

## **Urban development issues in China's Cities: Part One**

### **Community action to preserve the local environment**

“The power of text messages – how the movement to stop the building of a PX factory in Xiamen began”.

Article by XIE Liangbing and ZHAO Lei.

Source: “Zhongguo Xinwen zhoukan”, *China Newsweek*, No. 20, 2007.

Abstract: While the contamination of water with blue-green algae in Taihu Lake led to serious consequences, the city of Xiamen worried over the PX project. This year, during the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress and the National People's Congress, 105 members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference put forward a motion entitled, “Proposal to move the PX factory (PX for paraxylene) from Haicang”. Opponents cite concern over the factory location, only 7 kilometres from downtown Xiamen and the city's tourist area, and 4 kilometres from university residences. The motion addresses the possibility of a security disaster and of the hidden risks of pollution.

Various newspapers and TV media spoke about the motion, to which people in Xiamen quickly reacted, asking how it was possible that a project whose public impact was so great had been developed in secrecy, and that despite the motion, the government continued to withhold information regarding the PX project. Residents of Xiamen have sidestepped attempts to keep the affair under wraps by using less regulated forms of communication such as text messages, discussion boards, email and instant messaging to circulate information and discuss a problem which directly affects their well-being. This led to a peaceful “Anti PX” Yellow Ribbon campaign, during which residents were able to express a need for active dialogue with the government, and for more detailed information about the situation.

The municipal government of Xiamen has announced its decision to suspend the development of the PX factory on Haicang following a strong public reaction to the project. Also announced was the creation of a new environmental protection commission. This commission has a more encompassing role than it has had in the past, and will examine environmental protection measures that could be applied to the region's chemical industry. As a means of taking public opinion into account, the

municipality has also created an information hotline and a PX project web site, bringing down the “wall” which had prevented the exchange of information. Those who often voiced their opposition to the PX project in the streets are now waiting attentively for the environmental protection commission report, due to be published this November.

Inhabitants of Xiamen and Wuxi are faced with the same problem. The municipality is keen to develop large-scale projects during its mandate, often favouring economic advancement at the expense of acceptable living and housing standards for local communities. Previously classified as the top city out of nine for air quality in the province of Fujian, the city of Xiamen finished third from the bottom in 2006. Xiamen also ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in a study examining the production value of large companies operating in 15 province-level cities. The PX production site, considered to be world’s largest, along with the involvement of other related sectors, would generate 80 billion yuan in annual revenues, a little over a quarter of GDP for the city of Xiamen.

Whereas Wuxi residents can only look to the municipality’s pollution clean-up program, or criticize today how the crisis was managed, residents in Xiamen quickly learned how to use new communication tools and techniques, mobilize and focus public action, reasonably express public opinion, and communicate their desire to be involved in political issues. The use of new media tools to access information, the improvement of traditional, more restricted communication methods, and the people’s movement to be involved in the decisions shaping the future of their city are achievements which, in addition to promoting a constructive analysis of political decisions at all levels of power, also provide an excellent model for people in other Chinese cities facing similar problems.

End.

« The power of text messages – how the movement to stop the building of a PX factory in Xiamen began », XIE Liangbing, ZHAO Lei, “Zhongguo Xinwen zhoukan”, China Newsweek, No. 20, 2007



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/fr/deed.fr>