

国際シンポジウム
「多様性の中に循環型社会の未来を探る」
論文集

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**Learning from local wisdom:
Towards a sustainable community development strategy**

John K.C. Liu

Professor, Graduate Institute of Building and Planning National Taiwan University

Part 1:

Arguments for participation in sustainable development often focus on environmental justice and empowerment issues. While the strength of these arguments are without doubt critically important and must be actively pursued, there still remains a question of design, or more pointedly, of "form". Some would suggest that so often when we focus exclusively on the goals of just and equal participation for the disaffected communities, we still end up with poorly designed physical environments. Thus, as community planners and designers, we need to pursue good design as well as seeking participation as a goal. Yet others may counter that, if one had to make a choice, it would be more important to achieve environmental justice than good design.

I would like to suggest another way of approaching sustainability. In a fully participatory society, i.e., a just society, I imagine that "good design" occurs instinctively. I am of the position that there is power in the "local wisdom" to produce good design. This wisdom is collective and multi-faceted. It is both cultural and social, and it is inclusive rather than exclusive. However, too often this wisdom has been stifled by more powerful forces. The task of community design ought to be the rediscovery of collective energy so that a fully participatory society is reconnected with the wisdom of good design.

This part aims to provide case study evidence of the existence of "local wisdom" in the community. The participatory dynamics of the "local wisdom" will be described in some detail in order to demonstrate interactions among the participants, and between the community and the designer / planner. First, we will examine a case at Dong-Kang in I-lan County where the community generated the form without the input of the designer. This case study is then used in comparison to participation by the community in the I-lan Performing Arts Theater Project.

A cross-examination will be made between these projects to discuss the depth and variety of collective action. We will show that a collective social process in design generates unexpected forms which very often surpasses the creativity and quality of forms generated by designers.

Dong-Kang Hammocks: ⁽¹⁾

In I-lan County, 75 Km east of Taipei, where I-lan River meets the Pacific Ocean, there is a small fishing village called Dong-Kang. The village consists of about 50 houses tugged behind a sand dune protected from the north-east winds. The one narrow winding road in the village terminates at the river dike. Here on the top of the dike at the mouth of the river, villagers gather on hot summer evenings to catch the breeze and to gossip. About fifteen years ago, the elders sat on the dike one evening and imagined how nice it would be during the hot afternoons to have trees on the dike to sit under. The local officials provided 20

banyan tree seedlings which the villagers planted in two neat rows along the top of the dike. They were placed roughly 3m apart and the two rows are about 5m in width. People adopted the young banyans and took care of them in friendly competition with their neighbors. With love and care, all the banyans grew rapidly and in a few years they had become large enough to form a tree tunnel on the dike. The villagers made a light bamboo armature to form a vault shape to support the branches. Over time, the tree tunnel took on a distinct vault form. Now as the trees grew large and sturdy, one elder fisherman took some old fish net material, made a hammock and tied it between the first two tree trunks along the edge of the dike. One happy doze in the hammock had all the neighbors busy making their own hammocks. In a very short time, there appeared two neat and orderly rows of hammocks hung between the trees. Lying in the hammock on a hot sleepy afternoon, sunlight filters through the banyan leaves which gently flutters among the woven pattern of the hammocks. A light breeze comes in from the mouth of the river cooled by the river weeds. Far off in the distance one can glimpse the thin line of the ocean set against rising hills even further away. It's quiet except for the slight flutter of the leaves.

Later in the afternoon and much later into the evening, the banyan tree tunnel would come alive with men playing checkers, women gossiping and doing chores, children on tricycles and playing games. And families who have decided to have their evening supper under the trees.

The environmental quality of this particular setting is unmistakable. It is both physical (form) and social (content). It is multi-dimensional and multi-layered. It is undeniably an expression of an active, healthy and self-confident cultural process alive and well in the late 20th century.

This example of a good design is surely very common among all cultures of the world. In Japan, in America, and in all parts of the world, there are countless such active processes that are creating good designs. One distinct characteristic of all of these good designs is that they were all made by ordinary people, not professionals and not even community planners and designers. To put it boldly, I am not aware of any designer's work that can approach the level of quality of the banyan dike. As "progressive", "activist" community planners and designers, then, what is our purpose and our objective relative to the creation of form? To try to answer this question, I shall discuss an actual work example and analyze it in the light of the Dong-Kang case.

The design of a theater in I-lan: ⁽²⁾

A public theater for the County of I-lan was commissioned to us. We began by an intensive participatory planning phase wherein the program as well as the form of the stage was determined. That we reached a daring decision to build the first thrust stage theater in Taiwan is reflective of the degree of collaboration among the planning committee members as well as the vision of the county government. The planning committee was composed of academics and experts in the field of performing arts. The consensus was that Taiwan needs different kinds of high-quality performing stages, (different from the prevalent proscenium stage) and that I-lan is a good place to take a lead in a new direction. Decision making during the planning phase remains at a policy level where the arguments were about the pros and cons of a thrust stage versus a proscenium stage, not about the actual design of the theater.

With a decision to design a thrust stage theater, we proceeded to involve local residents, especially the elderly people who liked to gather in the park for informal singing and performing of the local opera. We also sought out local performing groups, not just the popular opera companies, but also other groups such as children's theater group, puppet groups, etc. Then we surveyed the whole range of possible performances that could use a thrust stage which then included musical performances as well as new avant-garde, and experimental theater.

Here I want to focus on one instance of how the entrance to the theater took its form. As we began to know more about the dynamics of local theater, we realized that local performance is most alive when: 1) it is performed out in the open air on a make-shift stage, and 2) it involved mobile acts, a procession and / or actors mixing with the audience. These two key ingredients also seem to be important to many other types of group performances.

Translating this into form, we faced questions of how to make the interior space more open, how to connect the inside and the outside, and how to allow a mixing of audience and actor.

One day while talking to a group of performers about these questions, someone said that what we ought to do is to make it possible for an out-door procession with music, drums, and street dancers to go through the neighborhoods, attracting audience along the way and carrying them all the way into the theater for the finale, as you would do at an open air stage in front of a temple square. Then specifically, a large opening is needed from the street into the theater and as you come in, the procession can come directly onto the thrust stage. Now, while this conception of the opening was being described verbally, I quickly drew a diagram to show its shape and size. From this diagram we slowly worked out the details of the entrance way which, combined with the thrust stage, is now a key distinction of this theater.

Of course the actual participatory process was more convoluted than I have just summarized. There were long and inconclusive discussions about the traditional and the contemporary, about local performing arts and cosmopolitan views, about moving versus stationary performances, etc. We, as designers, had also reflected long and hard on the formal implication of any or all of these ideas. This period of gestation, perhaps several months without a direction nor a clear decision, culminated in a very ordinary and almost matter-of-fact instant when a clear idea about use, i.e., a large and wide entry opening from the lobby extending to the stage, occurred almost simultaneously with the spatial diagram of the entry way. The moment when the conception of use and the form of that use are connected together passed almost without notice. It was not a moment of sudden flash of insight or a mysterious appearance of inexplicable form. In retrospect, the moment was simply a natural and agreeable conclusion of an issue of concern to many participants. No one could claim sole authorship of the design, but all participants contributed to its creation.

Analysis:

Is the one instance in the design of the theater comparable to the creation of the Banyan tree tunnel and the hammocks?

There are obvious differences between the two cases. At Dong-Kang, the participants are mostly elderly

fisherman whose families have known each other for generations. For them, basic life values are common and understood. So when one person comes up with a good idea for something, it is easily assimilated by the group as a whole. That is, the distance between the individual and the community is short and direct. This is clearly demonstrated by the creative process of the Banyan tree tunnel and the making of the hammocks. In the theater, it involved many different participants ranging from experts to local performing groups to elderly people in the park. The process of reaching a moment of community creativity was circuitous and unpredictable. Community, in this case, is an artificially construed idea and is far removed from the individual participants.

A part of this artificiality is the intervention by professional planners and designers. As mentioned before, in the case of Dong-Kang, from the very beginning to the creation and use of hammocks on the dike, there was no professional intervention. One may of course argue that indeed the fishermen are real professionals, but they are professionals only in the sense that they know how to make fish nets. Yet here, they were able to create a place of distinctive quality. In the theater, it is true that without the intervention of the professional planners and designers, the theater could not be built. Just as the fisherman is an expert on fish nets, the designer is an expert in making a building stand up. What remains unclear is the rest of it, the vast amount of knowledge and wisdom that are needed to create a place like the Banyan Dike and the theater. It is not at all certain that the designer is contributing to this reservoir of knowledge and wisdom. The one instance in the case of the large open entry way into the theater may be a very small exception where the participation of the designer may have enhanced community creativity.

In Dong-Kang the cultural process, living with each other and knowing each other in thought and action, has been on-going for a long time. It is a part of the history and life of the village. When the need for the trees and the hammocks became a community issue, it was dealt with as with any other communal problem in the village. There is a built-in social mechanism to handle such an issue. It takes a long time, years and years of gestation, for that social mechanism to mature and to be able to handle issues collectively. It also requires that social relations remain steady and predictable over a long time. On the other hand, the moment of community creativity is short and almost instantaneous, almost as an expected outcome of some on-going collective process. In the theater, the process seemed reversed. Because the theater is a public project detached from the everyday life of the communities, the creation of the theater did not have a communal gestation period. In contrast to the Banyan Dike, the design of the theater took a long time, about 8 years. During this time, the designer was able to partially simulate a process of communal gestation, as in the case of the entry opening, and to reach a formal outcome that is the result of community creativity. The temporal dimension of participatory design process are distinctions that need to be addressed.

Another difference between the two cases is the relationship between function and aesthetics (value assigned to form). In the Banyan Dike case, function appears paramount, form is almost an afterthought. Yet the resultant form is of high aesthetic value, in the sense that users assign meaning to the Banyan tunnel and the hammocks. In the theater, because it is a public project and because the designer is not a member of the community, the question of form and its aesthetics became a conscious one to be dealt with. However, in the case of the entry opening, we focused on the functional needs and let the form evolve

directly out of the needs for that space. In this instance we tried to reenact a community process so that the social dynamics of the participants led to the formal outcome. Yet because of the designer's position as an outsider, the question of formal aesthetics continue to be of an issue, and a dilemma.

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz would say about comparative cultural studies that it is much easier to identify differences than similarities⁽³⁾, the two cases under review here are indeed characteristically different. But returning to what I set out to explore, the participatory dynamics of local wisdom, I suggest the following common ground for discussion.

1. In the Banyan Dike case, the problem was to create a cool place to rest for the villagers. The source of the problem is a felt need, or the perceived lack of some desired state. Here it was the lack of a cool place to rest. In the theater, the problem was to create an entrance for moving performances. It was a perceived need for a particular kind of space that led to the formulation of an open entry. In both cases, the source of the need is functional, that is, the problem is a direct physical issue unencumbered by symbolic meanings of place. The utilitarian nature of the focus on function is not necessarily a characteristic just of stable, unchanging, traditional communities. Function, utility, and use are also the first and primary concern of changing, diverse and urban societies.

But why is this so? There are two points here. First, when people (users) speak of need, or the lack of some amenity, they usually speak in concrete physical terms. Very rarely do they talk in abstract terms. This is true even when the subject matter may be abstract such as ritual, ceremony or interpersonal relations. What this suggests is that people, unlike professionals, consider person-environment interaction in wholistic terms, not compartmentalized. Thus, a place, an object, or a space embodies all that it is and could be. Therefore, the Dike, the Banyan trees, the hammocks, the small temple, the wind, the river, etc., all form part of a whole reality and that wholeness is a constructed one. In the theater, the act of a moving performance and the form of the open entry into the theater likewise has a directness and a concrete reality, though in a less sophisticated way than the Dike.

Second, in a community participatory situation, concrete, physical, utilitarian issues provide a direct context for talking about common concerns. The concrete, i.e., Banyan trees and hammocks, allows an issue to extend from the individual to the group. The concrete also allows an issue to extend from the private to the public such that even if the issue has been raised as an individual private concern, because of its concrete specificity, it is easily assimilated by the group to be treated as a public concern.

2. There is a reservoir of local knowledge⁽⁴⁾ that is existing in all cultures that manage to maintain and create environments useful to a particular community. The strength of such "local wisdom" varies from community to community. In the case of the Dike, there was a flourishing of this "local wisdom". In another community, this wisdom may be dormant, waiting for a time and place to be released. In the case of the theater, with the intervention of the designer, this collective, local wisdom was partially and tentatively released to create an environment that respond to a need. Much more can be discovered and recaptured.

3. As in the case of the Dike, and as in a glimpse of a possibility in the theater, when the social and cultural conditions are mature, good design is a necessary and natural outcome. This opens up a whole set of questions regarding the professional view of "good" versus the community's view. From the comparative analysis presented here, it appears that "good" design is definitely not the exclusive province of the professional design. The cases suggest, instead, that "good" design is primarily a social concept and it must be approached from a social and cultural perspective.⁽⁵⁾ There is a variety of "good" designs each fitting and proper to its community. For this, as community designers, we ought to abandon the notion that we are form givers, and return to provide a useful service in stripping away the layers of oppressive and dominant forces and let the deep, inner wisdom of local knowledge once again flourish and create beautiful environments.

Part 2:

Based on the analysis of the two cases, I will now try to conceptualize "local wisdom" as a central organizing feature of a sustainable community development strategy. Here there are four issues to be addressed: individual vs. social wisdom, the knowable community, participation is not enough, and ecology and the learning society. Finally, a framework for a sustainable development strategy is proposed.

1. Individual vs. Social wisdom

Perhaps in all cultures, the wisdom of place is most often passed on through the art of storytelling where the nuts-and-bolts of culture are told with skill and passion. Each individual storyteller possesses a repertoire of stories which give meaning to place. Through the re-enactment of these valued stories, place and its representative voice, gains stature and power. In the contemporary environmental movement, someone like David Brower⁽⁶⁾ may be close to this kind of individual whose wisdom of place impacts and influences a wide range of civic and social actions. As individuals, each person, to a much lesser degree, seeks to attain a certain sense of wisdom regarding place, be it a garden, a room with a view, or just a comfortable place to sit. As individuals, we strive every day to seek a higher meaning in our relationship to place. Yet too often we seem to fail, we continue to create environments that are wasteful, polluting, and detrimental to well being. Is it that we are really very stupid, or have we failed in some other respect. This is one way of looking at it.

In another way, consider again the dike in I-lan where a small fishing community built hand-made hammocks along two rows of banyan trees. This place, including the process of its creation, its functional aspects, and its symbolic meanings, fits all the requisites of a powerful and wise place. Yet in its entirety, the sense of local wisdom that led to the creation of this place resided in the community, not in any one individual. True, a community is composed of specific individuals and these individuals are important characters and personalities in the story. But, concretely, it was the daily gatherings of the neighbors on the dike and through conversation and exchange where the whole of this place emerged. The vision of the whole, therefore, did not come from any one individual, but is of all those who participated. It may be true that one individual started the conversation, but he / she is by no means the sole bearer of local wisdom. In

this instance, the wisdom of place creation resides in the group.

2. The knowable community

Raymond Williams in his *The Country and the City*⁽⁷⁾, contrasts two forms of knowledge about the community. The great divide seems to be the industrial revolution where knowledge through experience in the pre-industrial era is transformed into knowledge by technical analysis. By experience he means a lived contact with the available articulations. Thus, in the post industrial society, being largely deprived of experience, new methods had to be devised to penetrate what was obscure. i.e., new techniques of analysis, including quantitative and qualitative methods that we are familiar with. Williams argues that this break created "complications for the traditional form because it ... depended on the idea of a knowable community, and now we are faced with the fact that this cannot be called a community and is not knowable in former ways. The result is an extreme crisis of form ...". He then argues that "... we need a lot of examples of practice, so that people can see how far a particular form can be taken. We must be very experimental about it." (ibid, 272-73)

Participatory design is one way of practice for the purpose of grappling with the issue of the "knowable community". Our predicament is that we are removed from experience and yet do not have good enough techniques to help us compensate for the loss of experience. A return to experience, to re-enter the daily life of the community, requires that we become participant members of the community in order to know it. In several instances and in several locations, our group has consciously tried to do just this. In one case at Er-kan village on Penghu Island, we got so close to the elders in the village that one of our female workers was seriously propositioned as a daughter-in-law. In I-lan county, we, as outsiders, have successfully, over the past ten years, become integral members of the local community. These, as ways of knowing the community, none-the-less, are exceptions to an overwhelming sense that we remain outsiders to the "knowable community". All of our efforts in this regard can not escape being outside-in in nature.

3. Participation is not enough

There are two points here. The first is that when people participate, they often simply voice wants which are not grounded in place, i.e., they don't really know what they want. People tend to rely on external images and values as their own. Thus for example, in a debate over street width in a poor neighborhood in Oakland where actually, both those in favor of wide streets and those arguing for narrow streets base their perception on externally determined images of what is good. Regarding participation, then, it is simply not enough to say that when people have participated, we will necessarily have good results. In this case, either way, the results would not be satisfactory. The second point is whether to view participation as a means or as an end. If we see design as essentially a political act, then the goal is to achieve participation, and we often consider the achievement of participation as "empowerment". However, if participation is a means, or a method, towards some good, in this case, good design or the quality of the environment, then the question becomes how participation could lead to good design, or conversely, is participation enough to create good design.

Here we face a profound dilemma regarding the forces of "globalization" which tend to homogenize and universalize our place values. As in the example of the streets, either wide streets or narrow streets are both borrowed values external to the locality. It is part of our post-modern predicament that we seem not be able to escape. Participation as a means to an end, and participation as a goal in itself, give us a clue to a possible solution to this seeming impasse. It seems that when we argue that participation is not enough, we are basically saying that empowerment by itself does not lead to greater wisdom, or better places, that people must learn to know what is really good. Thus, the good is not participation, but it is wisdom of good places. So the first point is that while we work to achieve participation, our goal is more than participation.

From another point of view, in many of our participatory community development projects in Taiwan, we often find that as we get closer to the community, as we become a little more in-tune with the daily life of the community, what is important to us begins to shift and change. For example, in the historic preservation of the aboriginal settlement of Kochapogan, what began as a project to preserve and restore old slate houses turned into a program for community development, the only concrete outcome of our project was the initiation of a kindergarten to teach the mother tongue to children of the village. Here what happened was that the externally implanted value of historic preservation of the physical was slowly, during the course of interacting with the people, shifting towards an internally driven goal of setting up a self-determinant educational program. To the extent that this could be considered as a good result, we attribute it to a fully engaged interaction between the professional and the people.

4. Ecology and the learning society

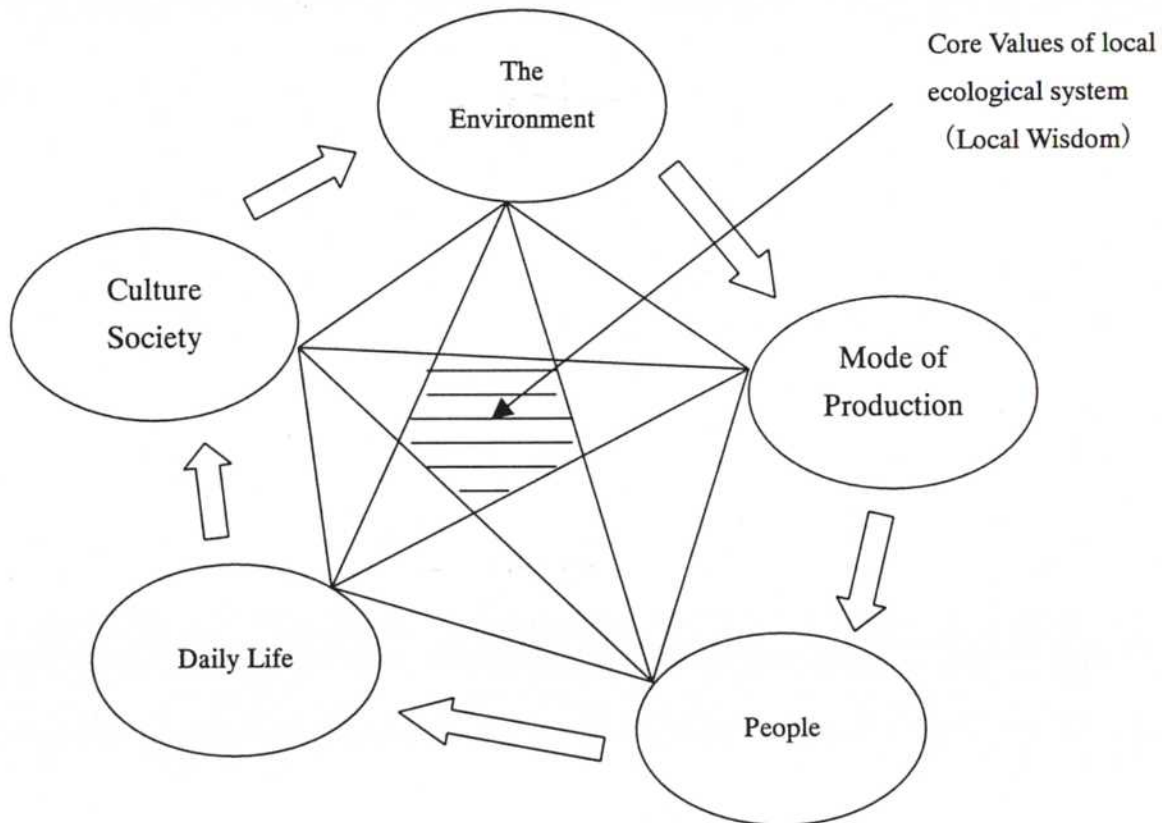
How do we begin to reacquire a wisdom of place? Randy Hester⁽⁸⁾, in speaking of a neo-native wisdom, i.e., a new kind of local wisdom, proposes three strategies. First people must experience locality, second, to know local ecology principles, and third, to promote local knowledge.

In reaction to contemporary society and the extent of environmental degradation, I would agree with these strategies in trying to reverse the course. There is no question that for most of us, we are increasingly disconnected with our locality. To reverse this trend, ways must be found for people to reconnect with the land, with locality.

In an article "Wisdom sits in places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape", author Keith Basso⁽⁹⁾ suggests both a reciprocal relationship between place and wisdom as well as a learning relationship between the native wise person and the outsider professional. The idea that "places work to make one wise" not only teaches how to know a place, but more importantly how to be wise. The moral pedagogy rests on "place preexists wisdom and place is the ground of wisdom", and to be wise, one observes, experiences, and narrates on places. This is a learning process, through wise people, we learn to observe, to experience and to narrate. In most contemporary cases, however, it seems to me that we learn much more from local people than they from us. Even concerning local ecological principles, such as wind, water and sun, local people generally know much more than us. In the case of the eco-house that we designed and built in Taichung County, if we had not engaged the family in a full participatory design process, we would not have determined the appropriate form. I suggest that the teacher-apprentice relationship is a mutual one

where the wisdom of local people can find a means to counter the ignorance of designers.

A sustainable community development strategy necessitates a reconsideration of fundamental views of ecology. Carolyn Merchant in *Radical Ecology*⁽¹⁰⁾ identifies three basic types. The first is deep ecology which views homo sapiens and other forms of life on earth as equals. Other than humans' self consciousness, there is no specific meaning to life. Ecology is understood as a total natural system. The second is spiritual ecology which holds a primal reverence for nature and the natural world. The native people's attitude towards earth and all religions sacred sites are similar in their spirituality. The third is social ecology which holds that humans are both destructive and creative. They can destroy the environment, but they can also recreate it. People's interaction with the environment is a learning process, where what is good can be learned and practiced. Meaning is derived from interaction between people and environment. The core of this creative process is the structure of local wisdom. By situating local wisdom within an ecological framework, the mechanism for sustainability can be conceptualized as follows:



The core values of the local ecological system, that is, local wisdom, holds the key to the sustainability of a community. It not only acts as the repository of the past, but also determines the specificity of the present. It is what distinguishes it from others and gives it meaning. In critical ways, local wisdom is a form of public intellectual property of a community. This community intellectual property is the basis for sustainable development.

Endnotes:

- 1) A detailed documentation and analysis of this process has been written by Ching-yu Tong, *Go sleeping in the Hammocks: A research of the "Banyan Dike" at Dong Kang in I-lan*, Masters thesis, graduate Institute of Building and Planning N.T.U. 1996
- 2) Planning and Programming report published as: "I-lan Performing Arts Center: A pattern language" Laboratory for Building and Planning, N.T.U. 1991
- 3) See for example, Geertz, Clifford, *Islam Observed*, "Their differences are apparent, as differences usually are", "The similarities are more elusive, as similarities, at least when they are genuine and more than skin deep, usually are".
- 4) Geertz, Clifford, *Local Knowledge*, N.Y. Basic Books, 1983
- 5) Voices for this turn to the social and cultural include: Lynch, Kevin, *Good City Form*; Haworth, Lawrence, *The Good City*; Friedman, John, *The Good Society*; Bellah, Robert, et, al., *The Good Society*; Galbraith, Kenneth, *The Good Society*; Chomsky, Noam, *The Common Good*
- 6) David Brower, co-founder of the Sierra Club, U.S.A.
- 7) Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City*, Oxford U. Press, 1973
- 8) Hester, Randy, & John K.C. Liu "A continuing dialogue on local wisdom in Participatory design", in *Building Cultural Diversity Through Participation*, Council for Cultural Affairs, Taipei, 2001, pp. 416-458
- 9) Johnson, Norris, B., "Space, Place, and Sensibility", in *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Winter 2000, pp.4-6
- 10) Merchant, Carolyn, *Radical Ecology*, Routledge, 1994