

INTRODUCTION

(RE)CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY DESIGN

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What do community designers across the Pacific Rim share in common? How can practices in the different political, institutional and social contexts inform each other? What lessons can be drawn from an increasing array of cross-cultural and transnational collaboration in design and planning? This collection of papers is an outcome of a three-day conference held in Seattle in September 2004 that brought together a dynamic group of activists/scholars from eight countries to answer and reflect on these critical questions concerning the growing practice of community design in the Pacific Rim.

'Community' and Community Design in the Face of Change

In recent decades, community design and planning has become a common part of urban planning and design practice in the Pacific Rim. With deep roots in advocacy planning and citizen participation developed in the United States, citizen participation and community planning can now also be found in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and even China. The movement toward citizen participation and community revitalization in the United States has been echoed by the Machizukuri Movement in Japan, the Community Building Movement (Sher-chu-zong-ti-yin-zhao)¹ in Taiwan, and an emerging challenge to the top-down urban planning and redevelopment process in Hong Kong. More recently, decentralization of decision-making in China has led to more government-led community building programs, and some experiments in participatory planning processes.

The parallel movements across the Pacific Rim reflect a shared aspiration of democratic decision-making and community building. However, while the idealism of community building begins to take roots, recent social changes across the Pacific Rim have also challenged the traditional notion of 'community' and the practice of community design and planning. In the United States, demographic shifts and other socio-economic forces have changed the composition, identity and definitions of communities in cities and regions. In Japan and Taiwan, influx of urban population as a result of continued urbanization is also changing the demographic makeup of traditional communities leading to competing interests and ideologies and often pitting newcomers against long-time residents. In Hong Kong, the traditional consultation process is no longer adequate in addressing conflicts and contentions in the redevelopment of

aging urban communities. In China, the drive toward economic development outpaces institutional and social adjustments. Across the region, globalization and its influence on economic activities and cultural change are contributing to transformations in the meanings, identities and spatial structure of urban landscapes. These changes provide the collective context for the papers included in this volume.

Why the Pacific Rim?

The growing practice of community planning and the conditions of changing communities present both revealing parallels and differences across the Pacific Rim.² They also provide opportunities for critical comparisons and analysis. First, with the establishment and institutionalization of citizen participation and community planning in the United States and Canada, the practice of participatory design and planning is becoming increasingly parochial, focusing more on methods than social and environmental change (see Hou and Rios, 2003; Francis, 1999; Hester, 1999b). In contrast, community design in the form of social movements in Taiwan and Japan can provide lessons and help reinvigorate the institutionalized practice of community design in North America. Conversely, the issues of institutionalization in North America can offer forewarnings on future problems to its Asian counterparts.

Secondly, the growth of new immigrant and multicultural communities in North American cities has put new strains on many traditional institutions of democratic participation, and requires a re-envisioning of the democratic process in response to the new multicultural and cross-cultural context. Similarly, debates concerning multiculturalism are also beginning to emerge in Asian countries as a result of growing acknowledgement of cultural differences and the politics of pluralism and democracy. The experience in North America may offer important lessons for the Asian countries and communities. Third, the changes in the Pacific Rim are increasingly transnational and interrelated. A cross-cultural and transnational examination of the experience across the Pacific Rim will contribute to a better understanding of the ongoing transformation in cities and communities as the result of increasing economic and social ties across the Pacific Rim. In an age of globalization, the focus on the Pacific Rim would transcend geographical and cultural boundaries and make critical comparison and understanding of cross-cultural influences possible.

The “Pacific Rim Conferences”

The “Democratic Design in the Pacific Rim” conferences have been convened to address across countries and communities the changing context and nature of community design. The conference that produced this collection of papers was the fifth in this series of working conferences that began in Berkeley in 1998. The purpose of these meetings has been to provide practitioners and scholars working in the field of participatory design and planning across the Pacific Rim region with an opportunity to share and compare each other’s experiences and advance their practice and research (Hester, 1999b). In addition to the conferences, a network of conference participants called “The Pacific Rim Community Design Network”



Figure 1. Berkeley conference, 1998.



Figure 2. Taiwan conference, 2001.



Figure 3. Seattle conference, 2004.

was launched in Berkeley in 1998. Inspired by shared interests and experiences, members have undertaken collaborative research to investigate differences and shared lessons in community design in their respective institutional, political and social contexts. Some have taken a deliberately cross-cultural framework to bridge community design practices through joint studios and comparative research. Over the years, many have participated in each other’s community-based work. Through regular conferences and joint projects, the network has provided a vehicle for collaboration and mutual support, as well as a forum for comparative understanding of community design in the Pacific Rim.

In many ways, the Seattle conference represents a milestone for this growing network. By returning to the United States six years later, it marks the completion of the first round of conferences in Berkeley (1998), Japan (1999), Taiwan (2001) and Hong Kong (2002). Second, it attracted the largest and most diverse group of participants, including scholars, practitioners, faculty and students, as well as local government officials and staff, from Canada, China, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan and the United States. The number of papers presented is also the largest of all the conferences, with topics ranging from new actors and institutions to community art and engaging marginalized groups. This large pool of papers and presentations provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions into the different subject categories of community design. As the fifth conference in the series, it also provides a chance to look back at what the network and the working conferences have accomplished in its first six years. The theme of the Seattle conference “(Re)constructing Communities: Design Participation in the Face of Change” reflects the need to re-examine the theory and practice of community design in the changing political and social landscapes of the Pacific Rim.

With the large number of papers, the grouping of papers in a meaningful and practical way presented a formidable challenge for the editors. We have attempted to group them into major themes in order for the reader to understand critical issues and advances in community design taking place through-

out the Pacific Rim. The organization of papers here largely follow the conference program but also highlight the overarching and crisscrossing themes during the three days of papers and discussions. In addition, we include some photos and graphics generated during the conference to give a flavor of the spirited and collegial exchange that took place.

Re-examining Community Design

In the spirit of a critical re-examination, the conference opened with a panel of papers in Chapter 1 that provided different observations on methods of evaluating community design practice. Mark Francis argues that participatory community design has developed to a point where critical and more systematic reexamination is needed. To document and critique the work in more rigorous ways, he suggests the use of the case study method to help designers and planners tell stories to practitioners, clients, students and each other, using a shared language and comparative framework. Echoing Francis' critique of the lack of reflection, Michael Rios further suggests the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in meeting the goals of both communities and universities in the context of service learning and community-university partnership. As a teaching and community outreach approach, PAR would offer the potential to improve current methods of service learning. Specifically, the shift from 'expert' to 'local' knowledge under PAR "creates new sites of inquiry and discovery outside the traditional academic settings." Mayumi Hayashi offers a case study on the effectiveness of workshops in connecting citizen organization and the management of green spaces. In the case of a post-earthquake rebuilding effort in Takarazuka, Japan, she observes that workshops in which citizens made proposals and undertook actual activities allowed them to gradually take ownerships of the planning process and expressed higher degrees of satisfaction.

An important part of examining the practice of community design is to reflect on the role and responsibility of professionals themselves. In Chapter 2, John Liu examines the epistemological challenges facing professionals engaged in trans-cultural planning and design activities. Based on participant observations of the tension between professional judgment, local cultural practice and political interests in the case of a temple expansion on Matsu, he argues that professional knowledge needs to incorporate the multiple realities and diversity of values in the local context. Ching-Fen Yang describes the role of professionals as both an interface and agents of disturbance in a power structure in the case of a campus planning in Taiwan. Through events and proactive negotiation, planners were able to mobilize resources and opportunities within an institutionalized participatory process. Similarly, members of the DaYuanZi Studio at National Taiwan University describe the multiple and sometimes conflicting roles facing planners in working with in-

stitutions and in addressing the need for social actions and advocacy in the case of preserving colonial-era Japanese houses in Taipei.

Institutions and Citizen Movements

Faced with socio-political changes and restructuring of government, new actors and institutions with important roles in the practice of community design have emerged across the Pacific Rim. Chapter 3 discusses the context for growing influences of non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Japan and the institutionalization of 'community planners' in Taiwan. Yasuyoshi Hayashi describes the conversion from a vertical society to a horizontal social structure in Japan through the formation of a "new public" in the 1990s. In contrast to the "traditional public," the new public is a public in which citizens, NPOs, businesses and administrative authorities support each other. He argues that while many government authorities in Japan are still struggling to cope with this new paradigm, the growth of NPOs has already given rise to the formation of a new societal model. In Taiwan, democratization and social movements in the past decades have given rise to the power of citizens in urban decision-making. The transformation has been reflected in the institutionalization of community planning practice in cities such as Taipei. Pao-Chi Sung, a city planner in Taipei, assesses the current successes and problems facing the 'Community Planner' program in Taipei particularly in relation to the limited resources, ambiguous roles, and conflicting expectations from the communities. Despite the advancement of citizen involvement in Japan and Taiwan, much of the urban redevelopment processes in Asia still lies beyond the reach of average citizens. Perry Yang contrasts two models of redevelopment planning in Singapore and Kaohsiung in terms of citizen involvement in influencing the outcomes of the proposed plans.

In Seattle, local government's support has been critical to the growth of citizen initiatives and community-based programs. In Chapter 4, Jim Diers, former Director of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods, describes the approach Seattle has undertaken since 1988 to empower local communities and foster community-government partnerships. Specifically, he describes how the city's Neighborhood Matching Funds program has spurred community self-help projects, such as building new parks and playgrounds, renovating community facilities, recording oral histories and creating public art. As an important point of departure, he distinguishes strongly between citizen participation and community empowerment. The former implies government control over priority and process, whereas the latter means, "giving citizens the tools and resources they need to address their own priorities." The institutional process in supporting the citizen initiatives is described in more detail in Hilda Blanco's evaluation on neighborhood planning in Seattle.



Figure 4. Forum on Empowering Seattle's Communities (Center: Jim Diers; from right: Former Mayor Paul Schell and activist Joyce Moty).

While institutionalization of citizen involvement has become a trend across the Pacific, citizen movements continue to be an important feature of urban planning and politics. In Chapter 5, Mintai Kim describes the influence of the environmental NGOs (non-governmental organizations) on government policies and decisions in South Korea. He also describes the role of the landscape architecture profession in supporting the movement through both leadership and practice in creating ecologically friendly open spaces that raise the consciousness of the public. Even in Seattle, citizen movements continue to be an important force in the design of the city. Kristina Hill describes and assesses the strategies used by a grassroots movement in Seattle to create a 14-mile monorail line through three successful citywide ballots. However, although citizen movement can represent progressive thinking and actions, it also faces many internal challenges. Satoko Asano examines a citizen movement against the building of arterial roads in Kobe following the Great Hanshin Earthquake. The case of Kobe, in which gender stereotype and hierarchy has prevented women from taking on a greater leadership role, reminds us that social movements face both the external and internal forces and are not without flaws. As reflective practitioners, community designers working in the context of social movement have greater responsibility in critically addressing such internal injustice.

Community Change and Differences

From Japan to the United States, small rural towns have been facing new economic challenges ranging from agricultural decline, new tourism economy and land development pressure. Chapter 6 includes papers that examine community design efforts at the small town scale. Patsy Eubanks Owens describes the case of a park master plan for the town of Knights Landing in California in which a participatory planning process brought together new and old residents in the town to envision a new

park. Douglas Kot and Deni Ruggeri examine another Californian town, Westport, in which structured participatory process allows the town's residents to collectively plan for a new development that is expected to bring new economic development opportunities while preserving and reinforcing the town's physical identity. Soshi Higuchi, Haruhiko Goto and Nobuyuki Sekiguchi describe the case of community planning in Kinokuni, Japan—a hot spring resort town faced with the challenge of municipal merger. Through a series of workshops, faculty and students from Waseda University have worked with local residents to enact future scenarios of the community and develop ideas for local governance. In these projects, participatory community design process has been critical in helping local residents envision the future of the community and identify practical steps including design of physical places and development of new organizations.



Figure 5. Tour of Danny Woo Community Garden in Seattle's International District.

Another aspect of changes that are occurring in communities across the region is the increasing presence of differences within the so-called communities. The papers in Chapter 7 all address the implications of differences in community design practice. Michael Rios examines recent theoretical debates centered on the concept of multiple publics and differences as a way to problematize the normative approach of participatory design. Using the design of Plaza del Colibrí in San Francisco as a case study, he demonstrates how an inclusive approach in involving local non-profit organizations, residents, public agencies and different park users, including the homeless, youth and transit passengers, was critical to an understanding of the multiple identities, interests and needs of the users, which then led to the design of an inclusive public space. Based on a similar body of literature, Jeffrey Hou and Isami Kinoshita compare the processes of negotiating community differences in Seattle's International District and the Kogane District in Matsuo, Japan.

They further suggest the importance of informal activities in navigating the political and cultural nuances in the participatory process. In addition to differences within the communities, the gap in perspectives between locals and professional remains a barrier in participatory design. Carey Knecht discusses the techniques that can either widen or narrow the gap in the case of a town center design in Caspar, California.

Engaging Marginalized Communities

An important characteristic of community design is the strong sense of social responsibility that distinguishes it from more traditional design and planning practice. In particular, community designers often play a critical role in engaging and empowering marginalized populations and individuals. In Chapter 8, Antonio Ishmael Risianto describes a three-pronged strategy—MPE (meta-development, physical/environmental development and “people’s economic development)—to address the multiple needs of marginalized poor in Indonesia. Sergio Palleroni discusses a similar effort in Mexico using models of community-based social banks and sustainable technologies in helping an indigenous community maintain their cultural/social value while developing their capacity to survive in a new economy. The problems of marginalized communities exist not only in poor developing countries, but also in wealthy, industrialized countries such as Japan and the United States. Yuko Hamasaki discusses the intermediary role of an NPO in Fukuoka, Japan that fills the gaps between wide-ranging needs of the residents and the formal welfare service system. The NPO provides critical services for seniors, people with mental illness, newcomers from rural areas, and children in the community. Lynne Manzo examines the process in engaging a group of ethnically diverse and low-income residents in the redevelopment of a public housing site in Seattle.

Reflecting a growing array of participatory practices, art has also become an alternative medium through which marginalized communities can be empowered. In Chapter 9, Min Jay Kang provides a critical examination of the practice of community activism (“a conscious combination of art and activism”) as a form and instrument of resistance and community empowerment. Specifically, he examines the creative power of art as well as the tension between the community and art in the case of Treasure Hill, a squatter settlement in Taipei, under the threat of demolition to make way for a new park. Kimura et al. describes a collaborative art project conducted with the residents of “Izumi no le”, a welfare facility for people with physical disability in Setagaya, Tokyo. They examine how a carefully structured program based on trust in people’s creative power can bring people independent self-expression and empower them to take part in collective actions. Milenko Matanovic presents a seven-fold ‘community gathering place’ model as a way of creating inclusive places and connecting environment, civic

involvement, education, the arts, economy and ethics—“combining justice with beauty.”

Power and Representation

Other than art, what techniques do most community designers use in creating places with people? How are they different from the conventional tools of the design and planning profession? In Chapter 10, reflecting on the literature and papers presented in the past Pacific Rim conferences, Randy Hester presents a typology and a critique of techniques commonly used by community designers. Specifically, he examines how ‘drawings’ help to exchange complex ideas, science, and technical information with diverse publics and allow for collaborative imagination of the environment. In reviewing the papers from past conferences, he observed the frequent use of techniques to emphasize the experience of a location. In addition, there seems to be “a concerted effort to overcome modern abstraction and post-modern deconstruction of life space” to capture its sensual and experiential nuances. However, he also argues that for a group of designers, there have been few spatially explicit collaborative design techniques precisely described in the previous proceedings. Specifically, he argues that the workshop seems to have become “the participatory ‘black box’ through which community designers are as inarticulate as traditional designers are about creative form making.”

Echoing the theme of Hester’s paper on co-authoring and drawing with the public, Masato Dohi argues that it is only through participation that ‘lines’ have meanings and begin to create spaces which then give meaning to people and to which people give meanings. He also argues for a need to take risks, to trust people’s ability to express their own world. In examining participatory techniques to search for collective urban memories in the disappearing public sphere, Annie Chiu examines the case of a commemorative park design as part of a mall development in Taipei on the site of a former paper mill. Specifically, the paper examines a series of workshops with former factory workers that provided a process of searching, exchanging ideas, producing and finally transforming voices of wound/trauma into landscape. She argues that participatory design workshops provide the chance to tell the story and turn the story into representation that people can continue to imagine.

Nature(s) and Place

In recent years, community design is no longer practiced solely in the context of empowering disenfranchised communities. Increasingly, environmental learning and connecting people to places has also become an important realm of community design practice. The papers in Chapter 11 all discuss a social connection to place and imply multiple views of ‘nature’ that facilitate the connections. Sawako Ono analyzes the case of

Rikugien Garden in Tokyo in the 18th Century. Through intermediaries such as the relatives, servants, friends, and gardeners, the private garden of an aristocratic clan became accessible to a wide range of people including samurai, neighbors, farmers, priests, women and children, and served as a 'public' space for the appreciation of 'nature' in a strongly hierarchical Japanese society. Julie Johnson examines children's learning potentials in nature and school landscapes. Through the case study of Dearborn Elementary in Seattle, she illustrates how the development of an ecologically designed school landscape can support learning and foster community. Complementing Johnson's paper on children's environmental learning, I-Chun Kuo presents the results of her study in Taipei showing that an increase in children's experiences of nearby nature has translated into increased participation in environment-related activities as adults. She argues that designers, educators and parents should value the importance of nearby nature and create neighborhoods with rich experiences of nature. Shifting to the context of low-income communities, Amy Dryden looks at two affordable housing developments in Oakland, California and evaluates the relationships between sustainable site design and residents' preference and values regarding outdoor space. She argues that understanding user preferences is particularly important when advancing sustainable design in a non-market based system such as affordable housing.

Through fostering people's connection to place, participatory mechanisms have also become increasingly recognized in engaging people in environmental stewardship and activism. The papers in Chapter 12 examine different forms of citizen engagement with a common focus on the protection of creeks and watersheds. Victoria Chanse and Chia-Ning Yang provide an overview on how stewardship of urban nature has changed



Figure 6. Children's Garden at Bradner Garden Park, Seattle.

from "a top-down, distant, centralized, professionals-leading regime to a local, participatory, grassroots movement." They further examine how two modes of engaging people—volunteerism and spontaneous use—can together create a participatory culture of urban nature stewardship. Demonstrating the importance of volunteerism, Louise Mazingo reviews the essential role and ongoing challenges of citizen activism and NGOs in restoration advocacy of urban creeks in the East Bay of San Francisco Bay Area. The complex web of citizen organizations provides important science support, training, and sources of volunteer labor in restoring and protecting the neighborhood creeks. Echoing the argument for spontaneous use, Asano, et al., describe the current challenges facing the protection of the Yoshino River and Daiju Weir in Tokushima City, Japan. To reinvigorate and sustain the local citizen movement, they present a proposal for tangible hands-on activities that recognize the opportunities for diverse uses on the river and the ecological and social connections these activities provide. They argue that the hands-on projects would stimulate citizen use and understanding of the place.

Engaging Students and Youths

One of the many challenges facing community design lies in the planning and design education and in engaging youths in community development. The papers in Chapter 13 examine different models and cases of service learning. Christopher Campbell and Dennis Ryan argue that recent social and political changes around the globe call for a new paradigm of engagement where "learning is simultaneously acting in the world." Using the Community and Environmental Planning program at University of Washington as a case study, they argue for a trans-disciplinary and collaborative model of community design education. Nancy Rottle describes the unique benefits and limitations of service learning studios based on two recent community planning studios at University of Washington. She also examines the challenges and sometime conflicting goals of 'service' and 'learning' from the perspective of a studio. Addressing service learning at a different scale, Daniel Winterbottom examines students' hands-on involvement in a design/build studio model at University of Washington that connects design, community participation and construction. Based on observations of three studios conducted in different cultural and social contexts (immigrant women in Mexico, children with HIV/AIDS in New York City, and cancer patients in Seattle), he describes the values of "educational outreach, cultural exchange, community understanding and shared endeavor" in addition to the tangible result of built work. Shifting to the other side of the Pacific Rim, Koichi Kobayashi describes the involvement of students in producing an advocacy proposal to rehabilitate an urban greenway in Osaka, Japan.

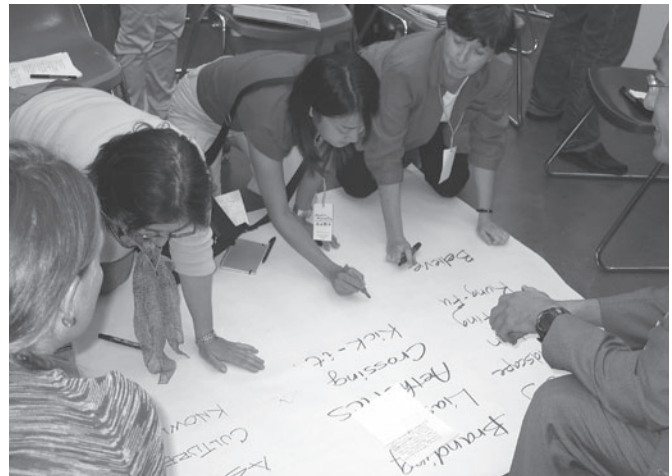


Figure 7. Children's art at Bradner Garden Park.

In community development and design, youths represent a frequent group of constituents and participants. It is widely assumed that youth involvement can contribute positively to the society and instill a sense of civic responsibility and citizenship among youths. However, participation of youths in community design also faces numerous challenges. In Chapter 14, Jonathan London describes a lack of linkage between youth and community development in practice. To address this issue, he presents a method of youth-led research, evaluation and planning in linking youths and community development. In the face of commercialism and commodification of youth culture, Isami Kinoshita also argues that the nexus between youth participation and community planning is important in restructuring the relationship between youth and community. On the need to engage and empower youths, Elijah Mirochnik reflects on his role as a teacher and experiences in working with children. Specifically, he explores the use of a transgressive vocabulary that challenges old notions about knowledge, teaching and learning. To demonstrate a critical approach to youth involvement, Michael Rios presents the case of a youth art project in the North Cheyenne reservation in the United States to illustrate the use of community-based design and art as a vehicle to explore issues of identity, landscape and civic engagement.

Cross-cultural Perspectives and Collaboration

As a forum on community design in the Pacific Rim, cross-cultural perspectives have been a main focus of the conference series. Chapter 15 includes papers from a self-organized panel on cross-cultural understanding and the linkages between professional expertise and local knowledge. Focusing on multicultural communities, Margarita Hill describes a participatory community process to create a more walkable community in West Hyattsville in Maryland, USA, in which multiple methodologies were deployed to engage a multicultural population. She also examines the different perspectives of the multiple actors in the process—students, faculty, and community members and



Figures 8 through 10. Groups working on reflections of the conference through 'keywords' at closing workshop.

leaders. Presenting a case study of a community design studio on the remote islands of Matzu, John Liu, Hsing-Rong Liu and Shenglin Chang examine the multiple layers of tensions—between the views of the insiders and outsiders, professionals and locals, and between teamwork and individuals. With growing concern on the global environment, international col-

laboration and partnership have grown rapidly in recent years providing alternative models of environmental and resource management. Based on the case study of IEGC (Organization for International Exchange of Green Culture), Takayoshi Yamamura, Tianxin Zhang and Aijun He describe the benefits and challenges of a collaborative framework consisting of tourists, residents, international NGOs and local administration in sustainable environmental management and education in Lijiang, China. The challenges include opposing value systems and tensions between universal science and local perspectives.

Since the Berkeley conference 1998, several collaborative projects have been launched among members of the Pacific Rim network, including an ongoing collaborative project between National Taiwan University and University of California, Berkeley in developing an ecological conservation and sustainable economic development plan for the coastal region of Tainan County, Taiwan, and a collaborative neighborhood design studio between University of Washington and Chiba University in 2003, among others. The final chapter includes



Figures 11 and 12. Performing the keywords.

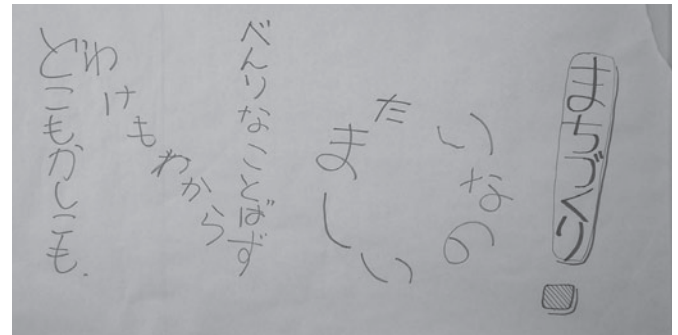


Figure 13. With “No Machizukuri!” the research team from the Tokyo Institute of Technology critiques the institutionalization of the community building movement in Japan.

two collaborative projects involving researchers and research sites across the Pacific Rim. Liling Huang, Marcia McNally and Louise Mazingo undertook a comparative study of the planning and design of neighborhood open space in Taipei, Kyoto, Berkeley, Oakland and Los Angeles. They have found that the production of neighborhood spaces in these cities share two phenomena—standardization and community action, and argue that neighborhood has become the “basic landscape unit of globalization and resistant local action.” In examining recent changes at the neighborhood level, they also point out three important forces—local government policy, global capital, and demographic shifts that influence the making of neighborhood and neighborhood open space across the Pacific Rim. Echoing the focus on neighborhood space, Daniel Abramson, Jeffrey Hou and their students from a summer field studio present the results of a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, community-based planning studio in Quanzhou, China. As a community design studio that brought together students from North America, Taiwan and Chinese universities and working on issues of preservation and neighborhood change, the experience exemplifies the opportunities and challenges facing cross-cultural community designers as intermediaries to bridge the multiple gaps of values, knowledge and perspectives in the collective region of the Pacific Rim.

山城藝驚太平洋

hill/town/art/surprise/Pacific Ocean

川流不息內外間

river/flows/non-stop/between inside and outside

聚集廟後蛙將軍

gathering/together/temple/behind/frog/general

落日樓頭茶當酒

setting/sun/building/front/tea as wine

風馬牛間談認同

wind/horse/cattle/in-between/talk/identities

貌與神移風雲動

face/change/wind/cloud/move

轉首評估社區夢

turn/head/evaluate/community/dream

'Keywords': Shenglin Chang

Translation: Jeffrey Hou

A Conclusion and a Beginning: Toward a Reflexive Practice of Community Design

As the papers in this proceedings demonstrate, the practice of community design in the Pacific Rim reflects the multiple and pluralistic realities in the fast-changing region. Community designers today, including practitioners, researchers and students, work with diverse constituents and issues in a wide range of contexts, from slums of the developing countries to trans-local communities and small rural towns in industrialized nations, from protest movements to working as intermediaries between governments and citizens, and from shopping malls of global cities to streams and schoolyards in urban neighborhoods. Community designers utilize a wide array of methods and techniques to engage citizens and navigate the political and social process, from workshops and charrettes to walking tours and drinking at a neighborhood pub, from drawing on the feet to Geographical Information Systems, and from ethnographic fieldwork to activism. The practice of community design today is also informed by a growing body of knowledge, from feminist and post-structuralist discourses to various forms of local knowledge, and from evaluation of existing cases to ongoing participatory action research. Community designers benefit from growing cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives and collaboration that allow them to become more aware of the critical differences and common values, as well as a broader range of techniques. The growing body of knowledge and experiences has also made them become more critical and reflexive of the external and internal challenges.

The collection of papers in this volume celebrates the pluralism and differences in the contexts and approaches of community design in a changing world. The papers also reflect the shared values of democracy, justice, and diversity. Working at the local level and in trans-local contexts, community designers are at the forefront of profound changes that are occurring both locally and globally. In the face of the continued and dynamic changes in the society, is our knowledge and repertoire of tools today adequate in addressing the growing array of issues and constituents? How can the practice of community design respond to a broad range of external and internal challenges? We hope that this collective body of work offers important lessons and reflections that can enable community designers to become more effective and reflective in their everyday practice.

ENDNOTES

¹ This term has been translated in several other ways such as 'Community Empowerment Project' (See Hsia, 1999).

² Our definition of the Pacific Rim includes countries and regions that shared strong economic, social and political ties in the region, which are not limited to those mentioned in this article.

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Photos: Makie Suzuki, Katherine Idziorek.