

Learning Cities: Interdisciplinary Urban Studio in Nanjing

Between 31 August and 18 September, 18 Chinese and 18 German students had an exciting experience within the Sino-German project "The Learning City – Interdisciplinary Studios for Urban Development. A Sino-German Initiative".

The first Urban Studio within the city partnership between Essen and Changzhou took place at Southeast University in Nanjing. The Studio is a part of the Sino-German project "The Learning City" led by the Wuppertal Institute and the China programme of the U.S.-based Energy Foundation. The project is sponsored by Stiftung Mercator and will run two years. The Studio aims at providing German and Chinese students with the opportunity to develop innovative urban planning concepts for Wujin District in Changzhou in an interdisciplinary environment under supervision of experts.

Changzhou – the city our projects will focus on – is located in the **Jiangsu province** at the Yangtze River, the third longest river in Asia. The prosperous Yangtze River Delta, of which the cities of Changzhou, Nanjing and Shanghai are part, generates as much as 20% of China's GDP. The town's nickname is "Dragon Town". It has a population of 3.5 million people (urban). The city is located right in the middle between Nanjing and Shanghai. Both cities are just a one-hour train ride away (about 150 km each way).



The city is a national tourist hub and one of the national and provincial industrial centres. The history of the city goes back 2,500 years. For a long time, Changzhou profited from the Grand Canal, which made the city a major canal port and trans-shipment point. Textile industries dominated the local industrial production for many years. By now, the industrial contribution to its GDP has reached 57% and the share is still increasing. The promotion of its high-tech sector and modern service sector is high on the political agenda, as well as low carbon development of the city. *Picture: Changzhou Old City District. Photo: Chen Yihan (CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons)*

The three-week Studio combined lectures, field trips, group work, and exchange sessions with Changzhou stakeholders and prominent urban designing experts in China. It started with lectures in which students, especially German students, gained an understanding of the urban development in China. For example, they learned about the challenges of urban development and planning and the governance structure of urban planning. This understanding had been largely enhanced by the intensive exchange with Chinese students and lecturers in three weeks.



Field trip in the old town / Photo: project participant

To develop a tailored solution to local conditions, the students joined in-depth excursions to relevant sites and districts in Changzhou. The first excursion was guided by the Wujin urban planning bureau and Changzhou Science and Education Town. They introduced the students to the different sites for which the city government is facing challenges (for example, development of the old town in the district or revitalisation of water canal system in the district) and is still searching for solutions. The second excursions was organised by the students themselves and gave them a chance to interview different stakeholders and obtain more detailed information about the sites.

On the last day, students presented their ideas of transforming different sites under the paradigm of “small is beauty” in a step-by-step approach.

Three different topics were selected:

- how to improve the so-called “Sunan Business Model” (a typical business model in Changzhou),
- how to vitalise the old city area,
- and rethink water culture.

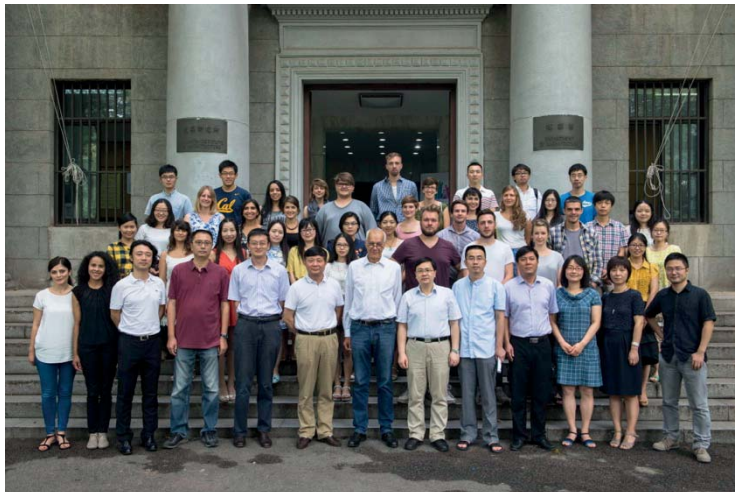
Under each topic, the students were further grouped according to different sites and perspectives. There was an overarching group which set the overall framework and integrated all topics.

Three weeks were short. All experts and Changzhou stakeholders were impressed by the solutions the students delivered, the interdisciplinary and systematic approach they took, and their commitment. Students expressed they had learn a lot about both professional knowledge and culture from each other.



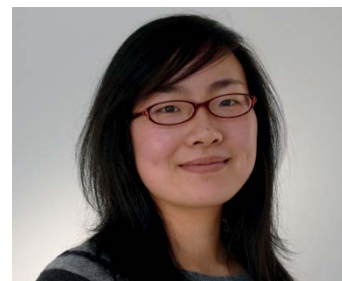
Final presentation /photo: project participant

The studio will be followed by a good practice tour taking place between 26 October and 30 October in Germany, during which all Chinese students and six Changzhou stakeholders will visit the Ruhr region. The students will visit good practice sites related to their solutions and exchange insights with stakeholders. The tour will serve as input for students to further refine their solutions and present the solutions in the final stakeholder meeting in Changzhou in April 2016.



Participants of the project /Photo: project participant

Further project information:
**The Learning City:
Interdisciplinary Studios for
Sustainable Urban
Development - A Sino-
German Initiative**



Reported by: Dr. Chun Xia
Project Co-ordinator,
Wuppertal Institute for
Climate, Environment and
Energy