in a group • Nostalgic feelings toward old songs • Seeking companionship and friendship • Seeking entertainment
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing entertainment • Expressing patriotic feelings
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large retired population nearby • The political undertone of Park L
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants include retired government officials and business owners • Taohua Street Government
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively recruiting park visitors to join the group • Seeking endorsement from various authorities and personnel
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local news exposure • Official recognition from Taohua Street Government • Self-promotional work
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members contribute various resources and voluntary work
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A closely bonded core group with long term participants • Many smaller groups based on friendship
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive ties with local government • Not supported by park administration
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter, shade and some seating in the pavilion
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and free • Large amount of visitors to the park
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal and temporary
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tested park administration's • Reinforced the political theme of the park • A tourist attraction

Origin: motives

This spectacle originated in 2002, when retired school principal by Mr. Zu who came the park with a few of his friends to play music and sing. They decided to sing old tunes, ones that reflected revolutionary ideas or patriotic enthusiasm and accompanied his generation. The initiative was his hobby and biggest entertainment.

Mr. Zu did not intent to build a big group, but his initiative attracted lot visitors to join. The sentiment towards the song resonates with many others. “People join me to sing because they know the songs well.” He said to one newspaper²².

Beside nostalgia, people also came seeking friendship. Two respondents from Hunan and Sichuan provinces who came to Shenzhen in their 60s, wanted to make friends and had found people of similar interests in the group. “We did not know many people when we first came. There are now a bunch of old ladies, 5 or 6 of us, now we always come here together.” One of them said.

Origin: objectives

Entertainment appears to be the biggest objective of the initiative. The group has named themselves the “the happy folks of Taohua” while the respondents all expressed they have fun here. Meanwhile the group wants to express their patriotic feelings. They hang a large banner in front of the pavilion highlighting their objectives, which read “Sing for the prosperity of our country; Sing for the happiness of our people.”

Origin: contextual conditions

The area of Park L is a one of the older residential neighborhood of Shenzhen and is now home to many retirees. Retirees constitute the majority of the group. The park’s central location and popularity mean initiative quickly get exposed to a large audiences, which in this case facilitates the group’s rapid growth. Notably, the goals of the initiative befit the political undertone of Park L, which help it gain much attention from media and some authorities.

Choice of location

Mr. Zu considered the park ideal for his intentions since it is public and free, while playing music in a park setting is after all a common practice. The pavilion provides plenty of shade, shelter and seating for his small band. Among these three, shade was crucial. During recent renovation of the pavilion, the group relocated to the palm tree grove nearby with no shelter or seating. They brought stools and ponchos cope with the lacking of the other two.

²² Name of the newspaper is not disclosed here for privacy concern.

Network: composition

The group is big collective of people from various backgrounds. It consisted of retirees from government and state-owned enterprises, some private business owners and many common citizens. The organizers live closed by while some members commute hours to attend the events.

Taohua Street Government joined the network when making the group a key societal organization to be “nurtured”. They provided logistical support, organized workshops for the training of volunteers and invited the group to perform at government-led community events.

Network: expansion

The group got larger and more influential through recruiting people who came to visit the park. It further extended their network in the attempt to build a stage to better accommodate their initiative. The members gathered much support for this proposal through their personal connections. They even invited the mayor of Shenzhen to come to site who later made favoring remarks to the initiative.



Figure 4 A regular Sunday gathering of the Park L Singing Group

Network: strengthening

The group received favorable coverage from various local medias, which popularized the name of the initiative, often citing the group's patriotism. The original group name "Fang Ge" and "happy folk" was used in several news report and constitute their identity. The group members also promote the initiative by promoting it to visitors to the park.

Being "nurtured" by the Taohua Street Government also meant the official recognition of the group. The participants felt proud with support from the government. The "nurturing" efforts also further consolidate the group in its organization.

Network: connections to key resources

Members of the group voluntarily provide resources from their own ends to support the group. A local business owner sponsored the group with 2000 songbooks. Another anonymous member provided free bottled water for member in hot summer days. These logistic support and voluntary work from members were important in maintaining the initiative.

Network: outcomes

The group is now consisted of a core group of around 50 people with clear task distribution. These members are involved in working with Taohua Street Government for various administrative tasks. Other participants are less involved in running the group and only attend the initiative by themselves or in smaller groups of friends.

The relation with Taohua Street Government is strong. However park administration of Park L is less supportive towards the group. The administration strongly opposed the group's demand to build stage at the current venue.

Influence on the park

The group attempted to alter park to suit their needs but it was realized. Their actual influence on physical attributes of the park is minimal with only temporary additions of seating and banners.

The group's proposal had impact in park administration. They felt pressure generated by the group and their contacts in government in their proposal to build a stage.

However as one administrator disclosed, “park is a public space for every citizen. I cannot let them build an exclusive stage.” But this reasoning was not enough. They withstood their opinions by citing potential safety concerns and unsightliness to the nearby route to the mountaintop often used by high officials.

The theme of initiative, deliberately or not, resonates with some of the political theme the park. Though park administration is ambivalent, the local government likes the group for their “healthy, harmonic and patriotic” initiative and fully supports them. The initiative complements the political importance of the park through praising the achievement of Shenzhen under the leadership communist party. In the meantime, it provides an attraction or spectacle for some visitors, especially for ones visiting from outside Shenzhen.

8. 3. Type 3: Small scale initiatives

This section reports on the smaller scale initiatives in Park S that are generally involving less than 30 people. Similar initiatives are found in Park L however I consider the ones reported here are representative enough. These smaller scale initiatives generally yield limited influences on the park by each initiative. However the abundance of them contributes to a significant cultural scene in Park S.

8. 3. 1. Christian Choir Group (Park S)

Overview

One rare initiative is a Christian Choir that comes to the park every afternoon from 2:30PM to 5:00PM and every night from 7:00PM to 9PM. The Choir Group has about 15 regular members, aged from late 30s to early 60s. All members except two are female. Their setup includes a picnic cloth on the brick paving, on which they leave their belongings, bibles and evangelizing booklets. They sit on small plastic stools arranged in a circle and take turn holding a portable clipped-on microphone to lead the singing. During the whole singing session, the group members have little interaction with other users of the park.

Table 6: Summary of Christian Choir Group

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking companionship of other Christians • Desire to practice her believe with others
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a local Christian group • Evangelizing
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility to stay in the park during caretaking jobs
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income immigrates workers from outside Shenzhen
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some other Christian join upon visiting the park
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing sports together • Mutual counseling and emotional support
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members voluntarily contribute various resources • Permission to hold their activity through one church member's communication with park administration
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A closely bonded small group
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current park administration tacit permission
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shade • Exposed and easily seen
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given by God • Free of charge • Lack of supervision in the park before 2009 • Existence of other activities
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal and temporary
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A considerable amount of noise • Tested the tolerance of administration

Origin: motives, objectives and contextual conditions

Initiator Ms. D came to Shenzhen in 2006 as aged-care worker from a prefecture city of Meizhou in Guangdong province. She is in her early 50s and a Christian for many years. Her job includes walking her clients in parks with a wheelchair. Motivated by desires to practice her belief and to seek fellow believers as companies, she took a Christian songbook from her church to the Park S to sing during her breaks from work. This slowly attracted believers with similar jobs, who also wanted to meet other Christians and make friends. Ms. D recounted the beginning of her initiative: “You go to a place where you don’t know the area or the people, who talks to you? It only got better later with this [initiative]...another sister Ms. Ma who came from Shandong, said she felt sad not seeing any Christians here and she’s very happy to find us.”

Ms. D described two main objectives of her initiative. One is to evangelize and the other is to make a group that local Christians can meet and talk outside church.

The flexible time during their jobs was a facilitating condition for this initiative. Another factor was the lack of supervision or control in the park prior to 2009, which allowed Ms. D to be there without much interference.

Origin: composition of actors

The group is made of low-skilled immigrant workers with low economic status. However the group also maintains a close relation to the members of a local church, whose members have more connected social networks.

Origin: expansion and strengthening

As Ms. D had intended, the group grew through attracting new member who came to visit Park S. They also invited some members from their church to join the initiative.

Besides singing, group members give each counseling as many of them have domestic issues. They also sometimes play badminton together after singing. These measures strengthened the bonding in the group.

Origin: connections to key resources

On crucial factor here is the permission from park authority to allow the group to be here. This endorsement was obtained through the networking efforts of a church member outside the group but acquainted with Ms. D. After negotiation park administration allowed them to be there as long as they do not distribute evangelizing materials.

In addition to that, participants support the group voluntarily by providing various amenities. One member bought stools for the sitting, another bought the microphone and sports equipment.

Network outcomes: internal and external relations

Internally, the group is now a closely bonded group with around 15 people, who identify each other as “brothers and sisters”. The group and other activities have been co-existing in the park without conflicts. Ms. D said: “They also don’t interrupt us. We just do our thing.”

However the group's relations with park administration is unstable. Park administration hires the security guards on contract basis. When new employees coming in another negotiation is sometimes needed.

Choice of location

The group convenes daily under the same lychee tree near the main path in the Lychee Grove area. The spot they chose is well shaded and bounded the lychee tree on one side, while exposed on the other side so the visitors can easily see it.

For non-spatial qualities, Ms. D considered the place “belonged to our Lord Father” and therefore provided free for them. She also mentioned that there were many other initiatives here when she first visited, which prompt her to start her own. “We could not join the dancing groups since we had jobs to do. But we could still sing.” She mentioned.

Influence one the park

The group has very little influence on the physical environment of the park. It is however the only religious initiative found during the entire investigation. The initiative is a test on the tolerance of the authority on what initiatives are accepted in parks. The administration in Park S in this case displayed a certain level of tolerance.

Though the volume of the group is rather louder and their singing is consisted of little tonal or rhythmic accuracy, they are able to co-exist with other initiatives.

8. 3. 2. Assorted initiatives in the Lychee Grove area (Park S)

Features and overview

The Lychee Grove in Park S is the area where initiatives are most concentrated. From 6AM to around 10PM, over 30 different groups initiatives are found here. There are three main types of initiatives: small ballroom dance groups of less than 15 people, “square dance” groups and Taichi groups both with 20 to 50 people. Most of these initiatives are organized in a form of casual teaching manner during which experienced individuals lead or instruct others to do a routine. Participants are mid-to-old aged citizens and female participants exceed males by far in most groups. The organizers usually bring battery-powered speakers to play music needed for the routine. They

often charge a small fee to the participants and sell some initiatives related goods such as clothes and shoes to the participants. However some of instructors also do it completely free of charge.

Table 7 Summary of assorted Initiatives in Lychee Grove area in Park S

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators and participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking entertainment • Health and fitness needs • Desire to make friends and socialize • Love for the hobby • (Some of organizers) source of income
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing hobbies more often – “more play” • Creating entertainment for self and others
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased retired population and immigrant workers
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants in the same group
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting park visitors or friends of participants
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing the different styles or genres of practice
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizers provide and arrange most resources
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A closely bonded group of long term participants
Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional interactions and limited associations
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shade, flat ground and sometimes seating
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and free • No strict control on initiatives from authorities • Large number of visitors and existing prolific initiatives in Park S
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small and determined by authorities
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractions for other visitors • Generally promoted perception of safety

Origin: motives, objectives and contextual conditions

Seeking entertainment and improving fitness is quoted as the main reasons to create these initiatives by the organizers. Their activities are considered as games for both initiators and participants to “play” or “have fun”. Many also mentioned their concerns of physical health. “Young people could go running,” Mr. S, one of the dance teachers in forties, said, “but we are older now so dancing is better.” Taichi participants in

particular emphasize on how their practice benefit lower body joints and muscles. The organizers often had training for the practice previously or did it as hobbies. They have developed great passion towards the practice and want to promote it to others. And in return of teaching, some of them charge some fees to cover the cost or as an extra source of income.

It is also observable these relatively small-size groups communicate to each other a lot both during and after activities. Participants often mentioned they enjoyed the group atmosphere in which they can also make friends while learning new skills.

Origin: objectives

When asked the objectives of the initiatives, most initiators said they are here to “play” and have fun. Some older initiators showed their interest in the wider community. “I want to make a group where some old folks like me can come to have some fun and make some friends.” Said an elderly organizer in his 70s, who made his dance group free of charge.

Origin: contextual conditions

Organizers of the initiatives often quoted the recent increased retirees and elderly immigrants now comprise a large proportion of the their groups.

Choice of location

The conditions different groups seek related to microclimate are very similar. For all the daytime initiatives, the foremost attribute they sought is shade. Breeze is also desirable and many groups use the area close to the artificial lake where there is more airflow. These choices reflect Shenzhen’s hot weather during the time of observation. One other condition the groups seek is flat ground for most initiatives required some horizontal movements. Some dance groups occasionally use seating and tables for resting or temporary storage.

On non-spatial qualities of the park, all initiators mentioned that the park is a “public space” when asked why they chose to come. Mr. S appreciated that fact that all the parks in Shenzhen are free and open to the public. Some of these initiatives, particular ones in the morning, have been around since the mid-90s. Park S then was already a place to go to for these activities. Groups also come since the park is lively and there

are lots of visitors. Some dance groups thought the rough brick paving can be hindrance. “We sometimes go to nearby plaza to dance since there is smooth concrete surface. But here is more fun as we meet more people here.” Another female organizer expressed similar opinion, “This is the best spot because it is with the most people.” In addition, park administration was mostly concerned with safety and vandalism. Unlike Park L, no registration is needed for any initiatives and that made it more welcoming. Initiatives also mentioned they were rarely interrupted by the administration.

Network composition

The networks of each of this smaller size group are very internal, usually only include participants from the same practice. Interactions among groups are minimal.

Network behaviors: expansion, strengthening and connections to key resources

The groups find their recruits from friends or acquaintances of existing members and visitors to the park who are interested in their initiative.

To strengthen the group, organizers often attempt to solidify a group identity by emphasizing the distinctive style of the practice and the differences or superiority of their styles. During the interviews, it was clear many groups disliked each other. Initiative of a similar kind dislike each other’s style – best seemed in different Taichi groups – often considered others’ styles incorrect. This also contributes to groups’ identities.

In terms of resources, groups are very self-reliable and the organizers take the responsibility to arrange the equipment needed for the initiative.

Network outcomes

The initiatives have created many small groups bonded by long-term friendship. Group member meet outside practice time and discuss things other than practice. However none of these smaller groups has had much interaction or stable associations with the authorities.

Influences one the park

The groups in Lychee Grove area in general are content with existing conditions in the park and have not demanded many changes. There had been a few upgrades and

alternations of the Lychee Grove area in the past under park administration's own initiative. These changes reflect some indirect influences of the initiatives. The administration covered original sandy ground with brick paving considering the heavy use of the area. Receiving several complaints from the nearby middle school about excessive noise, the administration attempted to define "no music" areas by removing furniture and demarcating ground with paint. Some organizers who knew people in administration also sought modification directly. Mr. Z attributed the removal of a raised flowerbed that obstructed his dance group to his own relation with "a man inside".

In terms of non-spatial influences, the initiatives have become attractions for other park users. During the day, many baby sitters, aged-care takers or mothers with small children come visit the park and watch others dance. In general, respondents feel safer with the crowd and buzz in the park. Participants consider the Park Safer to visit at night in recent years with the presence of their initiatives. However some respondents also mentioned other safety concerns come with the crowd such as stealing.

8. 4. Type 4: Self-initiatives managed by authority

A few initiatives originated from the community but were later on taken under park administration's management. This includes Matchmaking Corner and Kite Square in Park L, where the administration is a lot more proactive in considering new ways to use the park. While Kite Square is of less self-organizational pattern thus not reported here, Matchmaking Corner began hosted by a volunteer group and gained support by park administration. It was later solely managed by park administration after the volunteer group left.

8. 4. 1. Matchmaking Corner (Park L)

Features and overview

To the northwest of the main entrance of Park L, there is an area enclosed by green colored fence. The site is known as the Matchmaking Corner of Park L. It has been around since 2005 and reported by the media numerous times. Park administration built the fences and bulletins and took it in as part of their own management over the course of last few years. The parents preselect-select the potential candidates before introducing them to their sons and daughters, who are usually too busy at work to

come. During weekdays elderly people frequent the place and pin up posters introducing their sons and daughters onto these fences and adjacent bulletins. In weekend afternoons, the site is crammed with hundreds of visitors young and old to browse the posters or meet other seekers.

Notably there are also quite a few “middlemen” who run matchmaking as a job at the matchmaking corner. They charge a considerable fee for helping with posting and providing potential candidates.

71 years old retiree Mr. H created the initiative originally. The site gradually grew famous and was supported by park administration. However this group decided to move out from the park in late 2007 due the increasing defamation and disruption from the middlemen.

Table 8 Summary of Matchmaking Corner

Dynamics of self-organization	
Origin	
Motives of initiators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to contribute to public service. • Self-fulfillment
Motives of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking partners for themselves or their offspring • Seeking friends and companionship
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping people to find partners and relieve this societal issues without costing public money • Raising concern of this “societal issue”
Contextual conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many unmarried professionals in Shenzhen • Retired parents have free time • Emphasis on marriage before a certain age as being normative in China
Network: composition	
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small volunteers group of mostly retired elderlies • A Local newspaper • Park administration • Private business owners
Network: behaviors	
Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers join out of their own interest • Park administration and the newspaper supported the initiative proactively
Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defending the area from commercial activities by making “free service” equivalent to the identity of the group • Sustaining the group in another site to keep it alive
Connections to key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members voluntarily contribute various resources • Park authority support the initiative by building permanent structures • A local newspaper promoted the popularity and sought sponsors and volunteers on organizer’ behalf
Network: outcomes	
Resultant relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close bonded volunteer group

Relations with authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported by park authorities Some recognition by local governmental agencies
Choice of location	
Spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shade and seating
Non-spatial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and free Large number of visitors
Impacts on attributes of park	
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addition of shelter, seating, fence and bulletin boards by park administration
Non-spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management dilemma Enriched diversity of the park and created an attraction for other visitors

Origin: motives

Mr. H met a few elderlies matchmaking for their sons and daughters when visiting the park. He thought their approach was rather unorganized and decided to help them make it more effective. He compiled all the details of seekers in a database and created events for them to meet. It was a lot of effort organizing the events. He told the newspaper his motive is simply a belief in devotion in public services and self-fulfillment. He declined any financial gains from his effort, quoting the selfless deeds of his contemporary – a famous communist martyr named Lei Feng and his past devotion to the country in the past.

The participants' primary motive is straightforward: to find partners for their offspring or themselves. However for some elderlies the site also becomes a place they make friends and socialize. Some parents who already found satisfying sons and daughters in law still come to help others or meet with the friends they made during the search. A few of them had been coming to the site for over 5 years.

Origin: objectives

Besides helping people finding their satisfying partners, Mr. H also considered the quantity of unmarried people at marital age is becoming a societal issue and wanted to raise attentions to it. He thought the objectives of his initiatives are to both serve the public and bring a message to the society. He also insisted his work is independent of the government and “would not cost the government a cent”.

Origin: contextual conditions

The phenomenal of similar matchmaking corner also occurred in other mega-cities of China such as Beijing and Shanghai around the same time, although Mr. H's initiative was entirely his own idea. It is common knowledge in China that getting married at certain age is normative or nearly obligatory. The retired parents who have free time also consider it an utmost important business and wanted to help their busy working professional children with this task. The emergence of matchmaking corner aligns closely with these contextual conditions.

Choice of location

Mr. H chose the location largely because it is public and free. In terms of spatial quality he admitted he would prefer a place with more shade, shelter from the rain and free of mosquitoes bites, "but this park is a free, public and familiar space for many people and we have the support from the administration. And that will do." Mr. H said to the newspaper. He also considered park a public space for everyone and therefore befitted the nature of his work.



Figure 5 A weekday at Matchmaking Corner

Network: composition,

Mr. H's initiative gradually attracted a few elderly volunteers as well as some younger people who are seeking partners to join his cause and assist in organizational tasks. It received continuous media exposure in an influential local newspaper that highly praised his initiative and called for volunteers to help organizing the events. The initiative received much support from park administration, which later provided the initiatives with seating, fences and shelters.

Network: expansion

The publicity of the initiative grew quick through media exposure, words of mouth and large amount of visitors to the park. Mr. H called for more volunteers through newspaper and many joined out of their own interest. Mr. H and his groups did not proactively seek attentions from park administration or the media. These two took the initiative to support the initiative. At a later state, through the connection of the newspaper, the group also gained support from a private business, which provide a free indoor venue for the group's later activities.

Network: strengthening

The exposure in the media attracted many "middlemen" to the area. They pretended to act on Mr. H's behalf to use his creditability and charge fees. The foul play and defamation from these people created damage to Mr. H's group. The group struggled to defend the area from these commercial activities and used "free service" for its distinctive identity.

Yet after a few vis-à-vis confrontations with some of the middlemen, the threats and troubles from them compelled him to relocate in order to sustain his initiative. Mr. H initially kept the weekend events running in the old spot in the park but eventually relocated all their activities to the indoor place in a shopping mall provide free by a business owner.

Network: key resources

The volunteer work of Mr. H and his group was the key that kept the events going. The endorsement of park administration provided the initiative a secure venue while media was crucial in raising its publicity. Subsequently the support for a private business kept

the initiative alive and free of charge. It is notable some of connections was not sought by the initiative but rather established by other actors proactively.

Network: outcomes

The initiative resulted a relative close bonded volunteer group made of diverse backgrounds. At one stage there was also close links between the group, the local newspaper and park authority. However the network faded after the group moved out from the park.

After the departure of Mr. H from the park the already famous Matchmaking Corner did not quiet down. The professional middlemen, for-profit matchmaking website and some remaining volunteers kept the matchmaking activity going. People kept appearing every Sunday afternoon and posting profiles regularly. Park administration embraced the idea of matchmaking corner and took in the responsibility to monitor the site.

However the administration could not have the control over the site like the volunteer group did. They put up signage to warn visitors about scams and commercial activities. But the patrolling guards were not effective in keeping the middlemen out since they often disappear into the crowd easily.

Influence on the park

The matchmaking corner, though a tiny of the large park, had evolved a lot through the last 10 years. From 2007, the administration has been making upgrades to the site. They added more seats, built a rain shelter, adjusted plantings and constructed fences and bulletins. The site today is a result of the last upgrade in 2013, when park authority built the fence.

One non-spatial influence is the both inspiration and challenge in use of the park. It was an inspiration for park administration in terms of potential use of the park. The administration acknowledge the merit of Matchmaking Corner and proposed two re-designs of the entire area and submitted them to their superiors. After Mr. H had left, there has not been an organized group that can oversee the entire area. The unwanted commercial activities creep into the park and created management issues and the administration do not have the resources to continuously monitor the space.

The initiative also became an attraction of the park and enriched its meaning. Many visitors come here just to spectate. The administration considered it was both good deeds for the community and also good public relation work, therefore decided to promote it.

Chapter 9. Discussion and Summary

Summarizing the previous results, this chapter discusses the findings according to the analytical framework.

9. 1. Origin of self-organization

9. 1. 1. The motives

The initiators

In all initiatives studied, the role of the organizers is pivotal. A commonality of these organizers is the mix of self-interest and attention on the wider community. For most initiatives self-interest was the starting point. Often a self-driven passion for certain goals compels initiators to devote a lot of time and efforts into their groups.

Particularly so are type 2 and 3 initiatives are first practiced as hobbies and enjoyed by the organizers themselves. Then socialization desires as in sharing the benefits and joy with others further motivate them to start a group. These benefits generally relate to entertainment, health and companionship.

In initiatives type 1 and 4, the organizers explicitly expressed their interest in serving the public. Nonetheless they also stated self-realization as important motivation. Their initiatives focus more on existing issues found in the community and they want to improve the situation through their own efforts.

The time and efforts spent on these initiatives are made possible since all the initiators studied, except three dance instructors, are in retirement. Particularly so for initiative type 2, 3 and 4, the organizers treat the initiatives similar to jobs or life routine. Though in some cases they are compensated financially for their service, monetary gain is not essential and the bulk of their work is done voluntarily.

The participants

The motives of the participants are often similar to the organizers. They often join spontaneously out of self-interest or based on common belief in the goals and benefits of the initiatives. The detailed motives for each individual to join are likely different,

however a notable one found universally in initiative type 2, 3 and 4 is to socialize with others or seeking friendship. These initiative groups are described as platforms for people to meet and interact, and accordingly often consisted of people with similar interest and demographic backgrounds. Other motives correspond to the benefits of the initiatives – health benefits are primary; leisure or entertainment is also essential.

Similar to initiators, retired population comprise an important component of all groups. Some of participants also devote a lot of voluntary work in helping to organize the initiatives.

9. 1. 2. The objectives

Other than the ones linked with aforementioned motives, the goals or objectives of the initiatives are rather ambiguous at the beginning in many cases. Typically in the large-scale group of initiative, rarely did the organizers expect the initiative would grow into a great scale. Interestingly, these large sized groups now deliberately define their objectives to align with policies goals of the state or certain social norms – showcased by Jiamusi Dance's alignment with "Every Citizen's Fitness" and Park L Singing Group's patriotic zest – which can be seen as a way to seek acknowledgment and endorsement from the authority. Smaller scale initiatives are less clear of the goals they want to achieve.

9. 1. 3. The contextual conditions

The rapid and rather spontaneous growth of some of large-scale initiatives is connected to some important contextual conditions. Perhaps a crucial one is retired age group's familiarity with the content of the initiatives. As revealed in the interviews, it is easy to trace the elements of initiatives to past experiences of both organizers and participants. What is also noticeable is that they often experienced it in a collective setting. Be it the dancing, singing or others, the apparent nostalgia towards those activities are not only attributed to the experiences themselves but also to the group atmosphere. Typical for initiatives type 2 and to a certain extent in type 1, 3 and 4, the initiatives recreate scenarios that appeal to this age group.

Linked to this nostalgia is the abundance of retirees in Shenzhen. In the investigation the retirees are found from two main sources. The first source is the generation who came to work in Shenzhen when in twenties and thirties and has reached their retirement age²³. The second source is the parents of younger working population who have come to Shenzhen to live with their children often as caretakers of their grandchildren.

The existing need of these groups is another important condition. It was also demonstrated in cases of type 2 and 3 initiatives that for this retired group the initiatives benefit their needs for friendship or companionship, entertainment, health and self-expression. For initiative type 4, the need is timely marriage of their offspring. Community Foundation of type 1 initiative also clearly recognized the need from the retired population and attempted to articulate that in their events. What the organizers in type 1 and 4 initiatives also expressed is a need to feel useful in contributing to society after retirement. This point is also implied by some of type 2 and 3 initiatives organizers.

9. 1. 4. The locational context: urban parks

The results of the investigation show that the spatial quality of the parks is not as decisive in comparison to the non-spatial ones in attracting these group initiatives.

Some physical elements of the urban greens, such as vegetation cover and park furniture, do facilitate the initiatives. However these are not considered necessities by many initiators, who mentioned alternative venues other than parks that sometimes provide even better hardware. Yet the parks are comparative advantageous to other venues in terms of being easily accessible, free of charge, popular and familiar among citizens. The accessibility of parks comes with the original planning and design, which determines the often-central location and physical accessibility of the park. Being free guarantees affordability that is important to many initiative groups. Parks also appeal more since people are familiar with their environment and developed attachment to

²³ The age for retirement is 60 for male and 55 for females, which might have resulted in disproportional female participants than males.

them over time. Finally corresponding to desire of socialization is the existing buzz and livelihood of parks, which also attract initiators to start there.

However there is also a downside to these qualities. Accompanying this “public” attribute there is the competition to use the space from other groups and individuals. And that sometimes deters certain groups from using it. Meanwhile, there is also a decisive force coming from the authority that determines whether the initiative is appropriate and acceptable in the parks.

Some physical elements appear significant to most initiatives. Factors commonly sought by are shade and shelter that ameliorate the microclimate. Flat, smooth and unobstructed ground is crucial for fitness and dance group of type 2 and 3. Seating also appears to be important to some groups while many groups bring their own seats to cope with the scarcity of it.

9. 2. Network of self-organization

9. 2. 1. Network composition: Actors and Collectiveness

There is a considerable variation among different initiatives in their compositions. First kind is large-scale initiative in type 1, 2 and 4 that display an outreaching tendency in their networks. The actors present in the network often not only include the organizers and participants, but also external agencies or personnel that do not directly participate in activities. These actors might include other societal groups, private companies, media and some relevant authorities. However small-scale initiatives and Jiamusi Dance of the type 2 have much less tendency in this. Their networks are mainly consisted of participants from the same group and each group is quite independent from one another despite using the same venue. It is also notable there is clear distinction in relations with authorities between these two kinds, with the members of former groups being a lot more connected with governmental personnel due to their past work or life experience. Both the outreaching and inward-looking kinds want to include of certain authorities in their networks, though the former is a lot more successful in involving them.

Personal friendship or associations is found to be an important bond that holds the networks together in all cases. The large-scale initiatives are usually consisted of a smaller core group of similar size to the group size of smaller initiatives, which handle the essential organizational tasks. Similar to smaller scale groups, people in these core groups are well-acquainted friends who see each outside the time of regular group activities. Besides friendship, a shared belief in the benefits and objectives of initiative comprise their collectiveness in general. Such collectiveness is further reinforced in the regular gatherings.

9. 2. 2. Network behaviors: Expansion

The park as a venue plays an indispensable role in the expansion the group for initiative type 2, 3 and 4, although it is not as crucial to the Community Foundation. As many groups do not actively recruit new members but rely on people's spontaneity to expand, parks frequently visited by local citizens guarantee attentions these initiatives receive thus expose them to the potentially interested people. As the organizers often state that the popularity among people as an important reason why they chose to start in parks in the first place.

The groups rely on the existing personal connections of group members when seeking specific new actors. This was perhaps best exemplified in the networking of Community Foundation and Big Stage, during which the organizers of the initiatives approached and gained support from key personnel in the government whom they are personally acquainted with. Such connections are found to be crucial in establishing access to key resources such as budgets and permissions. And a lack of extensive personal connections, as in the case of Jiamusi Dance, means difficulty in expanding network to obtain key resources. In another sense, people also bring friends to join the initiatives and the information about the initiative is spread through personal connections.

9. 2. 3. Network behaviors: Strengthening

The network or the group is strengthened mostly through two types of efforts. A more apparent type of work is building of an identity through behaviors such as wearing uniform by Jiamusi Dance and Park L Singing, self-branding or promotional work of

Community Foundation and Matchmaking Corner and work to discredit other groups by many small-scale groups. Another type of work is organizing group gatherings beyond the ones in the park. These extra-activities can vary in forms such as the performance trips of Jiamusi Dance Group or badminton sessions of Christian Choir.

9. 2. 4. Network behaviors: Connection to key resources

Three types of key resources as non-human actors other than the park environment are found essential for many initiatives. The first one is permission to use the venue. This might come naturally for some of the initiatives since everyone had access to the park, particularly if they started small. However it could be a struggle to gain access in some occasions. The rights to use the teahouse proves to be quite a battle between various parties; for Christian Choir the venue was also contested by park administration. Since the government eventually monitors parks, gaining support for key personnel in authority becomes crucial in building connections to this resource.

The second type of resource is the efforts needed to organize, maintain and sometimes grow the initiatives. These are realized through expanding the size and influence of the initiative and recruiting volunteers.

The third type is the financial and various materials needed for initiative's upkeep. This is made available by aggregating resources that are available to each group member.

9. 2. 5. Network outcomes

A core group closely bonded by friendship is often a notable outcome of these initiatives. This is observed in all initiatives. In cases of large-scale initiative of type 1, 2 and 4 except the Jiamusi Dance, there are also networks of a variety of actors outside the regular initiative groups. This network is most alive at the time when the group is working to obtain certain resources.

The resulting relations with authority, however, depend on the composition of the network. In cases of Park L Singing and Big Stage Dance, relevant authorities became part of the group's network and contribute to the growth the initiative regularly. In some other cases when personal connections to the government are lacking, the authority's support remain distant from the group's reach. There are also a multiple number of

authorities and each might have a different relation with the group, as showcased in Park L Singing and Community Foundation.

9. 3. Influence on park attributes

9. 3. 1. Spatial influences

The spatial influences on park environment coming directly from the initiative groups themselves turn out to be limited. Most initiatives accept the existing condition of the park environment and utilize whatever elements they found useful. The self-directed modification of spatial attributes is minimal and often constrained by the control of park authority. However this does not mean the site condition is ideal for them. It is very common practice to supplement temporary amenities at their own expense such as lighting, seating and activity specific equipment to support their initiatives. Such temporary additions are found in almost all initiatives.

However there is a limit to how much these grass root additions can achieve and groups often demand improvement of spatial attributes from park administrations. They understand that decision for any major modification to the physical environment need to come from authority. It is through the relevant authorities that some groups are able to significantly alter the physical environment of the parks to the benefits of their initiatives, as exemplified in Big Stage Dance case and to a lesser extent in Matchmaking Corner. This indirect influence is largely based on the composition of the group and the personal networks of group members. Groups with good relations to authority are more capable in influencing the decisions that result in changes in physical environment.

9. 3. 2. Non-spatial influences

The non-spatial influences relate to five attributes: perception of safety, noise level, use and programs, management approach and attraction.

The influences on perception of safety mainly involve the popularity and abundance of initiatives in type 2 and 3. Particularly in Park S, these initiatives permeates many areas of park day and night, providing more surveillance towards criminal activities from the participants.

Noise also mainly relates to initiative type 2 and 3 that often involve use of loudspeakers. There have been a few complaints from the nearby residents in regards to the level of noise in Park S. Different initiative groups also criticize each other for their loud volume. However there is also subjectivity involved in determine what constitutes noise. Some visitors considered volume acceptable in Park S thanks to the lush vegetation.

The use of certain facility can differ from the original design intention considerably, as seen in Park L Singing, Community Foundation and Matchmaking Corner. Groups ignored the designed use and reprogram it purposefully for their own initiatives and diversified the use of the park.

This diversification of use sometimes also requires changes in management approach, in which self-management or governance of certain areas of park is often sought after. Big Stage Dance, Community Foundation and Matchmaking Corner all display self-managing tendency. However this challenges the management of park authority, which normally exerts control and authority over these public spaces.

Another influence of these diverse and sometime innovative uses the Park spaces is by creating attractions. Deviating from the conventional use of the park, initiatives such as Park L Singing and Matchmaking Corner appeal to the curiosity or needs of citizens bring diverse user groups to parks.

9. 4. Policy framework and authorities' perceptions towards initiatives

9. 4. 1. State Level

The China state government and the Communist Party of China (CPC) has gradually recognized the importance of public participation in decision-making processes and incorporated participation in decision-making since late 1990s. Horsley (2009) observes that the Party has realized that participation can provide data and expertise for making better policies and administrative decisions, while at the same time promoting people's understanding and thus compliances of these decisions. It can also increases transparency of the government and builds people's trust towards the government, therefore enhances social stability. In October 2000, the Party's Central

Committee officially endorsed the concept of participation to “expand citizens’ orderly participation in political affairs” for scientific and democratic decision-making (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2000). In the same year National People’s Congress²⁴(NPC) adapted law on legislation to include people’s participation “in legislative activities through various channels.”(Standing Committee of National People's Congress, 2000)

Following this change, public input through measures such as expert meetings and hearings are required for both NPC and State Council²⁵. In regards to particularly matters that relate to vital interest of the public, drafts laws of policies should be published to public for comments. Ex-president Hu Jintao further promised expansions of public participation to improve “social management²⁶” and social stability in 2007’s 17th CPC National Congress²⁷.(Hu, 2007) Importantly, he also recognized the role of social organizations²⁸ to “help expand the participation by the public and report on their petitions to improve the self-governance capability of society.”(Section VI Article 2, Hu, 2007) In 18th National Congress, he further called for “orderly participation at all levels and in all fields” and lawful autonomy of social organizations.(Section III & Secion VII, Hu, 2012) Current president Xi Jinping also emphasized on innovation in “social management”, encouraging the participation of all parts of society and recommending an interactive management model of governmental administration and societal self-governance (Xi, 2014).

In such context, public participation in land use planning is considered of great importance as the matter often involves vital interests of property owners and sometimes leads controversy in society. In response to this calling is the revised Urban

²⁴ National People’s Congress is the legislature body of China. Also see previous footnote.

²⁵ State Council is the highest administrative body of China.

²⁶ In Chinese, “social management” also denotes to a sense of active control towards the society.

²⁷ These meetings are generally held every five years for directing China policy goals for the next five years.

²⁸ In China, 社会组织 or social organizations include three types: social groups (社会团体), Private non-enterprise units (民办非企业单位) and foundations (基金会). The name and intended activities of these groups needs to be approved by a relevant authority for it to be legal. However, many of these organizations are semi-governmental (Agency, 2010; Wei, 2010). In this paper, I distinguish “social organizations’ governmental connotation by using the term societal groups or societal organizations.

and Rural Planning Law in 2008, which required draft land use plans announced 30 days before their submissions for approval and opinions of general public and experts fully considered (Standing Committee of National People's Congress, 2008).

The policies and perceptions of state level authority are quite positive and conducive for the flourishing societal groups. CPC constantly seeks improvement in its governance approach to improve social stability, build trust in government and enhance efficiency. The adaption of Planning Law clearly endorsed the requirement of public input in spatial planning. However it remained ambiguous in what participation procedures should be or how public opinions should be considered.

9. 4. 2. Local Level

Shenzhen's authorities as mentioned in Chapter 2 seem to be more positive about public participation. In 1998 Shenzhen announced the its first Urban Planning Ordinances, which is the first of its kind in China to clearly endorse public participation in planning regulation. The Ordinances required the creation of a non-governmental commission made of governmental officials and non-governmental planning experts to be in charge of assessing major planning decisions. It also demanded any draft land use plans to be publicly displayed for 30 days before submission for approval. Nevertheless, it also stated the relevant local government has the final right for any planning decisions. And as in the later national Planning Law, it did not contain details of how "open displaying period" should be executed or procedures of gathering public opinions (Standing Committee of Shenzhen People's Congress, 2001).

Accordingly, the local level authorities have much discretion in how to fulfill participation requirement and some of them resort to tokenistic approach to the issue. The results of this study showed that each initiative has different relations with various local authorities. This difference of attitudes appears to heavily influence the decisions.

The most directly relevant authority, park administration, differs significantly in terms of management due to various factors. In Park S, the administrative transition from Shekou Industrial District to Futian District Government contributes to ambiguity of responsibility and less strict control from park administration. Contrastingly in Park L, the administrative structure has always been clearly defined and the political significance

has set an undertone to the management. These differences might help explain why administration of Park L uses a lot more discretion in deciding what kinds of initiatives and use of park to support and what other kinds to contain. Whereas in Park S's administration is a lot more indifferent towards various initiatives in general. Though admittedly, Park S's administration is much less powerful in comparison in the first place.

What also appears significant is that these positive attitudes from the authority depend heavily on the personal relations between members of the initiatives and personnel of specific positions in the authorities, whereas support is always obtained through networking attempts of key individuals. In cases of Community Foundation and Big Stage Dance such personal connections were pivotal in gaining permission to use the teahouse and construction of the stage respectively. Correspondingly for groups with no such connections, there was no other channel in getting their voice heard by the relevant authorities. What this also means is that, since opinions can differ significantly from different personnel from different authorities, a decision can be rather contested among various governmental agencies. This is certainly the case in Community Foundation's use of the teahouse and Park L Singing's proposal for building a stage. This further reflects the lack of a way to transparently evaluate their proposals.

Chapter 10. Reflections and Policy Recommendations

10. 1. Park as public space and non-human actor

For these group initiatives, the benefits of urban green spaces as discussed by Matsuoka and Kaplan (2008) are based less on the physical environment of the urban park but rather on another basic quality of it – being public. This contributes to another two important qualities: accessibility for all and popularity among people. Groups or individual can easily establish their connections to the parks, and subsequently through parks they are able to connect with more people and other resources. And this is how most groups expand their sizes and influences.

However this is not to say physical factors do not play a role. Physical elements complement the public space with amiable microclimate, seclusion for the more busy urban areas and amenities such as seats and shelters, and therefore facilitate these initiatives. The organic mix of spatial attributes and non-spatial ones made parks indispensable actors in catalyzing these self-organization phenomena. In Actor-Network Theory, each actor is also an actor-network (Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009). The agency of parks as non-human actors originates within this mix.

The study found a large concentration of initiatives in parks that caused some conflicts among group users, individual users and residents nearby. Since allegedly there is already a great amount of green spaces and parks in Shenzhen, this might be a reflection of the uneven distribution of parks argued by X. Zhou et al. (2013), and it might also be because of a mismatch between existing design and actual needs of its users. The latter appears to be evident in my investigation and I will discuss it next.

10. 2. The need for flexible space and co-evolution of actors in urban parks

What is perhaps most interesting in regards to the physical space of these parks is how groups often use them for the purposes that differ far from their original design intent. Park environment in this study often focuses on passive and aesthetic experiences of individuals rather than the groups, as evident in the traditional Chinese gardens style of Park S. The mismatch leads to two solutions from these groups: one commonly used is self-improvement by appropriation and temporary addition of components such as

furniture or lighting; more demanding and progressive is to request modification from the authority, which leads to participation attempts. Both can be seen as networking efforts by the initiatives to connect with various human and non-human actor-networks in order to extend or intensify their relations with them and subsequently generate concerted actions (or a robust state).

These networks and actors evolve during the process of networking. Yet because the physical space is not as malleable as other actors, it might not evolve at the same pace as human-actors. Meanwhile, since the space is also part of multiple and dissimilar actor-networks, which might require it to evolve differently. This condition recalls Thompson (2002)'s discussion of a "loose-fit" design on urban parks to allow multiple use of the same space.

A key actor for concerted action is park administration, to which many initiatives have to establish a connection in order to obtain permission to use the space. Similarly, park administration co-evolves in the process of networking. Their attitudes, perceptions and management approaches change through the time under the influences of the groups. "Loose-fit" design also needs to be combined with a more flexible and tolerant administrative mindset to allow the co-existence of multiple uses.

Some traces of this "loose-fit" space might already be observed in the Lychee Grove area in Park S. At first there was no pre-programmed use and no intentional design imposed onto this space. The lychee trees are kept as they were in the original state to produce lychees. Yet the trees not only also provide shade and shelter, they also divide the spaces into smaller pockets, thus facilitated exercise groups of a few dozen people to occupy each of these pocket without too much interruption to one another. While at the same time these spaces are not secluded to the extent of being hidden, thus becoming unsafe. The dense vegetation also serves as good filters for their music. The prolific initiatives prompted administration to cover the sandy ground with brick paving and add seats and tables. With hard paving and amenities the initiatives became yet more diverse. Dance and card playing became popular and groups like Christian Choir also started appear. More recently, initiatives also started to extend into night hours. Then lighting became an issue. While the administration did not react to it, the Jiamusi Group invented their solutions. Then better lighting attracted more groups to the area

still. During these years of development, the very basic features – a lychee grove and a piece of relatively flat ground – become the venue of an area intensively use for all sorts of initiatives. It was a dynamic and interactive process among various human and non-human actors during which a relatively stable socio-spatial order gradually emerged. The configuration is flexible since it was simple yet the crucial physical elements are well provided.



Figure 6 Lychee Grove area in Park S

10.3. Appraising the impact of self-organization

A few things stand out in the findings with regards to the theoretical framework on self-organization. Before further discussion to consider whether self-organization phenomenon in this study does comprise a superior mode than other more conventional participation approaches, it is worthwhile to discuss the concept of public participation in more details.

Naturally the ladders of participation from Arnstein (1969)'s keystone paper comes into light here. Since self-organization denotes an “autonomous community-based networks of citizens”, it aspires to reach beyond the highest rung of the ladder – beyond “citizen control”. However, although remaining influential and inspiring, scholars have come to criticize this “ladder ” for its naïve assumption that higher levels of participation always better (Campbell & Marshall, 2000; Fung, 2006). The development in both theory and practice brought technical innovations in practicing and evaluating

participation. Fung (2006)'s evaluation framework involves three benchmarks of democratic governance: legitimacy, justice and effectiveness. He used it to assess different participation modes²⁹. Campbell and Marshall (2000) argue the rationales behind participation need to be understood before a participation process – to gauge whether it is based on self-interest or collective good, therefore informing planning decisions. Both frameworks are equally useful in appraising these self-organization initiatives.

Now the focus is on self-organization. It is apparent in this study the self-organized initiatives reflect closely certain needs of the community. These needs are genuine and immediate, as assumed by Boonstra and Boelens (2011) and correspond to the previous mentioned human interaction benefits (Coley et al., 1997; Kazmierczak, 2013; Shen, 2014). Q. Wang (2015) in her very recent ethnography study of “square dance” also argues for crucial socialization need from the retired “lonely mothers”. These needs are the fundamental motivations for people to start or join the initiatives. As discussed previously these motivations are a mix of self-interest and attention on other people. However with exceptions of Community Foundation and Matchmaking Corner, after groups' formation the notion of “other people” usually denotes the immediate group members that are of similar interests and backgrounds, and does not include other groups or individual users of the park. This implies a level of exclusion of groups and individuals. The groups' participation efforts therefore are of an instrumental rationale described by Campbell and Marshall (2000). Namely, they emphasizes on individuals' freedom and rights to pursue personal interest (in this case groups' common interest). Correspondingly, they argue participation of instrumental rationale origin is often limited to knowledgeable elites who are more eloquent in articulating their demand. Similarly in this case study, successful participation attempts often involve elites who can find ways to articulate their demand to authorities.

²⁹ It is arguable whether democratic governance is a good measuring index since the meaning and content of democracy, though defined in Chinese constitution, is often contested in the China context. It is however beyond the scope of this paper to venture into the discussion of universality of democratic values. Here democracy refers to its commonly accepted normative in the western society.

This instrumental rationale leads to the question of legitimacy in some of cases. Fung (2006) argues decision is only legitimate if the public has good reason to support it. He contends two basic issues related to legitimacy: representativeness and genuine reflections of public will. The notion of representativeness is less relevant here since the participating bodies are self-selected. It is the second issue that legitimacy of planning decisions are put in doubt, particularly in the case of Big Stage. The stage is constructed without consulting the residents nearby or other users of Park S, which in this context also have interest in this alternation of the park. The resulting stage reflects the will of the dance group and some relevant governmental agencies, but possibly not of the public at large. Consequently the stage was almost used exclusively by the dance group, providing them a free venue. The complaints from the residents nearby about the loud music of the stage are evidences for its lack of consideration of the wider community. Notably, the administrator of Park L rejected the proposal of a stage quoting almost exactly this reason: such project does not serve the general public. The demands of these groups are justified; yet manifestation of such demands in a park should also consult the will of the rest of community. Admittedly measurement of public will has been difficult in practice. For this reason some participation tools are designed specifically for exploring this public will through intense dialogue with the community (Fung, 2006) .

The issue of just is more problematic still, when one groups' demand is realized while another is rejected. This is exemplified by the different treatment from authorities received by Jiamusi Dance and Big Stage Dance, with the former receiving little attention despite of similar popularity of their initiative. The contrasting constituency of these two groups further entraps this issue in inequality: the latter group has member with strong ties with key personnel in government, while the former is consisted of many immigrants from less developed regions. Initiators of groups like Jiamusi Dance are frustrated because they do not have a channel to voice out their demands to the relevant authority, whereas organizers of Community Foundation and Big Stage found relatively easy access through personal relations to articulate their demand.

However when it comes to effectiveness, the issue becomes most interesting. Groups exemplified by Community Foundation and Matchmaking Corner took the initiative to

decide both the subject and the location they want to intervene, and incidentally triggered participation processes. This closely resonates with what Boonstra and Boelens (2011) consider as the way spatial order would emerge. Two notions are noteworthy here. First of all, these initiatives used the space in entirely unintended ways. The results were new functions of park knitted closely with the existing need from community (although in Community Foundation case this is still to be tested). Secondly, the groups had shown great devotion and certain capacity to preserve and manage these park spaces for the convenience of their initiatives. They are motivated to achieve emergent goals of the community by reconfiguring park environment.

Are these interventions effective in achieving their goals? From the case study it is difficult to determine. However in the institutional reality of China, it is more relevant to consider how effective these interventions are in achieving more underlying policy goals. At least two important policy goals can be identified from the discussion of policy framework and research on park management: 1) Social stability. 2) Efficient management of parks.

Again from this study it is difficult to judge how effective these initiatives are in achieving these two, since either of these two goals requires careful measurement. Yet it is observable that initiatives studied generally promoted social interactions, and increased cultural diversity in the park, which are considered normative by scholars such as Low et al. (2009). Furthermore, initiatives such as Community Foundation have shown good confidence of self-governance in organizing their events, whereas in Matchmaking Corner park authority lack the capacity in managing the space. Some experiments with self-governance from these groups are worth trying.

To summarize, self-organization initiatives in Shenzhen's parks face the same challenge of achieving legitimate, justice and effective outcomes as other conventional participation modes. The goals of the initiatives are strongly related to self-interest of the group and the legitimacy of these goals should be justified among other users of the park. The capacity to access relevant authority or trigger participation process is unevenly distributed, with the groups with members who are well connected with the government getting favorable decisions. Finally, there are potentials for initiatives to

serve the normative policy and social goals. How effective these are is undetermined yet worth some experiments.

10. 4. Policy recommendations

Summarizing the points raised, here are I will conclude some preliminary policy recommendations for Shenzhen's park.

Design and planning

- I. Differentiate needs from group user and individual users and accommodate both. In particular, create spaces with semi-seclusion while still keep a level of openness for supervision. When possible, have the active areas of the Park Separated from the passive areas.
- II. Design parts of park to be simple and flexible to allow for dissimilar activities. Avoid single-purposed, exclusive and fixed design features. Provide flat ground for these areas and locate these areas away for nearby residential zones. Use vegetation, preferably existing established ones, to filter the sound.
- III. Emphasis on providing comfortable microclimate. Provide abundant shade throughout the parks. Combine shade with amenities such as seating and table.
- IV. Distribute parks more evenly throughout the city. Retrofit aforementioned "flexible design" in the upgrade of existing parks.

Management and participation

- V. Establish an official channel and provide equal access for all groups and individuals of society to express their opinions and demands about the issues related to parks. Create platform to assess these demands among the public with transparency to test its legitimacy. Allow unconventional ways of using the park, as long they are legitimate demands from the community.
- VI. Provide space in the parks to experiment with self-management if self-organized groups are willing to use the space for public causes. Do not suppress retired citizens' willingness and energy to serve the public. Mobilize them to govern parks and reduce management cost. Test out if the initiatives can help achieve state policy goals. Allow these self-organized groups to be creative in designing new ways to govern the parks.

10. 5. Limitation and direction for future research

The study is done in late spring and early summer. There is some expected seasonal variation in initiatives. The observation results will be more valid if observations are carried out more times of the year.

The fieldwork is carried out in two distinctive districts of Shenzhen with considerable differences in administrative conventions. Whether some of the findings related to authorities can be generalized to entire city is arguable and needed further research.

This study is qualitative and focuses on the group initiative's perspectives. Admittedly, a large portion of users in parks does not participate in these initiatives. Correspondingly, to further the discussion on legitimacy of participation and implication of design it is important to understand these users' opinions. This will require further study possibly with more quantitative research design.

One finding emerged in the study is the discretion of specific personnel in influencing decision in the parks. It will be useful to study how much influence key personnel in the government has on planning decisions and the dynamics among these key figures. Also relevant is how state policy plays a role in this dynamics and whether they have different interpretations of the institutional context. Such study might help elucidate the black box of many planning decisions in China.

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Appendix 1: Observation Sheet

Weather Condition:		Temperature	Date	weekdays/weekdays	Observer
attributes	Observation notes 观察笔记	other notes	attributes	Observation notes	other notes
descriptions 1			descriptions 2		
Time / duration			Time / duration		
age estimated			age estimated		
gender ratio			gender ratio		
number of people			number of people		
Spectators and interactions			Spectators and interactions		
Equipment Used			Equipment Used		
Sun/shade			Sun/shade		
Temperature felt			Temperature felt		
wind			wind		
Size of Space			Size of Space		
Boundary			Boundary		
Character of space			Character of space		
Paving materials			Paving materials		
Special features			Special features		
Accessibility			Accessibility		
Aesthetics			Aesthetics		
Park facility used			Park facility used		
Feeling safe?			Feeling safe?		
Supervised?			Supervised?		