

From Community Success to Sustainability: The Fragility of Community Capacity in Taiwan

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Abstract

Community development policies often emphasize building local capacity as a pathway to stronger and more sustainable communities. Yet the capacities that contribute to community success do not necessarily ensure their continuity over time. This study examines how successful communities in Taiwan build and sustain community capacity, with particular attention to the vulnerabilities that may emerge during this process. Employing a two-phase qualitative design, Phase I involved field observations and in-depth interviews with leaders from 22 purposively selected high-performing communities across Taiwan, while Phase II convened seven focus group discussions with 23 scholars, practitioners, and local government officials. Findings show that successful communities commonly possess strong leadership, committed volunteers, organizational capacity, extensive internal and external networks, and access to public resources. However, these same strengths may also generate vulnerabilities, including dependence on key leaders, difficulties in leadership succession, ageing volunteer bases, unstable professional manpower, fragmented collaboration, and reliance on government funding. The study argues that community sustainability depends not simply on accumulating capacity, but on the ability to share, transfer, renew, and institutionalize it over time. It therefore highlights the need to move beyond capacity building toward **capacity institutionalization**, providing a more dynamic understanding of how successful communities can achieve long-term sustainability.

Keywords: community capacity, community sustainability, capacity building, leadership succession, community development, Taiwan