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1  Background

In China, some districts exclusively for minority group are not so well developed in economy. But they have very unique natural environment and enjoy abundant intangible cultural heritages. However, in the context of globalization and modernization, their traditional communities have been strongly influenced by modern lifestyle. Faced with the culture collision, the distinguishing features in the culture are changing day by day, not just the visible changes in building and costumes, but also the shift of the customs, lifestyle, and communication way. Cultural diversity is as important as natural diversity, it is the general condition of the harmonious development of society and nature. Diverse local knowledge constitutes this diverse globalized world. Therefore, New Channel Design & Social Innovation Project tries to use community-centered design and participatory design to protect the local ecology and social capital, turning agricultural community to culture-and-information-oriented innovative community.

2  Research Subjects

Multi-sited practices were done from 2009 to 2014. In the past six years, annual summer camp program was organized by School of Design of Hunan University, which includes “New Channel”, “Jiang Home+Style”, ”YouGe Xing”, and “HYH”. We went to ethnic minority areas,
such as Tongdao County, Kashgar, Ili, Turpan, Youyang County and Longhui County, to seek new interpretation of culture, tradition and craftsmanship.
3 Participants

Led by Hunan University, New Channel Design & Social Innovation Project has gained supports from a wide range of participants, which include Markor International Home Furnishings Co., Ltd, Hunan Ministry of Science and Technology, Xinjiang Ministry of Science and Technology, and Nokia Research Center. Partnered with Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Xinjiang Normal University, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute etc., New Channel attracted more than three hundreds professors and students from different schools contributing to the project from diverse angles.

4 Goals

By combing local residents, government, and outside business, multi-disciplinary innovative team, a network-based information platform and design innovation alliance was built, to support conservation, communication and innovation for traditional culture. Thus design, as a more flexible form and a power acknowledged by the mass (innovation network, design network, social network etc.), can play its role in different phases of social innovation.

Our main goals are:
• Preserve and maintain traditional culture.
• Develop sustainable industries according to their cultural assets.
• Construct living environment for community to rebuild social cohesion.
• Promote communication across different culture for a better conversation.

5 Methodology

• Community-centered design

Community is an organic and integral system, which contains more meaning beyond the sum of separate elements. The village or community needs to be seen as a whole when we deal with the problem in the system. We put “individual” into “communities”, exploring how the holistic assets and social needs of community can lead to more social values. The discovery, which depends on, the interpretation of the local context and knowledge in the community, can generate solutions for the well-being of the whole community.
• Co-Creation

Ezio Manzini described social innovation as ‘a process of change where new ideas emerge from a variety of actors directly involved in the problems to be solved’. We involved the actors on all sides to spark ideas, including the government, NGOs, companies, and local residents and other grassroots institutions. Designers take the organizers’ responsibility and integrate natural resources, cultural resources, behavioral resources, knowledge resources and organizational resources into one platform to promote the co-creation process.

• Participatory design

Designing with local residents, we stimulate their innovation awareness, and encourage them to take part in the process of innovation. And all actors dive deep in the community, explore, yield and share practical “local knowledge” from the native’s point of view.

6 Design Contents

We built a joint innovation organization for this project. The approaches of this project are integrating multi-disciplines, protecting intangible cultural heritages, making use of industrial design, landscape design and life style design etc.

• Social Research

This team undertakes analysis about demographic structure, lifestyle, and ways of production, consuming style and social organization by field studies, interviews, and questionnaire.
• Video Design

This team aims at using video and music as media to connect these local areas and the outside, to attract more attention on this issue and solve problem together. The videos are mainly focused on documenting folk art.

• Landscape and Furnishing Design

This team helps to rebuild the uniqueness of the environment and culture features of each community in landscape design and interior design. Not only meet their demands for public spaces, traditional communication way and entertainment, but also find the balance between modern convenience and traditional architectural style.

• Industrial Design

This team aims at accomplishing design (products, visual, environment and services) with local Dong features. Localization and globalization crashed and burned, which means they would use two design approaches: to acquire local knowledge and design for local culture, service and production from designer’s point of view; to communicate and promote Dong culture to the world.

• Information Design

This team use digital ways to solve local people’s needs (Job-hunting networking), to preserve culture (database of Dong Brocade), and to catch people’s attention (the mobile App of New Channel, Jiang Home+Style, etc.).

• Visual Design

This team uses visual language and digital ways to represent traditional culture, like visualization of architectures, cloth design, wallpaper design etc. Also, this team designs for local business, like logo design, package design for local brands and design for tourism.
7 Future

Through a combination of different means, like community research, conservation of traditional culture, design participation and social innovation, we explore the new mode of “Culture & Creativity for Public Benefit”, to achieve the goal of “Social Creativity”.

In the next five years, we will

(1) create more job opportunities. By developing their ability of self-initiated innovation based on their local culture, we will help them to connect outside resources, markets and industries. Create 500 – 800 work opportunities in five years.

(2) create mode of cultural conservation and communication. We use different ways to present the diversity of local culture, and then to improve the cultural identity among different minorities and communities.

(3) integrate resources creatively. Through organizing diverse activities, such as international competition, exhibition and summer camp, we want to attract more designers and resources to participate in. We will provide supports to designers and volunteers with the instruction of resources for production and market channel. At the same time, form a relatively stable and open innovation system.

(4) create social and business value. Exploring the dual track mechanism to promote cultural innovation and industry at the same time. We will run through the industrial chain to promote
household products. Help create sustainable social enterprise through the innovation on business model.

8 Achievement & Award

The project has won awards as follows: “2011 China's top ten enterprise-led projects for public good”, awarded by Global Charity which belongs to China Soong Ching Ling Foundation; “Good Design Award 2012” (G-MARK) for community development and planning, which is the first domestic honor in this category; the first prize of “China Universities Industrial Design Competition” (CUIDC) in 2012, which is hosted by Chinese Ministry of Education; 2013, Best Producer Award, awarded by “Yue” Foundation.

The project have participated exhibitions domestic and overseas, such as Milan Design Triennial, Beijing Design Week, Asian Design Week of Green Design, Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture (UABB), Business of Design Week (BODW), and French Youth Film Festival.

GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2012