

Design and the force of nature

How People Re-shape Their Village After Earthquakes

This article is about the participatory landscape design experience of the reconstruction project of Tao-mi village in Taiwan, 1999-2001, after the serious 9-21 Earthquake. Participatory design is more time-consuming than the traditional design process, but we believe in the principle that the best design comes from the whole community. It is main characteristic lies in: people, who can find an approach that is suitable for the cultural context, learned to be designers by doing.

The location

The location of Tao-mi village: Tao-mi is a small rural village inside the Pu-li town, which is located in the very centre of Taiwan. The square measure of this village is 18km², the population is 1264, and the range of altitude is about 420~771 meters. On September 21st of 1999, the central Taiwan was hit by huge earthquakes. The disaster destroyed 60% of buildings in Tao-mi village, including public and private buildings.

*Listen to every voice in the design process.
No one is participant only or designer only:
Everyone is a participant-designer.
Honour the special knowledge that each person brings.
As people work together to heal their place,
they will heal themselves
(Van der Ryn & Cowan, 1996:146).*

Design Process

A central principle of participatory design and planning is that local residents know best. A design evolved and was adopted because it fits the needs of a particular community of people with share values and circumstances. The best results often emerge while local people worked closely and intensively with our planning team that insisted in a participatory design process, and design solutions are more likely to be in tune

with what is needed and wanted. The concepts and fulfillment of participatory design in Tao-mi village were quite successful.¹ In the participatory planning process, we - designers - see ourselves as enablers, help local people achieve their goals, rather than as providers of services and solutions.

In the very beginning, it was the community elites initiated the need to reshape their space after "9-21 Earthquake" and to search for exterior aids from professionals.

In the preliminary step, we held a brief workshop, then a field workshop, to establish reconstructive agendas and get people involved. Thus, we helped local volunteers to build up a picture of the nature, needs and resources of their community. These were prioritising and community profiling.

In the step of conceptual design, we generated ideas and created interaction between interest groups by having a community design forum. Design workshops and games were also helpful in conveying their insights and voices. In the same time, we analysed the scale of the regional landscape and investigated the general socio-economic status of villagers and the basic conditions after the disaster via interviews and fieldworks.

Our design team also tried to use all

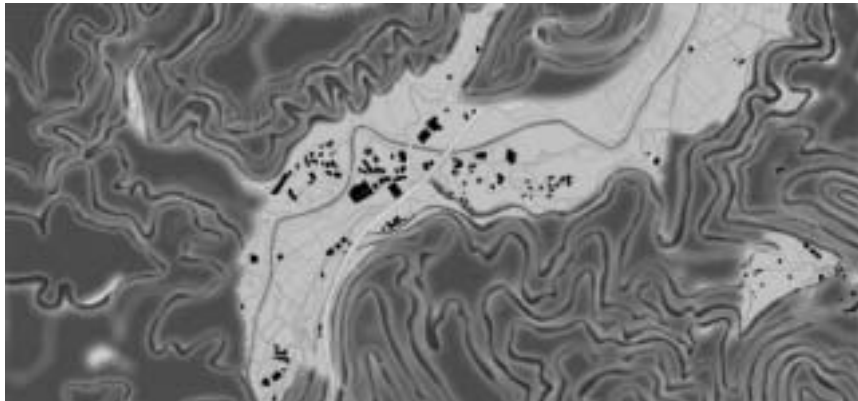


The design location Tao-mi.

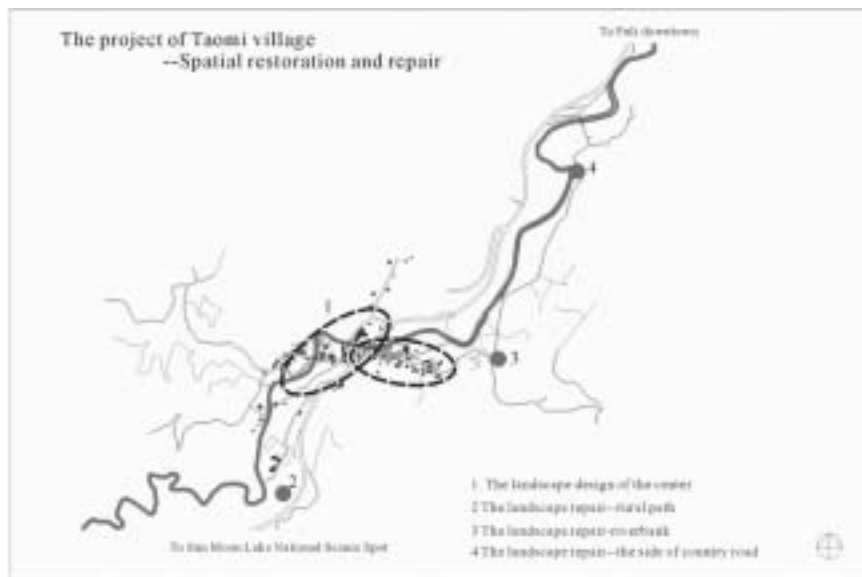
Chen Sheng Lin

MSc Landscape Architecture

chen-sheng.lin@wur.nl



The design area and its spatial context.



The landscape design, restoration and repair in Tao-mi village.

available media to let people know what the project was about and how to get involved. We set up a mobile planning office in the neighbourhood in order to work with inhabitants more intensively. Public exhibition, a micro-planning workshop of design details, and future search conference were held regularly during the whole participatory design process. Besides, the design assistance team was formed and other professionals from different disciplines were consulted in the step of detailed study and detailed

design. The inter-disciplinary and multi-dimensional cooperation inspired me and local people to think and work beyond the initial framework. Reconnaissance trips and recreation activities were arranged several times. These informal activities enabled local residents to get in touch with people from elsewhere who have relevant experience or other community members who were undergoing the reconstruction as well. Sometimes, outsiders, if well briefed, can provide a fresh perspective

which can be invigorating.

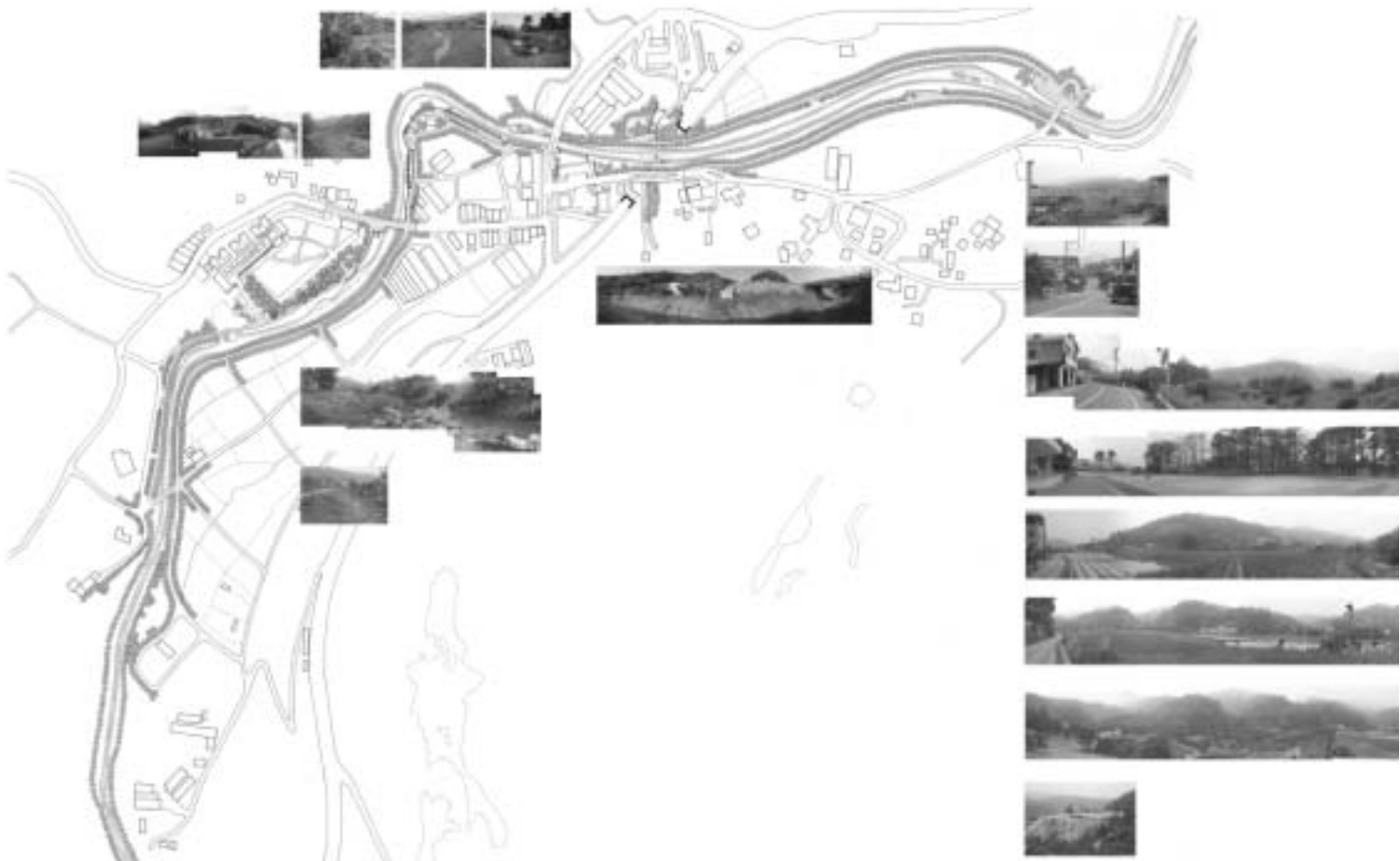
In the final step, the implementation was achieved by the community construction team, which consisted of local people. This is the most distinctive characteristic of this reconstruction project.

The landscape design and repair in Tao-mi village

The centre of Tao-mi was scheming out as *cluster 1*, which includes the main entrance design of the village, the ecological landscape design of riverbank, and other sites which are not shown in this paper. The centre of Tao-mi village was designed with locals' participation. Instead of being implementing by a corporation or a company, the landscape design of the centre were programmed and co-constructed by the local labours, who are also responsible for further maintenance and long-term management. *Site 2, 3, and 4* are the spatial repair and renewal of the living tissue, which aims at integrating in nature scenery and embedding local landscape features into the design, were carried out by the local volunteers without blueprints.

Towards a design of sustainability and grassroots democracy

As a landscape architect myself, I deeply believe in the concept that "my clients," who are rich with local knowledge and therefore of great value, can all possess a basic design literacy that allows us to participate equally in the shaping of the places; in such instances the distinctions between designer, participant, and user vanish. Mitchell (1993:68) proposes collaborative design is a means, through which designers and non-designers alike may participate as equal partners in the design process. Thus, community involvement becomes a truly powerful force for



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positive and sustainable landscape change when a solution grows. When people control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, they will safeguard what they have helped to create; people feel more attached to an environment they have helped created, and they will therefore manage and maintain it better. The design is the work not just of experts, but of entire communities. Such participation, with its rich tangle of inhabitants' knowledge and manual

skills, is at the core of a culture of sustainability.

Furthermore, involvement builds local people's confidence, capabilities, skills and ability to co-operate; the process of working together and achieving things together creates a sense of community; and the collaborative design is also the opportunity for dwellers to learn to take the responsibility to make their living space better. Participatory design is an important part of the trend towards democratization of all aspects of society.<<

Footnotes

1 There are several positive factors for Tao-mi village to develop the participatory landscape reconstructing process, such as: Mobilization and solidarity of village-folks are usually high; Residents and their associations are very enthusiastic about the public affairs and professional aid; furthermore, the level of local elite's participation in the decision-making process is quite intensive.

References

- Mitchell, C. T. (1993). *Redefining Design. From Form to Experience*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Van der Ryn, S. and S. Cowan (1996). *Ecological design*. Washington, Island Press.