

# Collaborative Services From Europe to China

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**Abstract:** This paper shows that the typical social innovation projects emerging in Europe (EMUDE 2006), which include community support for agriculture, carpooling and group purchasing, are also presented in China (CCSL 2007). This paper compares Chinese grassroots social innovations modeled as collaborative services with representative European cases. Three common service ideas and three corresponding pairs of cases are compared to provide insight into the range of activity in China and Europe. The cross-case comparisons show that in China the same service ideas occur, but emerge in relation to different local contexts, participants, motivations, service systems and infrastructure to those in Europe and have different impacts. In response to these findings, the paper proposes that different strategies should drive design intervention in Chinese social innovation initiatives where the development and promotion of collaborative services seeks to achieve sustainable lifestyle.

**Keyword: Sustainability, Social innovation; Collaborative services; Case studies**

## 1 Introduction

A new movement has been launched by the central government of China---Harmonious Society, which came into picture after the big decision of the shift from economic development to sustainable development. Meanwhile, social innovations are emerging and promoted in China. Many diffused social enterprises (Creative Communities) and sustainable lifestyles have been observed such as Car Sharing, PinKe, Group Purchase, Community Supporting Agriculture and etc. Those promising cases implicate the initiatives and anticipation of sustainable lifestyles from general people in everyday life spontaneously.

Social Innovations are the innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social (Mulgan 2006). Cases of social innovation towards sustainability have been observed in Europe (EMUDE 2006) and worldwide (CCSL 2007). Known as Creative Communities and Diffused Social Enterprises, they are bottom-up emerging initiatives that illustrate the real possibility of reorienting the evolution of present society in the direction of a sustainable knowledge and network society (Manzini 2003). Therefore, promotion of this kind of social innovation could be a viable strategy for sustainable development, and in this transition strategic design approaches are supposed to play important roles as a social learning process.

## 2 Promising cases between China and Europe

The following are synthesized description of several typical cases that we find in China and 3 corresponding cases with same service ideas in Europe. More cases can be found on the project website: [www.sustainable-everyday.net](http://www.sustainable-everyday.net)

## 2.1 Community supporting agriculture



### Agri-Fond Association

It's a community support agriculture action and system to connect consumers who have need of high quality food and countryside experience with small agri-producers who keep the traditional species and planting way. On one hand, it makes urban peoples in this community accessible to have food with high quality and special tastes by a reasonable price. And they also could have fantastic experiences of countryside life if they like; on the other hand, with these stable consumers, the individual farmers could

have some income and keep their traditional agriculture, which has a long term meaning for protection of species diversity.



### Les Jardins De Ceres- Ceres's Garden

It's a collaborative service that people interested in healthy lifestyle and preserving the environment obtain organic food from local farmers, and also supporting their production. 'Les Jardins de Cérés', founded in December 2003, is consumer group which wants local farmers to produce food organically. To do this, the group orders the produce in advance, before it is even planted, and guarantees to buy the crop. Members of Les Jardins des Cérés have persuaded a cereal farmer, with about 250ha, to use one part of his farm to grow organic

potatoes – the simplest crop. The members of the association helped the farmer during the process – they cleaned the 400-year-old cellar and created storage places, and helped plant, tend and harvest the potatoes – and in doing so developed a close relationship.

## 2.2 Car pooling



### PinChe: Carpooling for going to work

Several residents whose homes and companies could be organized in one routine share a car of one of them for going to work. A good transportation solution is provided for those people who haven't their own car, which does in crease the life quality much in practise. Those owners of car in groups share much economic pressure with others. The transportation pressure in rush time decreases. Social connections between residents increase. Urban transportation is a big social problem in cities today: too slowly by auto bus, too

crowded by metro, too expensive by taxi, too exhausted to own a car. There is a big potential need of new solutions more comfortable, economic, convenient, fast and accessible, which is car pool could contribute. Once more residents have their own cars, car pool is becoming popular rapidly. With different communication channel, residents look for others who homes and companies could be organized in one routine and go to work together with a car.

### MCS – Milano Car Sharing

MCS is a self-service car rental system which enables residents to use a car without the expense and hassles of owning one, and saving



money. It is an alternative solution to the urban commuting, based on the easy access to a car whenever it is needed. The concept could be an intelligent solution for such cities, as Milan, with lots of problems caused by traffic. The first objective of car sharing is to teach people that the car is not a status symbol and that it can be used only when you really need it. Once users have subscribed, they get an MCS card with a personal code on it that allows them to make reservations via the call centre or the website. They can choose the car and the garage to collect and deliver the car. The garage records the kilometers driven by each client, and charges them at the end of the month.

### 2.3 Mutual Elderly Services



#### Wenxinshe: Elderly association in FengJingYa

It's a self-organized association in community providing all kinds of services to the community residents mainly. With the growth of the Chinese city, more and more people leave the one-storey house and move into the apartment. The initial relationship among neighbours is becoming worse and worse. The residents living in the FENGJINGYA community would not like to see this phenomenon happen in their own community. So some of the residents of this community (most of them are old age people) set up the Old Age Association. It is now become the bond among

the residents. They advocate keep watch and help other people, living in a harmonious community.

“WENXINSHE” includes some groups such as serve team, patrol team, calligraphy and painting team, Yangko team and riding team, etc. They organized the residents to learn the calligraphy and painting, to do some physical exercises. And they also teach courses in near primary schools.

#### Raciborowice Senior Club



It's club where old, sick and disabled people are supported in daily life. The Senior's Club provides a place for making friends and sharing experiences and memories. The main aim of the initiative is to organise the spare time of elderly and ill people, who after working hard for many years, often on farms, have some free time. The pensioners and retired people meet every so often in a parish hall made available for them. Over tea and homemade cakes they take part in performances and stage shows, with sketches, songs and dance. The club even organises field

trips and even pilgrimages. They also organise take care of the lonely and home-ridden together. This initiative came about thanks to Wiktoria Mysliwiec, a Michalowice regional councillor. This scheme plays a valuable role in society. The attempt to give the elderly, often excluded and considered economically useless, a new lease of life is a great social service. The club is self-sufficient in both organisational and financial terms.

## 3 Discussions

### 3.1 Same ideas but different contents

It could be found that most of the service ideas indicated by European cases are also addressed by Chinese cases, such as communities support agriculture, carpooling (PINCHE), purchasing group, co-house, mutual elderly services, mutual neighbourhood, time bank, rediscover of bicycle transportation and so on. They are emerging out actively in the urban. However, those cases with same ideas have different contents from European experiences. For example, carpooling today is very popular in China but in general it is collaboration between an

owner of car and others who haven't cars, instead of between car owners, so the motivation, structure of system, the relationship between actors are quite different from European cases. While they are also collaborative services since the car owners don't only provide services for others and all of them have to be collaborative to generate the common solutions by themselves. Taking group purchasing that has been diffused in China as another example, with the same ideas, the contents and expressions have been largely enriched in Chinese practices. Firstly, it is very popular particularly in the young group and in universities; Secondly, the purchased products and services are widely various from food, fashion to cars and houses; Thirdly, the scale of participants of activities are much larger than European cases. In sum, the service ideas often have local stories and expressions in the contexts of China.

### **3.2 Design for sustainable and harmonious society**

What could design and design research contribute when "things will develop in the opposite direction" in the approaches of top-down and bottom-up? Laozi provides a big universal vision for the future. However, more indicated visions, proposals and tools have to be investigated and developed to realize the sustainable society.

Certainly, we are still facing paradox realities: On one hand, we understand that design and designers are supposed to provide more contributions for sustainable development; on the other hand, we still get excited on continuous development of market oriented tools and designs. Design is recognized to be an important program and profession to impact the development of society in positive way with social responsibility. China has a long history and culture in "Making Goods" and philosophy of "Usage", but the design education system was mainly imported from western countries where modern design had been born out of industrialization. For one thing, "Harmonious Society" and sustainable society has been a big vision of society in China; for another, Design seems part of problem more than part of solution for this vision.

## **4 Conclusions**

The results of comparison study reports those cases with same ideas in China have different contents from European experiences in terms of local context, participants, motivations, service system, infrastructure and impact. Furthermore, those grassroots social innovations could also be anticipation of Chinese sustainable lifestyle. With the rapid industrialization, the traditional social infrastructure has been collapsed quickly in urban, as a rebound effect, the new ideas of wellbeing is forming by recognizing the value of social relation and quality. Consequently, different strategies have been proposed to undertake design intervention and promotion for Chinese collaborative services and sustainable lifestyles. China is a paradox focus between traditional philosophy, rapid industrialization and the ideal of harmonious society. Reality is complex and it is a part of reason why we need research work. Fortunately, Design is complex as well and that's why design is expected to face the reality in advance.

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