

CREATIVE
WORKSHOPS
WITH
COMMUNITIES
IN SHANGHAI

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the research activities and outcomes of three creative workshops organised with communities in Shanghai, China, as part of the research project titled “*Fostering Creative Citizens through Co-Design and Public Makerspaces*” funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Newton Fund. The goal of the project is to develop a novel and inclusive means of fostering creative citizens in China in a bottom-up manner through strategic use of co-design and public makerspaces. This project will also consider how best design can be used to create greater engagement with citizens to generate societal impact. The emphasis is on offering multipurpose spaces where creative activities can take place, rather than providing high-tech fabrication tools. The results show great success in providing opportunity where citizens, place managers and the local government could connect together through social engagement and the participatory process. The project is a collaboration of two universities (Brunel University London and Tongji University) and practitioners, such as The Glass-House Community Led Design.

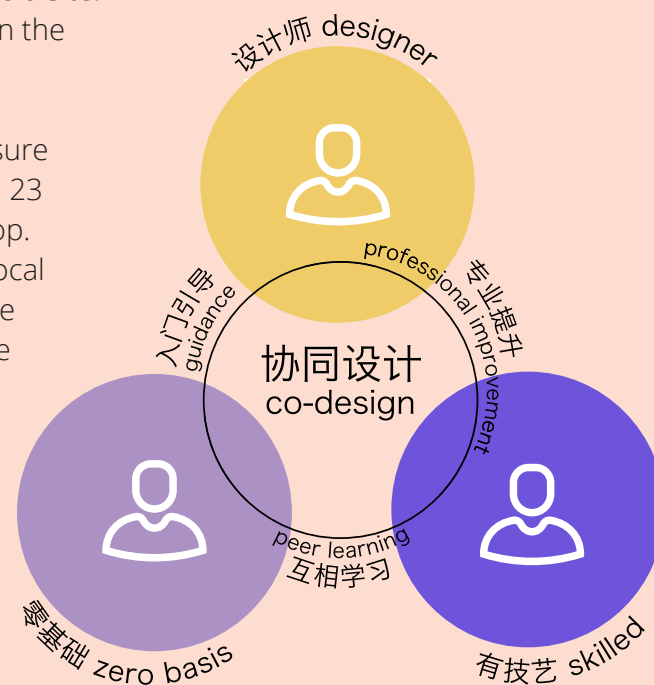
Three workshops were carried out with the community in Shanghai to achieve two aims: 1) test the different forms of creative making within the local communities; and 2) develop a sustainable model of creative hub through connecting different stakeholders. Three workshops included: 1) creative hub taster; 2) asset mapping; and 3) co-creating a sustainable operational framework for a community creative hub in a long term.

WORKSHOP 01

CREATIVE HUB TASTER SESSION (CREATIVE CO-KNITTING WORKSHOP)

Brunel University and Tongji DESIS Lab held the first co-design workshop in Fushun Road Community Centre in Shanghai in December 2020. The workshop theme was 'Creative Co-Knitting' in collaboration with Innocent and the local community centre. A professional knit designer was invited as the on-site tutor. A call for participants was made one week in advance via social media site. We received more than 50 applications to join the workshop.

26 participants were carefully selected to ensure the diversity of age groups and backgrounds. 23 people completed a survey after the workshop. Some participants were senior ladies in the local community, who were skilled in knitting. Some participants had basic knitting skills and some had zero experience.



METHODS:

The co-design method employed in this workshop was story sharing. Participants (e.g., local residents, professional designer as well as some external partners) were encouraged to share stories while knitting hats for Innocent drinks together. The event aimed to test whether creative making activities, such as co-knitting, can promote peer-learning and help foster individual creativity. The event also encouraged participants to use local elements in their hat design. The event intended to test whether collaborations with external organisations (Innocent was used as an example in this case) could provide a means for the local community centre to expand their activities.

Firstly, Dr Mingqing Ni from Tongji DESIS Lab, introduced the concept of co-design and explained how creative making could benefit the community. Next, Qian Ouyang from Innocent shared the story of the Big Knit project. She explained how knitted hats by senior groups contributed to the marketing campaign and profit generation, which went back to supporting the community. After that, Foning Bao, the professional knit designer, shared her stories about professional knitting design.



The second part of the event was co-knitting activity. Participants were separated into five groups. Each group had participants with different skill levels – from the zero to the skilful ones. All participants were asked to express their creative ideas by drawing the designs and knitting together. They were asked to knit a hat based on any element(s) related to Shanghai City (e.g. local dishes or architectural decorations). The co-design of the knitted hats in each group was facilitated with support of the on-site professional knit designer. For people with relatively high skills, the professional knitter helped them to improve and realise their ideas in a more aesthetic way. For beginners, there were some semi-finished samples for them to start with. These beginners also got help from experienced participants on the same table (peer-learning).

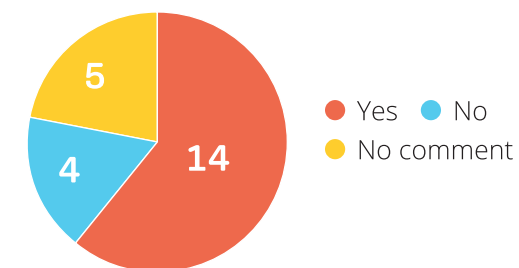
At the end of the workshop, people shared outcomes and stories. Hats created by skilled knitters contained many references of Shanghai City, such as traditional windows and staircase. Through this workshop, they learned how their work could be refined further. Some experienced knitters reported that they gained a lot of new ideas on how to improve their skills and patterns. For beginners, although time was too limited to complete their work, they had learned a great deal about knitting and would like to practice more in the future.



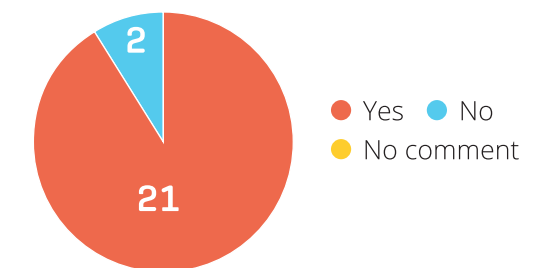
23 people completed a survey after the workshop. The aim was to find out whether they recognised their creative skills and were interested in engaging with more creative activities in the future. The survey revealed that the majority of participants (30%) were 21 – 30 years old followed by older people aged 60 and above (26%) and professional workers aged 41- 50 year old (26%). The younger groups (aged 21 – 30) were mainly students. Participants aged 31 – 40 and 41 – 50 came from various fields, e.g., finance, design, procurement and construction. The older group (aged 60 and above) were retired. Some participants were senior ladies in the local community, who were skilled in knitting. Some participants had basic knitting skills and some had zero experience.

The details of their answers are as follows.

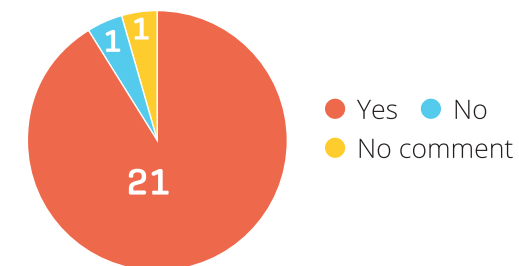
1 | Would you consider yourself to be a creative person?



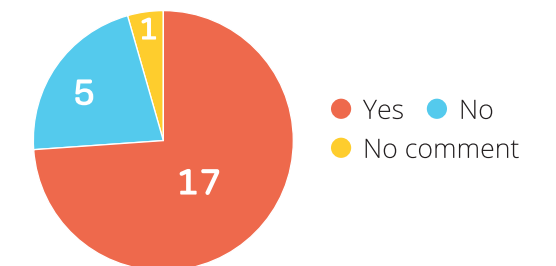
2 | Before attending this workshop, did you consider knitting as a creative activity



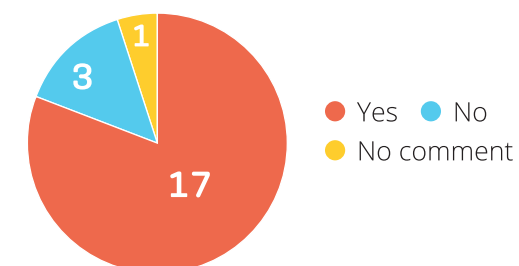
3 | After the workshop, do you consider knitting as a creative activity?



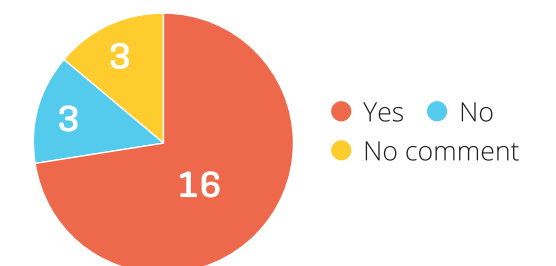
4 | Do you think you have made a creative product at this workshop?



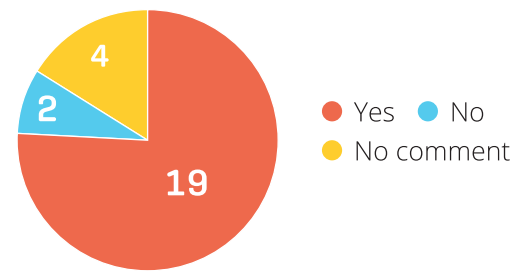
5 | Do you think your creativity has been enhanced as a result of co-creation activities?



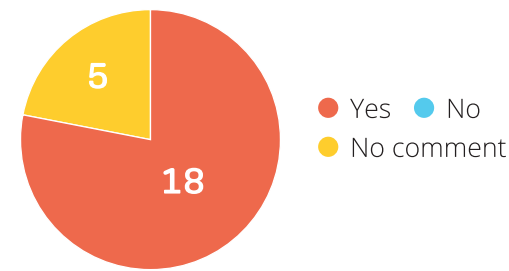
6 | Have you felt any changes in your creative skill after collaborating with a professional designer?



7 | Do you think your creative skills have been enhanced after co-working with peers?



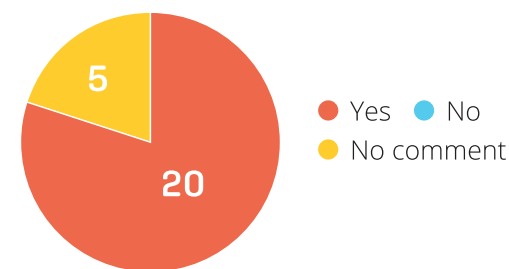
8 | Do you consider other hands-on making activities to be creative tasks?



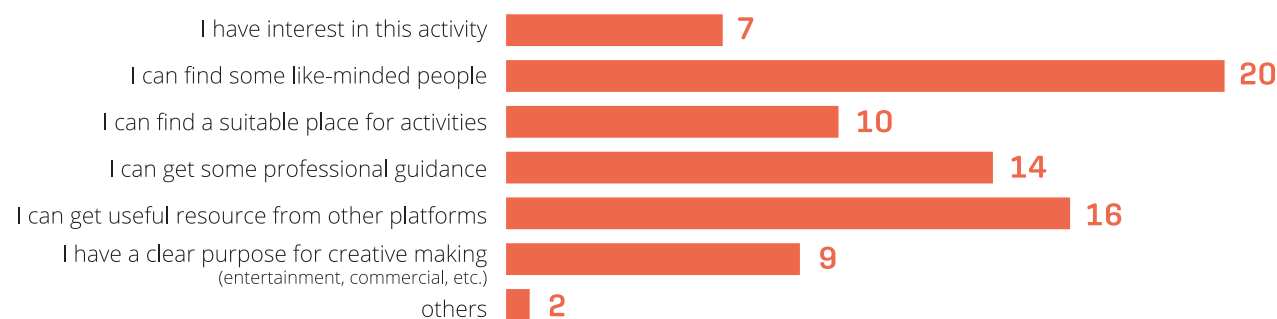
9 | If so, please give some examples:

paper Art, tie-dye, applique, painting, dressmaking, cooking, knitting, up-cycling, gardening etc.

10 | Do you think that creative outputs are not limited to artistic forms and many works can be considered as creative work as well?

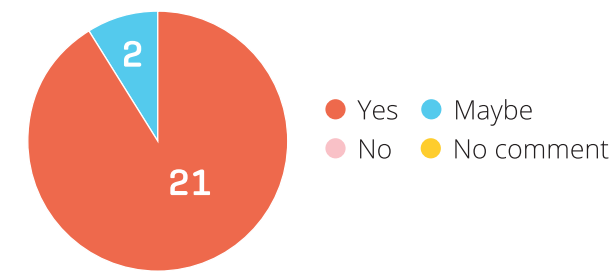


11 | In your opinion, a key to the success in initiating or participating in creative works is:

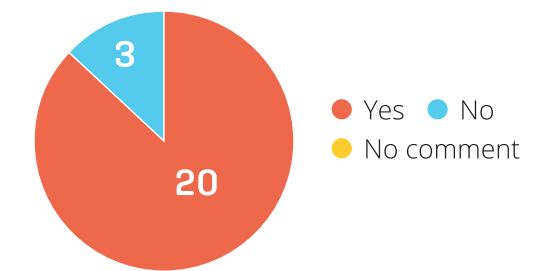


Other: One older participant stated that they could gain happiness through some recreation activities. Another participant explained that it was essential for him/her.

12 | In your opinion, could this space and its facilities meet your needs for making?



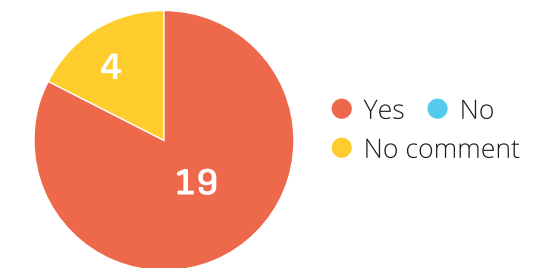
13 | Do you think that the community centre could be a creative hub for the community?



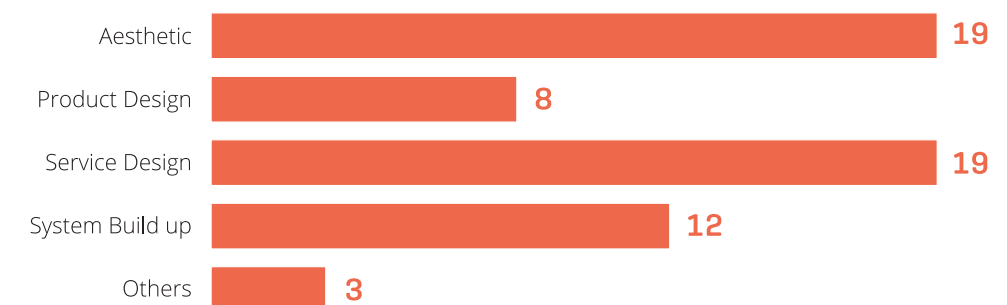
14 | If so, please specify the potential creative activities:

drawing, co-creation for the community, jewellery design, up-cycling, knit groups and involving more generations, sewing, co-cook, play with children, long-term creative work

15 | Do you think the community requires a hub for self-governance purposes?



16 | In your opinion, what issues in the community could be solved or improved by design?



For those who chose 'others', their suggestions included: formal tutoring for knitting, activate the community; have some fun

17 | How would you describe a creative citizen?

- Willing to serve the community
- Bring happiness to the community
- Co-creating value for the community
- Good at thinking, designing and making
- Good at up-cycling
- Being passionate about life
- Good at problem solving
- Being able to think and make independently
- Having professional knowledge and good at realising ideas

KEY FINDINGS:

Firstly, this workshop helped people recognise their creative talent and how to develop it further. According to the survey after the event, people feel their creativity was enhanced through drawing and knitting together. The expert's guidance as well as peer-learning were helpful for people to recognise their potential in creative making. Experienced knitters realised that their skills could be improved. Inexperienced knitters also recognised their potential to be creative makers.

The second finding was that creative citizens could be built around the community centre. Using local elements (e.g. cultural references) were useful for promoting creative education within the local community. By getting participants to think about their local elements,

this made them realise that the community centre provided a good platform for creative making, as it could bring together different parties including commercial companies, local residents, university researchers and the wider public audiences. It was observed that the community centre has a great potential to solve problems through people's creative ideas, which encourage self-governance at the community level.

Finally, the introduction of external resources to the community was helpful because the makers could co-brand with commercial companies. The example of Innocent's Big Knit enabled participants to see how creative artefacts could be aligned with branded stories for wider commercial use.



EMERGING IDEAS:

The workshops revealed an interesting form of creative making within the community centre. The self-organised groups (e.g. local knitting groups) were considered as a part of the creative hub plan in the future. Collaboration with different stakeholders was needed to build up and sustain self-organised networks. Although story sharing helped building up the platform for creative makers, a more strategic approach would be needed to get more stakeholders involved.

WORKSHOP 02

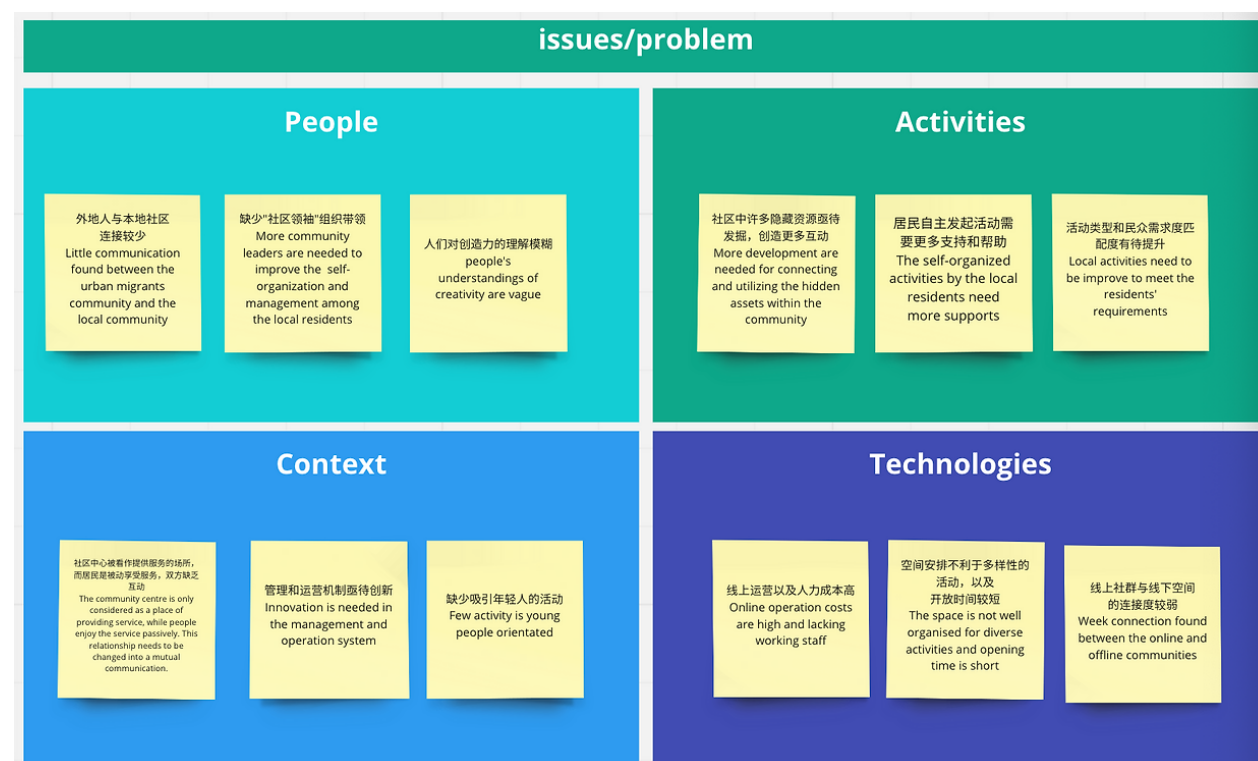
ASSET MAPPING WORKSHOP

We held the second workshop at Fushun Road Community Centre in Shanghai. The workshop applied the Asset Mapping technique as a co-design approach to discover and unlock hidden resources of the community. This workshop provided a starting point where local people could work together to create a long-term plan for everyday creativity projects. This event brought together nearly 50 participants including representatives of the Community Centre, the Siping Road Street Officer, Siping Road Community Non-profit Foundation, local enterprises in the Siping community, students and lecturers from Tongji University, representatives of the civil society, and many local residents.





Prior to the workshops, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and relationship mappings were conducted with people around the community centres to explore the hidden assets and possibilities for future collaborations. We have used the PACT Analysis structure as a framework to analyse the current situation of the community centre – see the figure below. (PACT is short for People, Activities, Contexts and Technologies.) In this way, the current situation could be enhanced and reconstructed by increasing and improving local activities. The centre could get local residents more involved in the planning process which could help to stimulate their interests in everyday creativity.



METHODS:

The asset mapping consisted of three parts. The first part focused on showcasing existing creative resources (including the knitting project by the local group as well as the creative futures made by Tongji university students near the community).

The second part was the Asset Mapping. With the help of visual tools, participants discovered the hidden assets for building up community and their connections for some future development programmes. Many intangible and physical assets were visualised using icon cards (such as venues, facilities, skills and human resources). Participants played the cards and made connections between

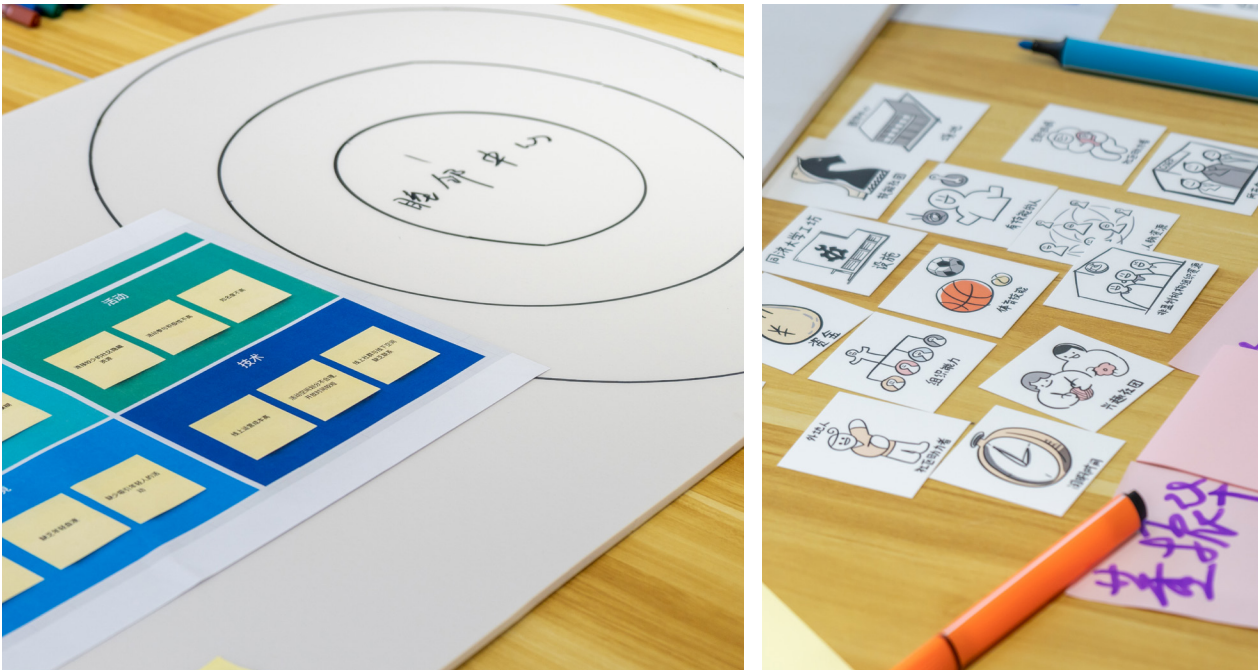
them. In this way, they started to realise whether these resources could be run together in a sustainable way.

The final part of was to initiate the community project through asset mapping. It was observed that some participants were active/positive about leading potential projects in the future. Thus, they were invited as the community representatives for our third workshop to discuss and implement some potential strategies.



TOOL FOR ASSET MAPPING:

The onion diagram was used to help people identify and position ‘assets’ in their community. The community centre was placed at the middle. The outside circle was for assets that had ‘weak’ relationships with the community centre and the inner circle was for assets that had ‘strong’ relationships with the community centre. A number of icons were created to help people get inspired about potential assets.



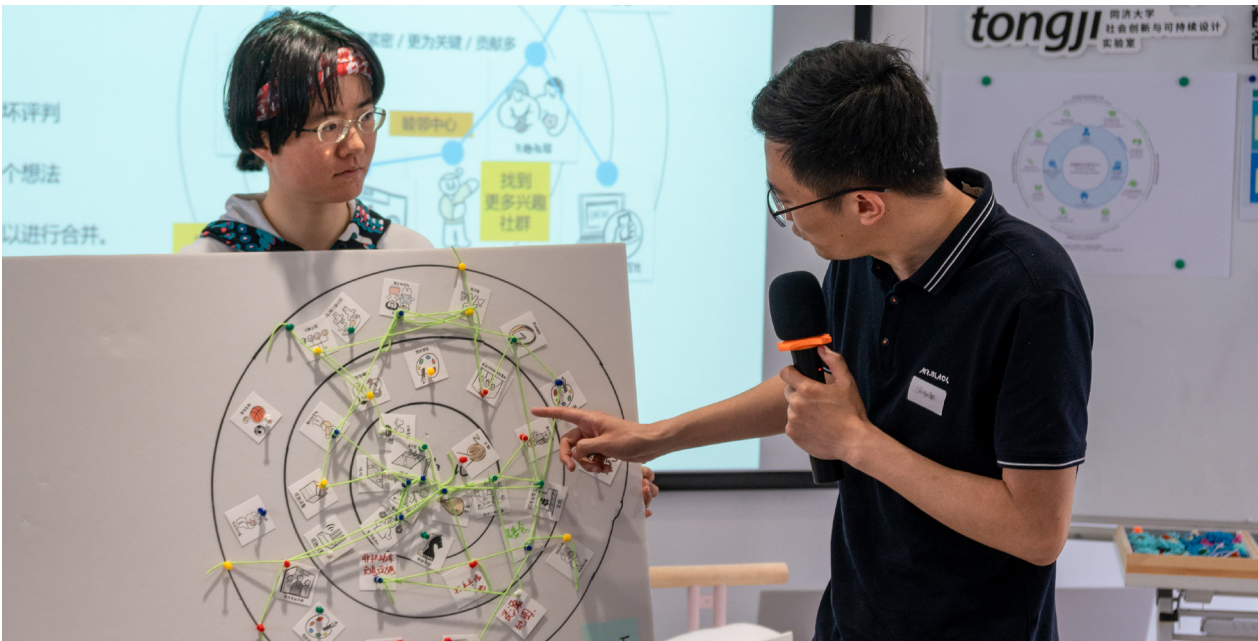
The workshop started with the ‘everyday creativity brainstorming’ followed by the Mapping Game and the reward and engagement. Participants were divided into three groups. Each group was comprised of people from different ages, genders and backgrounds.

The warm-up session started with the brainstorming activity which asked participants to explore “what is creativity in everyday life”. This task helped open up participants’ imagination. Some people thought that daily creativity could be different ways of cutting apples, researching new recipes and revamping old things. Others thought that ‘real’ examples of creativity should be ‘out-of-the-box’ ideas and practices, such as new ways of thinking/doing things and sustainable lifestyles.



In the mapping session, participants were asked to identify and link available resources on the board. The Community Centre was placed at the centre of the board and resource cards were scattered around in different distances. As people connected different resources together, they proposed new creative activities for the centre and explained how different assets and stakeholders could work together. They also examined relationships between different resources and the community centre. This enabled everyone to check the practicality/viability of their proposals.

In the end, each group presented their ideas of re-constructing the creative activity network and how it could work with the Community Centre. At the end of the workshop, a special pin named “Community hero” was awarded to all participants. The gifts were handcrafted by those skilled knitters (who took part in the first workshop). The idea was to show the appreciation and demonstrate how a successful case of creative activity and networking could be.



KEY FINDINGS:

Several key elements were identified for building up a creative hub within the Community Centre – for example: an active community leader, more community of interest, more commitment from community members, and more accessible funding opportunities. It was also important to balance different stakeholders' viewpoints and their demands as well as find efficient ways for people with different roles to work together. For instance, a mature gentleman, who was the senior citizens' association manager, suggested a lot of good ideas for running creative activities. However, his ideas were not appealing to

younger groups. Some younger participants were rather practical and rational about the possibilities of multi-resource cooperation. Although the workshop was comprised of both local residents and representatives from the local organisations (such as Siping Community Foundation and the Self-organized Office of Siping Community), they were generally receptive to new ideas and suggestions. It was also noted that some participants were thinking strategically - showing their potentials to lead the future programme development.



EMERGING IDEAS:

The asset mapping results and participants' interests at the workshop provided a way forward for the development of third workshop. Three groups of participants came up with three pictures of the future creative community. The proposal made by Group 2 (Full-time Mothers Activity Centre / Book Club) was selected as the most suitable theme to be developed further.

WORKSHOP 03

CO-CREATING A SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY CREATIVE HUB IN A LONG TERM

The third workshop was held in DESIS Open Street Lab near Tongji University. Six community residents who attended the second workshop were invited to take part in this workshop. They were joined by two more participants (one member of staff from the local foundation and one student from the university).

Results from previous co-design workshops were analysed and combined to create six possible strategies for future development, namely:

1. Collecting and classifying existing community activities (new opportunities and residents' visions)
2. College of Design and Innovation Tongji University contributes knowledge to the community, and acts as an effective agent for social change
3. Tongji DESIS Lab empowers the community centre in a long term
4. Initiating and incubating community projects
5. Launching "Knit How" as pilot project to participate in the activities in the community centre
6. Formation of an online / offline creative citizens group, and start the action!



METHODS:

Firstly, participants were encouraged to brainstorm and came up with some potential solutions that connected all six strategies. Participants were asked to map their reflections on the above solutions. Lastly, the mapping exercise was then followed by a group discussion aiming to identify the priority projects, the operation details, and how individuals could contribute to them.

The workshop was mainly divided into four steps: self-introduction, connecting potential solutions to the six strategies, resource mapping by residents and group discussion. In the self-introduction session, everyone explained why they would like to take care of the community and what issues they found. The common issues identified by all participants were: 1) some seniors were living alone and felt lonely, 2) parents would like more activities for their children, and 3) some marginalised groups need more support. The participants then elaborated these issues and gave their feedback. Details were written and attached to the six strategies to form a road map.

The most crucial step was co-mapping each participant's abilities and how they could contribute to the potential projects identified. People were asked to answer two sets of questions. In the first set of questions, participants were asked about themselves: 1) what I need and 2) what I can do. In the second set participants were asked to explore: 1) what the community centre needs and 2) what DESIS Lab can support. Next, they were asked to find common issues and map them out.

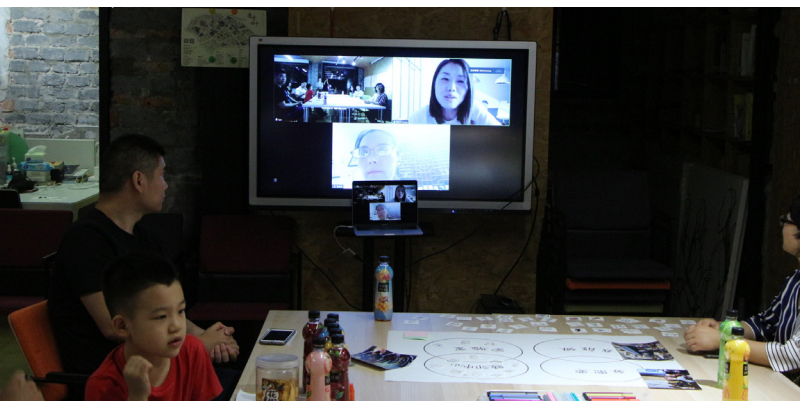
The group discussion at the end was considered productive, since the participants got to know each other through previous tasks. People discussed what kinds of project should start first and what role they could play. They also started communication in the social media chat group.



KEY FINDINGS:

The workshop helped all participants realise that they are creative and passionate about leading activities for their community. A WeChat group was formed as a result of the workshop for further discussions and implementation planning. Since most participants were parents, most projects were related to children – for example: parent-child reading corner and activities between children and their fathers. Other ideas were also proposed, such as resource-sharing salon, personal photography exhibition, emergency rescue training, flea market, and Chinese medical caring course.





EMERGING IDEAS:

Communications between participants has continued in the social-media chat group. Several activities have potential to be implemented at the community centre. There is a need to assess these ideas strategically. To move the ideas forward, the following steps have been proposed and agreed. Firstly, the group will assess and choose a pilot project. Next, they will select the potential leader and facilitators of this activity. After that, they will work together and plan the implementation as well as ensure that this activity is linked to the community centre.

To conclude, these co-design workshops helped stimulate interests in creative activities among the general public. They also helped participants develop ideas and identified people who would be willing to turn these ideas into reality. While these co-design workshops helped promote bottom-up initiatives from people, government policies and support were still taken into consideration through asset mapping exercise, since the activities would be organised at the community centre. This process leads to a good balance of top-down and bottom-up practice.

OUTCOMES:

STRATEGY 1:

Collecting and classifying existing community activities (new opportunities and residents' visions)

The community centre already provides a lot of activities, but it should offer more opportunities where citizens, place managers and local government could connect together through social engagement and the participatory process. Moreover, the activities could all initiated by local residents with the help from other stakeholders.



STRATEGY 2:

College of Design and Innovation Tongji University contributes knowledge to the community, and acts as an effective agent for social change

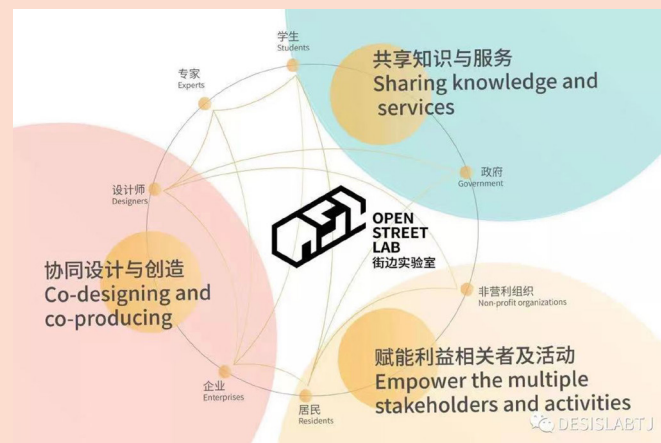
College of Design and Innovation Tongji University is located in the Siping community. Thus, it is in a good position to apply design tools and strategies to create social impact and help foster creative citizen. It could also act as an effective agent for social change in the urban context.

STRATEGY 3:

Tongji DESIS Lab empowers the community centre in a long term

Tongji DESIS Lab (DESIS is short for Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) is one of the important members of DESIS Network, found in 2009, which based on the international and leading research platform College of Design and Innovation Tongji University.

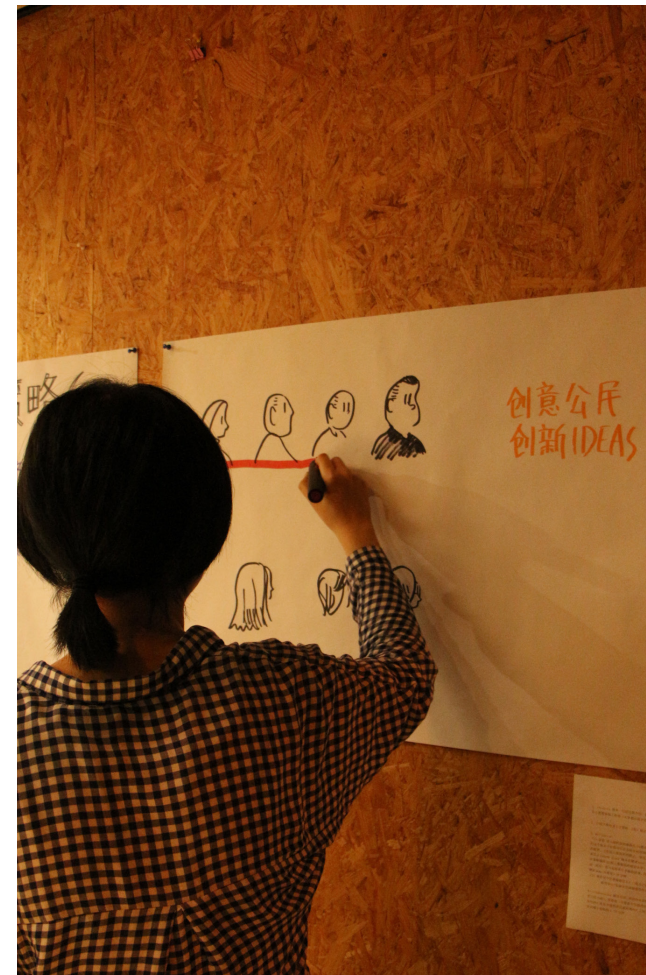
The lab is now focused on delivering practical solutions that could ensure resilient communities by promoting social resilience through a variety of urban systems and processes. Moreover, It aims to contribute to resilient communities in the Chinese context by facilitating the creation and activation of urban places that encourage people to participate in the design process. It also promotes public awareness and social understanding, and help develop community centre into social infrastructure will construct a new sustainable and innovative local model of the community-building.



STRATEGY 4:

Initiating and incubating community projects

Initiating and incubating community projects are a very important part of fostering creative citizens. The most recent project of NICE 2035 (which is short for Neighbourhood of Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship towards 2035), is an experiment to help a residential neighbourhood develop into a design-driven citizens' community. The aim is to produce social innovation which can inspire and direct incubating processes towards sustainable and collaborative cities, which are perceived as an alternative asset to economic exploitation and building new forms of communities-of-place.



STRATEGY 5:

Launching "Knit How" as pilot project to participate in the activities in the community centre

The "Knit How" project was founded by Tongji DESIS Lab. It aims to cultivate creative citizens by utilising hidden weaving skills in the community. The focus is on community building and empowering sustainable lifestyles through the co-design. It will also act as a pilot project to mobilise, integrate and grow existing resources within the community. In this way, it could help empower social innovation through the design process.

织识分子
KNIT HOW



STRATEGY 6:

Formation of an online / offline creative citizens group, and start the action!

Take action is the big impact of social research. A project titled “Creative Citizen” has been established. We will explore how the strategic use co-design and a community-based public space approach could tap into the creative power within the urban communities and help foster creative citizen in a bottom-up manner. The “creative citizen” group started with 16 people including residents, students and professors. It has already been expanding to other communities nearby. The project intends to connect people, generate public spaces, and improve the ecosystem that enables social actions with a hybrid collaborative platform.

创意公民 Creative Citizens



CONCLUSION

The three workshops in China mainly focused on how to make stronger connections between community centres and creative activities, such as making. The workshops’ results showed that there is a great potential and many benefits of transforming community centres into community creative hubs. In this way, local residents will have more opportunities to access to creative activities and use their creativity to ‘give back’ to the community in return. We chose Funshun Community Centre in Shanghai for our research. This was because it is a newly refurbished community centre, which has a great potential to become a community-based public makerspace. We think this is a good starting point to explore how strategic use co-design could help nurture civic creativity in a bottom-up manner. It could also help create a positive and open community’s cultural environment that empowers and promotes the community of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship from research to practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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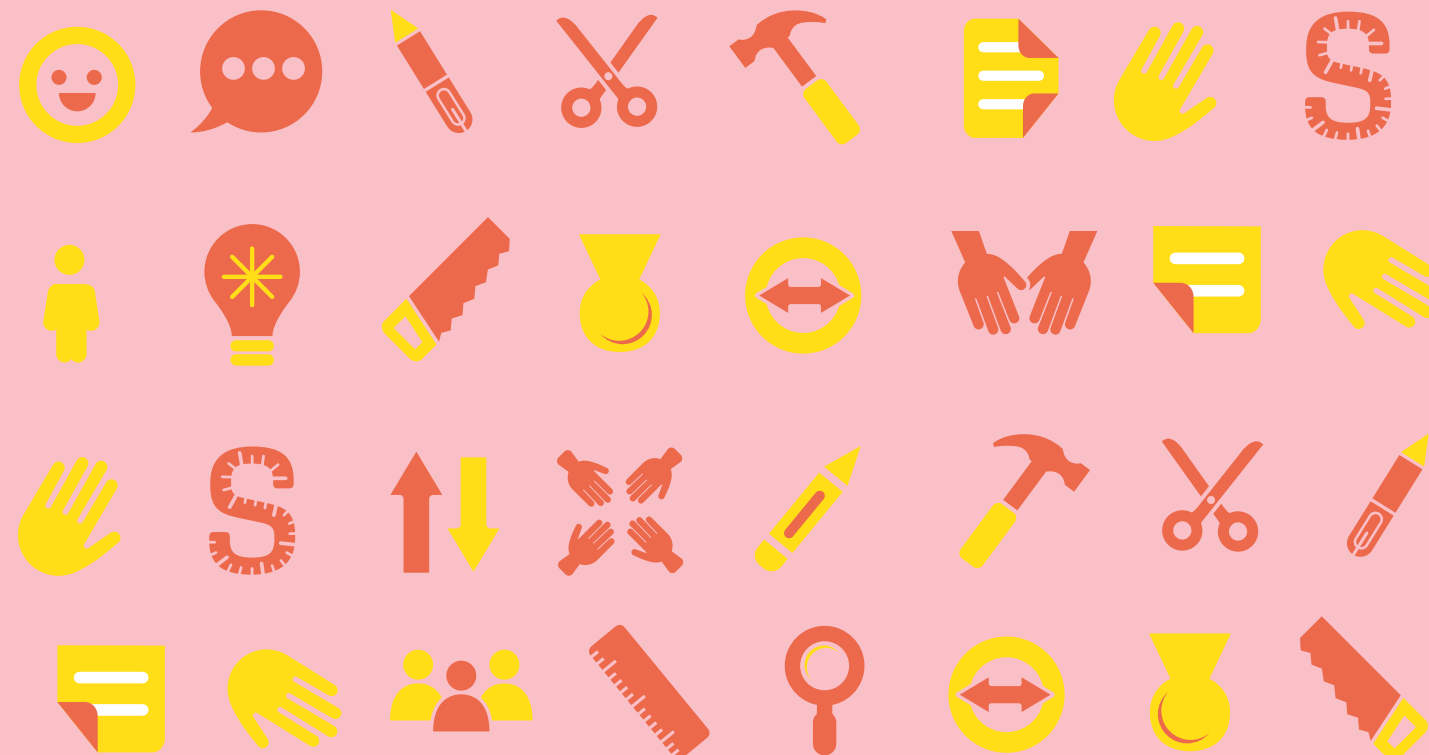


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- Fuxin Road Community Neighbourhood Centre, China
- Fushun Road Neighbourhood Centre, China
- XinChejian workshop, China
- FabLab O, Tongji University, China
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creative makerspace



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