

## **FLOWER FIELD GUARDIAN PROJECT**

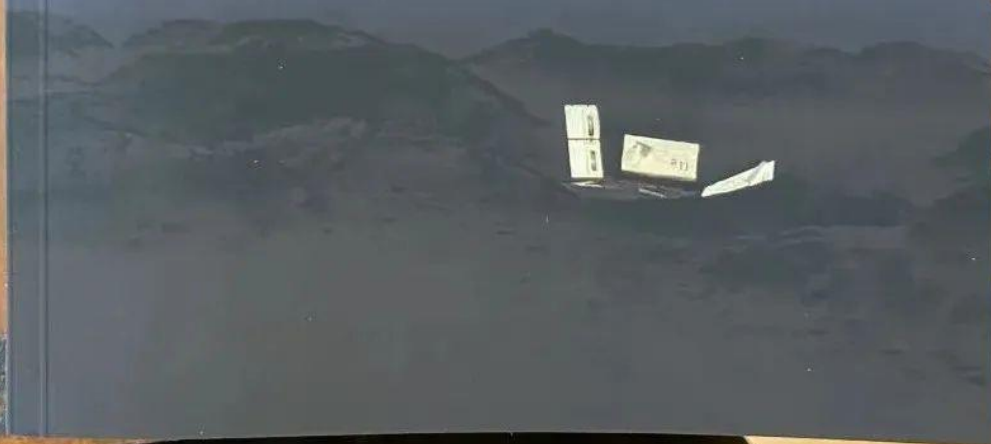
### **Participatory Approach of Community Building and Community-based Environmental Education**

In July 2020, the "**Flower Field Guardian**" project was funded by the Suzhou Industrial Park Meisong Community's Party Building Service Project, initiated and implemented by Suzhou Industry Part Green Light Year Environment Protection Center (GLY). The implementation of this project not only provides a place for the residents of Meisong Community to plant vegetables and flowers, but also provides a platform for the residents to exchange planting experiences and learn about community environmental governance. At the same time, in this community interacting process, a learning community that focus on the Sustainable Development was built on the basis of a social community. And an Education for Sustainable Development Engagement Platform is built and developed on a social community level, where the residents can engage in the creative activities, such as Project Based Learning.

Although GLY exited at the end of 2020, the "Flower Field Guardian" still maintained a well self-operation. The compost bin of this project consumes 1000 kilograms food waste each year. In December 2021, Flower Field Guardian was awarded the "Zero Carbon Community - International Innovation Case".

**Nannan Xie**, the Project Manager and Deputy Secretary General of GLY, worked with the intern - **Yao Wang**, to summarize the experiences of implementing Flower Field Guardian project. And the article Flower Field Guardian Project was published on the **11th issue of GROUND UP in 2022** (Ground Up is the student-run journal of the Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning at the University of California, Berkeley). We share this article with dear readers.

*Feedback*  
GROUND UP





process of asking for help from neighborhood committee staff and property administrators. There was a sense of experience, knowing that teamwork is better stimulated in facing common problems.

"To treat street-side corners of the flower fields," Shen Ruihua, the garden director, is always excited when talking about the flower field.

Shen felt that this activity played a very positive role in promoting cooperation between himself, the team and the community. Like Shen, there are many retirees among the members of the Flower Field Guardian project; however, they all expressed their eagerness to learn about new technologies when they were introduced to the new environment-friendly planting technology brought by Green Light-year. The small world and Shen felt this world with care and love by checking the growth of the flowers and the soil moisture of the flower beds every morning even during holidays. In Shen's words, the flower fields take her back to 50 years ago, when most people were still living in the countryside and grew their own crops. He was excited to share that he has already watered three batches of garlic that he planted.

### 3. A Platform to Buy Environmental Products to Practice

Since the implementation of garbage classification in China on June 1, 2020, a new wave of environmental protection has swept across the country. Residents of the community, in order to grasp the opportunity for residents to take action to reduce behind garbage classification.

Wang Jie, one of the members of the Flower Field Guardian project, has been participating in the project since it started. She learned to carry out environmental protection in her own sense of curiosity. Through various opportunities to join many activities, she found that the project aims to address the environmental environment around their own lives. For example, collecting food waste to make compost would run down to collect the flowers and plants a day. If it rains, they are afraid that the flowers will be watered too much, and if it is sunny, the flowers will be dried. We can see how the people are growing with the flowers.



### 4. Xi Youwei Just Half a Step Ahead of Community Members

As of the end of October 2020, the Flower Field Guardian project has been running for two months. 90% of the Flower Field members who participated in the program before that being part of the program to help them and their families to have a more thorough understanding of environmental protection. From a more active participation in caring for the environment. For example, everyone requested that kitchen waste be sorted at home and brought to the Flower Field for composting. More than 80% of the gardeners hoped that this project would mark the beginning of a series of future activities in the collective undertaking of environmental protection in the Flower Field.

Community building approaches should embrace environmental change as the by-product of the behavior of each individual. It seems to make a bottom-up approach, instead of top-down. It is to make sure they become the real-life "grass roots" of community members. Getting the "grass roots" to help in creating a necessary awareness that is both "for the community," "by the community," and "of the community."

To connect with the community's hope for future activities, the Green Light-year team has been rigorously brainstorming ideas and plans that might encourage further community engagement and environmental activities. One of these plans

I called "Green Garden Little Classroom," a sub-program to introduce the Flower Field Guardian project. The program aims to introduce children and young people to the activities that are going on in the garden of the Flower Field in an engaging and interesting way.

Green Light-year wanted to bring to citizens, officials and community-based groups, to more understand the Flower Field Guardian. With the participation, support and ongoing effort, we are all becoming a leading environmental education platform in China and encourage the public to help in creating coverage of sustainable development.



## FLOWER FIELD GUARDIAN PROJECT

Participatory Approach of Community Building and Community-based Environmental Education

NANNAN XIE & YAO WANG

These are typical conversations one might hear in Xue Song Garden, Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP). This casual chatter is actually part of an ongoing process of community building through participatory environmental education.

In 2020, Green Light-year launched the Flower Field Guardian project with SIP residents to design a space for people to grow vegetables and flowers, while also establishing a platform for residents to participate in community environmental governance, and exchange of relevant experiences.

Flower Field Guardian is a lot better. Could you please take care of the flowers for me?

Miss, could you help me take a look at how to grow my potted flower?

There are so many insects on the stem of this flower. What shall we do?

I just keep thinking about it now so I have to come here every day after work!

I'm going to make a dish using these newly grown garlic shoots and fries pork for dinner today!

The whole community gathered to plant seedlings together.

NANNAN XIE & YAO WANG

These are typical conversations one might hear in Mei Song Garden, Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP). What comes to mind? Growing flowers? Vegetables? This casual chatter is actually part of an ongoing process of community building through participatory environmental education.

In 2020, Green Light-year launched the Flower Field Guardian project with SIP residents to design a space for people to grow vegetables and flowers, while also establishing a platform for residents to participate in community environmental governance, and exchange of relevant experiences.



The whole community gathered and planted seedlings together.

Most residents of Mei Song Garden of SIP are highly educated, young and have an open-minded perspective on globalization. Hence, the communities are also built around innovative ideas of the youth. However, most Chinese residents view the neighborhood simply as a place to live, rather than a space for communal engagement. For example, on the topic of garbage classification, a recent public policy, many community residents view it as an obligation, rather than active stewardship of their environment. Therefore, to increase livability and integrate eco-friendliness into residents' daily lives, managers of Mei Song Garden invited Green Light-year, a non-governmental organization specializing

in environmental education and youth empowerment, to carry out an in-depth investigation on the community and propose a plan that helps activate the residential space.

Lu Siyue , the founder of the Taiwan Social Building Alliance, believes that community building is a bridge between “keeping the family together” and “governing a country”. Creating ways to support the needs of a modern community is highly complex; every community requires support for elderly care, childcare, accessibility, children’s education, youth counseling, and lifelong learning. In response to these demands, what the government can do is to protect the bottom line and satisfy everyone’s basic needs equally. As a result, many social service organizations are stepping in front of the government and playing an important role in meeting such demands for areas that have been neglected by the government.

However, a drop in the bucket is not enough to cover the needs of the entire community. A more sustainable way to meet such demand comes from changing the communities themselves. People who are most concerned about children are their parents, and the ones that are most concerned about the elderly are their children. Consequently, the first task of building such a community in community activities, and to contribute to building the community environment together. To form good habits, we could educate people by organizing regular classes and informative sessions for them to participate in spare time, but building an environmental community should be seen as important as work. These actions allow residents to learn from hands-on experiences, and at the same time, be motivated by achievements to continue growing such a community.



Green Light-Year, neighborhood committees and community leaders meet to discuss community needs

## **1. Let Demands from the Community Speak for Themselves**

We began our work with the Mei Song Garden community by seeking out the specific problems that the community faces and the residents' needs. After communicating with the leaders of the Mei Song Garden community, we learned that a considerable number of residents like to grow flowers and plants at home, and they are interested in learning more about gardening.

In one meeting, when discussing how to fertilize the flowers and vegetables, residents expressed interest in it being organic and pollution-free. After listening to the residents' desires for the project, we suggested that they use a public compost bucket to make fertilizer themselves; in our work with Mei Song Garden residents we prioritized listening to the community's needs and allowing them to lead the project, and supporting these decisions with expert advice. In this way, we were able to establish intimate connections with the residents and help them become more active participants.

## **2. Build Consensus through Deep Participation**

A Chinese proverb says: "Nothing can be accomplished without norms or standards". For a common space, establishment of rules are critical for better

operations. The guardians of Mei Song Flower Field jointly developed the Flower Field Contract around seven aspects:

**Flower Field Name:**

every guardian participates in deciding the name of the flower field

**Responsibilities of the Director:**

as a group, all the guardians discussed and established guidelines of responsibility for the director, whom they elected

**Secretary Assistant:**

the guardians also assigned a secretary to facilitate the director

**Customization Mechanism:**

Guardians are allowed to choose their own flower fields and decide where they would like to place them

**Transfer Mechanism:**

Guardians are supposed to transfer their fields to others under mutual agreement if they themselves are too busy to take care of their flowers

**Maintenance Mechanism:**

Each guardian must promise that they will meet the basic requirements on watering and fertilizing the flowers everyday in order for them to thrive

**Attendance and Reward Mechanism:**

Guardians are taken attendance based on their involvement in the communal housekeeping of the flower field (e.g. sweeping the floor and cleaning the equipments), and the most active members will receive reward at the end of each year

Everyone contributed their ideas in the course of the discussion. The Contract of the Mei Song Flower Field is a carrier of the ever-changing consensus. In the process of participation, the owners found that the floor of the flower field often had problems such as unswept garbage, or lack of water in water tanks. In response, one member put forward the solution of setting up a weekly rotation scheme that assigns a correspondent who is responsible for taking care of the area. This once again shows that only when community members are invested in it, is there a sense of ownership and care of the space. The contract establishes a sense of belonging such that they would want to come to have a look at the flower fields everyday after work.



In the flower field, each bucket is taken care of by residents and is labeled by their names

After developing a contract, we started to design and construct the flower fields. All owners of the field are involved in the process, including designing and assembling the fence, the signage, and the wooden door of the field. But there were several unexpected occasions in the process of building the wooden door. For example, when a nail was missing at the last step, everyone had to figure out a solution together. With a common goal in mind, community members worked concertedly in the process of asking help from neighborhood committee staff and property administrators. There is a sense of coherence, which showcases how teamwork is better stimulated in facing common problems.

“We have twenty-nine owners of the flower fields!” Shen Ruizhou, the garden director Shen Ruizhou is always excited when talking about the flower field.

Shen felt that this activity played a very positive role in promoting cooperation between himself, the team and the community. Like Shen, there are many retirees among the members of the Flower Field Guardian project; however, they all expressed their willingness to learn about new technologies when they were introduced to the new environment-friendly planting technology brought by Green Light-year. The small portion of the field they own becomes like their own little world, and Shen fills this world with care and love by checking the growth of the flowers and the soil moisture of the flower fields every morning,



even during holidays. In Shen's words, the flower fields take him back to 50 years ago, when most people were still living in the countryside and grew their own crops. He was excited to share that he has already eaten three batches of garlic that he planted.

### **3. A Platform to Bring Environmental Education from Theory to Practice**

Since the implementation of Garbage Classification Law in China on June 1, 2020, every corner of the community has been filled up with brand-new interesting slogans related to garbage classification. But from the perspective of residents of the community, it is more important to create opportunities for residents to truly realize the motivations behind garbage classification.

Wang Wei, one of the owners of the flower field, shared that the biggest takeaway for her from participating in the Flower Field Guardian program is to see how it affected her daughter, who learned to carry out research and observation to fulfill her own sense of curiosity. Theoretical teaching in schools, such as environmental stewardship, does not give students the opportunities to put theory into practice, and this problem is what this project aims to address. After participating in our project, children tend to pay more attention to the natural environment around them and do what they can to help, for example, collecting the peels and using them as compost. Children also enjoyed the process of planting flowers – sometimes they would run downstairs to check the flowers two or three times a day. If it rains, they are aware that the flowers cannot be watered too much, and if it is sunny they would wonder if the flowers would get thirsty. We can see how these young guardians are growing with the flowers.

### **4. Put Yourself Just Half A Step Ahead of Community Members**

As of the end of October 2020, the Flower Field Guardian program has been running for two months. 99% of the flower field owners who participated in the program believe that being part of this program has helped themselves and their families to have a more thorough understanding of environmental stewardship. There is a more active participation in caring for the environment and everyone requested that kitchen wastes need to be sorted at home and brought to the flower field for composting, which further stimulated enthusiasm in flower field owners. More than 80% of the guardians hoped that this project would mark the beginning of a series of future activities on the collective undertaking of environmental stewardship in Mei Song Garden.

Community building approach should embrace incremental change as the key to change the behavior of each individual. If we were to take a bottom-up approach, external organizations need to make sure they position themselves

just “half a step” ahead of community members. Getting too far ahead does not help in creating a community environment that is both “for the community”, “by the community”, and “of the community”.

To resonate with the community’s hope for future activities, the Green Light-year team has been vigorously brainstorming ideas and plans that might be fitful candidates for encouraging further community engagement and environmental activism. One of these plans is called “Secret Garden Little Detective”, a sub-program we position under the Flower Field Guardian project. This program aims to introduce children and young people to the edible plants that are growing in the corridors of Mei Song Garden in an engaging and interactive way.

Green Light-year is excited to bring its creative, effective and community-based approach to more communities like Mei Song Garden. With our consciousness, expertise and ongoing effort, we aim to become a leading environmental education platform in China and encourage the public to happily practice the concept of sustainable development.