Emerging Practices

Inquiry into the Developing

新兴实践：发展中的探究

马 谨　Davide Fassi　娄永琪　编

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Introduction

"Articles end where emerging practices continue to appear and evolve." We dropped this line at the end of the introduction to *Emerging Practices: Professions, Values, and Approaches*, the anthology of essays from the first two conferences, in the hope that the dialogue may continue. One year later, we are most pleased to host this short opening here for the proceedings of the third Emerging Practices Conference held by the College of Design and Innovation, Tongji University on October 13th, 2014. The main theme is "developing."

Figure 1. Jin Ma and Yongqi Lou, eds., *Emerging Practices: Practices, Values, and Approaches in Design* (Beijing, China: China Architecture & Buildings Press, 2014).

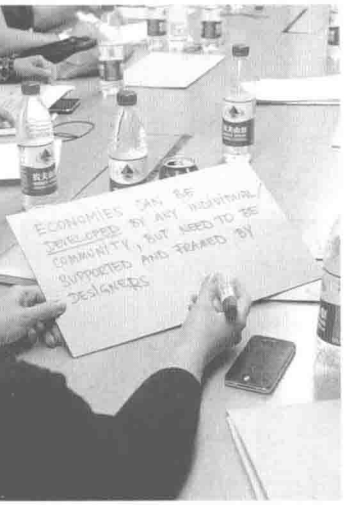
The idea of 'developing' is controversial. On the one hand, the word developing often implies inferiority, and is used as a synonym of underdeveloped. On the other hand, developing is the present participle of to develop, which literally means to bring out the capabilities or possibilities of something and a process of evolving toward a more advanced or effective state.

For instance, a developing country is defined in terms of a lower standard of living, less-developed industrial base, and lower Human Development Index in comparison with other developed countries. This is a prevailing understanding of the term developing. Arguably, the status of being 'developing' can nevertheless be a great asset to a country. It can provide energy and space to initiate a series of sustainable paradigm shifts, including reshaping values, changing rules of action, ways of living and production, and ultimately reforming the whole society and economy. The rapidly changing dynamics in developing countries make major transformations possible.

In this sense, the word developing can be used to frame a situation that is still in progress, full of potentialities and energy, and at the same time in need of inputs, skills, and resources. The term developing may refer to countries, communities, policies, services, knowledge, tools, methods, and many more. All these constitute an energetic landscape, upon which discussions on emerging practices of design become challenging, yet more meaningful.

We aimed to facilitate discourses that reflect on the prevailing acceptance and implicit interpretation of the notion of 'developing'. Further, it would explore the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that the status of being developing offers, in various scenarios of emerging practices driven by design.

To foster productive discussions, we raised several questions that merit examination from the participants' specific viewpoints. These include: What are the strengths of being developing? What are the shared challenges and values between the practices conducted in the developing context and those grounded in the developed context? How can the established/



prevailing approaches be adapted to the state of being developing? How can the practices deeply contextualized in the developing scenarios inspire the approaches toward innovation?

The main theme, along with these questions, was further contextualized with five sub-themes including: developing communities, developing economics, developing research and openness, developing education, and developing explorations.

Taking a step forward, for each parallel session we focused on various sets of topics that hopefully would generate serious reflections. For communities, we looked into enabling and empowering, connectedness and relationality, and practices in modeling social awareness. For economies, topics varied from alternative economies and emerging business models, to best practice of transition from product to service, and to the global landscape of creative industries. The sub theme of developing research and openness aimed to explore emerging forms of academic publication, managing fuzziness in the process of opening design, and challenges and strategies. When design education with a shifting agenda is concerned, we anticipated serious responses toward aspects such as re-designing curriculum, challenges and lessons learned, and leadership and entrepreneurship. And, for explorations under way, we encouraged thoughts and practices on topics ranging from critical reflection on alternative futures, innovation inspired by nature, to new ways of making.

While planning the third Emerging Practices Conference (2014), we kept asking ourselves, why people would need another design conference? Aside from the set of topics that we saw as highly relevant to the challenges designers and researchers face today, there must be something that is able to inspire people's involvement and contribution.

Driven by this simple motivation we decided to take a design approach to shape the conference. A design conference, in our eyes, is an event, a service indeed, that intends to foster communication and co-construction of knowledge. It is about being involved into an enriching process where networking could improve the exchange of knowledge and research development. Consequently, we developed an experiential format of an interactive conference.

The format, named "from speaking to acting" was structured around the principle of using conference speakers' presentations to trigger a debate about provided topics. The outputs, documented by all the participated with the aid of specific toolkits, arrived at two levels: First, comments on and responses to participants' individual projects; Second, thematic clusters in the discussed area in terms of the future research agenda of the community. The entire activity culminated with a narrative outcome based exhibition at the end of the parallel sessions. Each participant received a comments booklet that was just made by and for her/him. This "wonder" moment made sense of all the activities along the past journey and sparked a sense of being involved in an active part of an unfolding research activity.

Through this preliminary format, we were practicing an alternative approach in developing the conference titled "Emerging Practices."

Finally, let's conclude with some facts and figures. Starting with receiving 96 paper proposal applications in total from different parts of the world, we selected 53 proposals and 48 of them were presented at the conference. Following the peer review process 27 full papers were accepted and included into the Proceedings.

Articles end where emerging practices continue to appear and evolve. We welcome comments of all kinds on, and beyond what is accommodated by this little book. It comes from a small, and yet, meaningful event where the value of human interaction and knowledge co-creation is profoundly appreciated. For this, we are deeply grateful to our participants, authors, reviewers, volunteers, and many others, for their contributions, support, and patience.

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#developing community

Envisioning Collective Wishes with Local Community for Social Innovation towards Village Regeneration in Inner Mongolia

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Abstract: This paper reports co-design interventions with local community of practice at Inner Mongolia, who are keepers of a vernacular architectural practice dated back to 2000 BC. The research aims to explore a social innovation method towards sustainable village regeneration in China. We report four days community engagements with tools and activities designed and implemented as a result of collaboration between three design researchers, local NGOs and the local community. We describe co-design interventions based on a framework of co-design which works through envisioning and enacting community's imagination for social innovation. We conclude by addressing the embodied co-design tools developed with the locals as an unobtrusive form of activities to engage community to work towards consensus. We addressed the importance of design activism, which take into the considerations local values, and to achieve social innovation through collaborative imagination of the community's collective wishes.

Keywords: *Co-design, community of practice, rural village, China, social innovation, village regeneration.*

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1. Rural Reconstruction at Disappearing Villages in China

Modern China is undergoing rapid urbanization that rural villages are disappearing due to young villagers are giving up labor-intensive farming to work in towns and cities. This uneven distribution of urban-rural population changes Chinese social-cultural landscape. In contrary to most countries in the world, Chinese culture is largely preserved in the countryside due to the mainland's long history in farming where settlements gathered on fertile lands. These rural communities are also keepers of wide range traditional practices unique to China such as art and crafts, architectural, farming related, and more. The romantic feeling of traditional villages as happy living environments echoes particularly among urbanites who used to be villagers, but there is no going back. Infrastructure in the villages such as schools and clinics were closed down during the past twenty years, preventing young families to return to the village.

When the elderly generation in the villages deceases within next few decades, we will face a loss of traditional Chinese culture often preserved through these communities of practice dated back to thousands of years. To preserve this, we need to find new ways to integrate these disappearing traditional villages into modern China. The preservation of rural environment involves two issues: connecting rural population to their local traditions; and to do so with a strategy of sustainable development. It can be accomplished by introducing design process which takes into the consideration of elements such as farming, agriculture, local culture, landscape heritage, pollution control, education, social awareness, management, business and tourism. This would leads to an understanding urban-rural relationship in the flow of materials, information, funds and human resources.

1.1 Case study: The village of Yuan Zi Gou Cun

At our case study, the hamlet of Yuan Zi Gou Cun, the loss is an ancient cultural tradition of mud cave house construction dated back to 2000 BC. The unique way of building houses is done by digging into the mountain, only practiced by male villagers, passing down through generations without any documentation (see Figure 1). This paper reports a four days co-design engagement with village community of Yuan Zi Gou Cun (园子沟村) at rural Inner Mongolia, a northern region of China, a forgotten hamlet below a mountain located near the lake of DaiHai (岱海) and next to Liangcheng town (凉城). The engagement forms the beginning of a practice-based research project aims to develop co-design model of activism with local values in mind, with applied objective to help regenerate villages in China. To do so, we collaborated with local NGOs XiuShi Charity Foundation—a Beijing-based charity foundation who has charitable presence in the village since 2011; by adapting co-design framework to enact and envision with the villagers to innovate to encourage returnees back to live in the village.

The village was once a prosperous village with over 1600 inhabitants ten years ago is now left with fewer than 200 villagers. Majority of them

aged over sixty and still work as farmers for self-sufficiency, alongside women and infant children. The rapid decrease of village population causes close down on facilities such as schools and clinics, which further hinders the possibilities of returnees to the villages. XiuShi confirmed the availability of financial aid by the government to rural household in some remote areas and special provinces (like Inner Mongolia). Despite these efforts, we observed many abandoned houses, infrastructure and areas in the village.

Yuan Zi Gou Cun village presents a simple structure of a rural settlement. An elderly home and a small shop that sells basic good are located at the entrance of the village. Some of the roads are paved while most are mud roads, for example the main path that leads village entrance to the public space centered on the village's main fresh water source, a natural spring water well. Parallel to the main path is a narrow river streams from a bio-diversified mountain towards Daihai Lake just outside the village. Most habitats in the village are located along this path, including the village's only school, which is now closed. Even grounds naturally form common areas where villagers socially gathered after farming, before or after their dinner.

Life in the village centered on farming activities. The men, mostly elderlies, work from sunrise to mid afternoon on crops such as corn, maze, potatoes and wheat; for own consumption and for minimal income by selling the excess to agents. The government substitutes their living cost very minimally; while their children in the cities support a few lucky ones. Animals such as cows and donkeys are major forms of labor-intensive activities such as farming and transportation. Sheep are shepherded around the grounds of abandoned and exposed habitats.

The nearest town Liangcheng is 8 km away, structured along two main streets where shops, restaurants and services located. The town and the village despite such a short distance, present two contrasting standard of living: a remote area where inhabitants still use animals as a mean of transportation and a modern town where one drives a Jeep, and get entertainment at KTV Karaoke. This contrast is mirrored in thousands of villages in China.

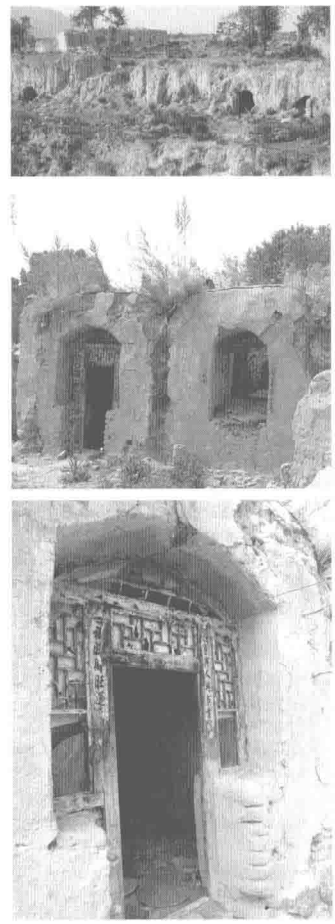

Figure 1. Well-kept vernacular architectural practice cave and "modern" mud houses.

2. Research Methodology

The practice-based research has an applied aim to preserve the village's vernacular architectural practice by encouraging returnees. We sought localized, democratic and sustainable method that facilitates communities to create solutions for their everyday problems, which economic system is unable to address.[1] We collaborate closely with our NGO partner—XiuShi to ensure the problem can be addressed locally by villagers as a bottom up approach to meet top down policy made by the government.[2] We hope to enable social transformation and sustainable growth that modify current situation by replacing old individualistic values with a community sense of knowledge exchange and support. To do so, we explored and experimented with tools and methods to engage locals for the practice.

1 Ezio Manzini, "Design for Social Innovation vs. Social Design," *DESIS Network*, July 8, 2014, accessed October 1, 2014, http://desis-network.org/content/design-social-innovation-vs-social-design; Anna Meroni, *Creative Communities. People Inventing Sustainable Ways of Living* (Milano: Edizioni POLI.design, 2007).

2 Geoff Mulgan, Simon Tucker, Rushanara Ali, and Ben Sanders, "Social Innovation: What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated" (working paper, Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, Said Business School, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2007).

Figure 2. Social innovation with villagers, NGOs and volunteers.

Mixed methods research was adopted with interventionist process happened alongside ethnographic observation.[3] Narratives were gathered and thematically analyzed with Grounded Theory approach.[4] We took advantage of multi-lingual, cross-cultural (Chinese, Italian, British) and interdisciplinary (co-design, environmental design, healthcare design and community NGOs). We take Chambers'[5] participatory rural appraisal that encourages local views from rural community to contribute to projects planning and management. In addition to members from XiuShi; village kids returned for the long weekend; and ex-teacher of the abandoned school, helped as ad hoc engagement assistants during fieldwork (see Figure 2, 3).

A series of community engagements were carried out centred on XiuShi's plan to encourage returnees through redesigning while preserving the vernacular habitat for eco-tourism. A week fieldwork during June 2014 was made possible by researchers in-kind time and travel cost funded by XiuShi. The abandoned school was used as our research base, while co-design interventions with the villagers and public took place near the school's entrance. Co-design interventions enable villagers to collectively innovate as the expert of their experiences.[6] Together we collect knowledge, envisioned context; and enacted ideas; which are often fuzzy and opportunistic; established interaction with the community, collecting insights and in-depth framework on current situation to inform future development.[7]

3. Collective Imagery Co-Design Framework

We facilitate villagers to co-design based on collective imagery framework,[8] which works on the externalization of individual creative imagery to share with others' as a common space for co-design activity to take place. Collective Imagery is a theoretical framework informed by practice-based research to extend Finke et al.'s work on pre-inventive structure of creative imagery for the study of co-design.[9] The shared collective imagery is a conceptual structure that represents community's shared design space of which connections of ideas are made possible through spatial activities of deconstruction, construction and reconstruction. The structural connectedness of ideas and data give rise to creative emergence of design concept.

Conceptual structuring begins with connections of two elements (facts and possibilities, however partial), which also connected into facets to form a coherent system of structure. This system if orientated in a design context,

3 Alan Bryman, *Mixed Methods* (London: SAGE, 2006).

4 Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2014); Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1967).

5 "...you may not expect them to improve by only the actions of some benevolent but you need an active role from the rural insiders." See Robert Chambers, "The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal," *World Development* 22, no. 7 (1994): 953–69.

6 Froukje Sleeswijk Visser, Pieter Jan Stappers, Remko van der Lugt, and Elizabeth B-N Sanders, "Contextmapping: Experiences from Practice," *Co-Design* 1, no. 2 (2005): 119–49; Liz Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design* (Amsterdam: BIS Publisher, 2012).

7 Anna Meroni, Davide Fassi, and Giulia Simeone, "Design for Social Innovation as a form of Design Activism: An Action Format" (paper presented at Social Frontiers: The Next Edge of Social Innovation Research, London, United Kingdom, November, 2013).

8 Priscilla Chueng-Nainby and Miaosen Gong, "Collective Imagery: A Framework for Co-Design," *5th International Congress of International Association of Societies of Design Research*, IASDR (Tokyo: JSSD, 2013).

9 Ronald A. Finke, Thomas B. Ward, and Steven M. Smith, *Creative Cognition: Theory, Research, and Applications* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1992).

Figure 3. Collective Weave with villagers with the help of NGOs and volunteers.

is a conceptual structure of design solution. There are two types of structures experimented: 1) A system of connections which gives rise to clusters as concepts; and 2) conceptual structure constructed from narratives that connected into stories of design concepts. Story is a system (sequential or not) of interconnected narratives as abductive way of linking elements. Three interventions were implemented: Collective Weave, Spatial Co-Design and Performative Behavioral.

3.1 Collective Weave intervention

We envisioned using Collective Weave by collecting the villagers' stories of their views on the past and future living.[10] We began with writing or drawing of one's reflection on the past and wishes on the future on colorful tags and threads; and then make connections by threading with each other's tags to enact and envision community's collective imagery, in this case, on their village living. We engaged villagers in two one-hour sessions of collective weave by asking three questions: 1) How was your life in the village before? 2) How is your life in the village now? 3) What is your wish for future on your living?

To make accessible to villagers and the public, we installed a collective weave on an even ground tied to the trees in front of the abandoned school (see Figure 3). The collective weave stayed on display for the whole period of the fieldwork so anyone could come to browse and add to the content. We found most of the elderly villagers are illiterate. To overcome this, we engaged three Chinese native speaking NGOs as independent researchers to record villagers' reflections and wishes by writing or drawing on the tags as shown in. The collective weave was taken down right before we leave the fieldwork. We took photos of the tags as data collected on villagers' reflections on their pasts and wishes on their futures (Figure 4). XiuShi's manager, Mr. Li expressed the engagement tool as icebreakers and fun for the villagers, which was easy to use yet powerful to create connections.

3.2 Spatial co-design intervention

We introduced spatial co-design intervention to enact villagers to design their habitats (see Figure 5). With limited resources in the village, we made use of discarded cardboard as the habitat space and tags to represent functional spaces. Villagers, researchers and NGOs, gathered in front of the abandoned school, sitting on foldable stools, and engaged in co-designing

10 Chueng-Nainby and Gong, "Collective Imagery"; Priscilla Chueng-Nainby, "Collective Imagery Weave: Visualizing knowledge to co-design with a community of research practitioners," in *Proceedings of the 19th DMI: Academic Design Management Conference Design Management in an Era of Disruption*, London College of fashion, ed. Erik Bohemia, Alison Rieple, Jeanne Liedtka, and Rachel Cooper (London: Design Management Institution, 2014); Priscilla Chueng-Nainby, "Co-Design in the Wild: A Collective Imagery Framework for Social Innovation," *CoDesign in the Wild* (blog), accessed September 10, 2014, http://www.priscilla.me.uk; Maaike Mulder-Nijkamp and Priscilla Chueng-Nainby, "Collective Brand Imagery Weave: Connecting Brand Values to Product Characteristics with Physical Complexity," in *Proceedings of 20th International Conference on Engineering Design*, Politecnico di Milano (Glasgow: Design Society, 2015).

Figure 4. Interpretive Analysis on tags and photos.

Figure 5. Spatial co-design intervention to redesign habitat with villagers.

Figure 6. Performative behavioural intervention on garbage collection.

their habitats. We asked two questions for this intervention: 1) How is your house now; and 2) How might you like your house design to be if cost is not a problem?

We labeled on tags to represent various functional rooms and spaces. The villagers extended the tools by improvising with natural materials such as stones and tree branches to represent and manipulate spaces. One elderly woman used her walking stick to draw on the sandy ground. It shows hands on manual capability of the community of practice. We capture their stories on the vernacular practice of mud house construction, which they described with verbal description over arrangement on the cardboard and drawing on the ground. We took photos of the designs for analysis to inform future research.

3.3 Performative behavioral intervention

The final activity was a performative intervention in the form of an outdoor drama, problem in the village (Figure 6).[11] During our stay, we came across rubbish scattered around their water sources such as the spring water well and the lake. Most rubbish was dated plastic packaging. The villagers are unaware of the risk of pollution. At a fieldwork break during the third day, when most men were at the farm; the research team spent three hours collecting garbage along the river and natural spring water well.

We did not plan this activity as an intervention but it caught the attention of mostly female villagers who were as usual gather at the other end of the public space across the river. Eventually three of them came to enquire about our seemingly strange act. We took this opportunity to explain to them the risk of plastic garbage in the water source. Two female villagers hang around and one (seemingly the youngest) joined in. The opportunistic

11 Eva Brandt and Camilla Grunnet, "Evoking the Future: Drama and Props in User Centered Design," in *Proceedings of Participatory Design Conference*, Malmö University, ed. Thomas Bindrer, Judith Gregory, and Ina Wagner (Palo Alto, CA: Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, 2000), 11–20.

act became a performative behavioral intervention that is creative yet effective to participatory reflection in action with the community to make aware of environmental issue.

4. Collective Insights from Village Community

Patterns emerged from collective weave depict a sense of loneliness and hopelessness among the elderly villagers and their wishes to be reunited with their children, even though they identified themselves as the burden for the better future of their children in the cities. However, they recognized that it will be difficult for them to get use to the life despite warm water in a city apartment. That they tend to feel more isolated in the cities, while they have friends and social network in the villages. Even though they feel lonely as their children are far away, they prefer village's simple life and air quality. The villagers' main activities were growing crops, feeding livestock and domestic fowling. Yet they felt healthy and happy with strength from living among big family. There was trust among villagers—it was not necessary to lock their properties. Nevertheless, many chose to move out even though their current living condition is better than the past with government support such as health insurance.

General issues include the decreased in village population, governmental policies, and the lack of healthcare, education, and entertainment; as well as weather related issues that affected farming. Aging is the main concern. One widow expressed her reluctance to live in the elderly home, as the decision will brings negative reputation on their children, even though she does not mind doing so. Villagers with children in the cities expressed their wishes to design for their children to return home to live even though it is only during the holidays. One villager designed the whole house with rooms dedicated to each of his adult children.

In general, a typical "modern" one-level mud house (see Figure 7) is built using bricks with a mix of soil and hay, produced locally at communal kilns located at the bottom of the mountain. Usually two bedrooms are linked through a living room in the middle, which faces a courtyard leading to the street. The bedroom is a multifunctional space where oddly includes stoves for cooking and heating. The bed is a wide heated platform where they spend most of the time on to rest and sleep. The toilet is located outdoor as a kind of primitive composting toilet surrounded by low walls, which provide just enough privacy. Vegetable plots and life stocks such as chickens and pigs populate the courtyard, which is also used as public space to gather and as a connecting space to the countryside.

Most villagers are happy with the size of their current habitat. They described room sizes in square meters, like most Chinese do. Majority did not ask for bigger space despite given the cost free scenario. A post-engagement reflective discussion among researchers and NGOs who are mainly city dwellers were impressed by the sense of contentment among the villagers

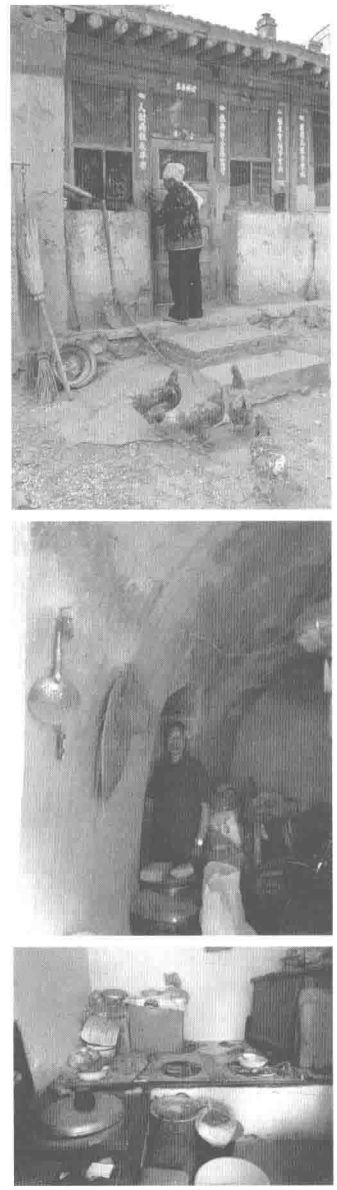

Figure 7. The "modern" mud house habitat.

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