

THE COMMUNITY GUESTHOUSE BUILT IN THE MIAOXIA RURAL VILLAGE OF CHINA

In the Miaoxia rural village in Sichuan Province (China), the [Insitu project](#) has built a Community Guesthouse with the active participation of local people.

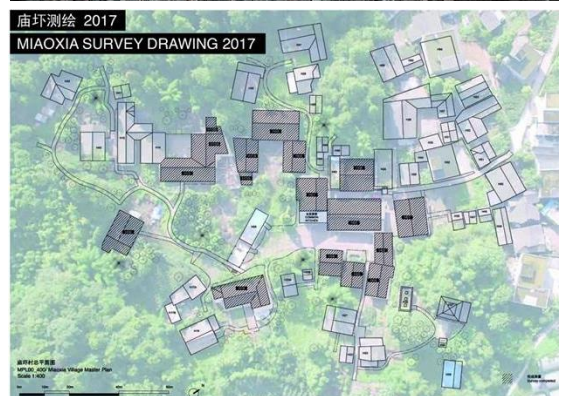
The [Miaoxia Village Community Guesthouse](#) is constructed through a participatory design process and has been completed in 2017. The renovation of an existing house and construction of a new extension accommodating 20 people provides six guest bedrooms, training spaces for disaster preparedness, a social workers office, a tea room, activity spaces for children's play and study, as well as bathroom and laundry amenities in a total of 350m². A community kitchen enables larger events to be catered for including festivals, weddings and visiting groups, and generates revenue for the villagers. It fosters positive change in the village, activating skills, self-organizing capacities and higher levels of community cohesion. External bridges and deck spaces are integrated into the overall design to contribute to a flexible usage.

The *Miaoxia Community Guesthouse* runs as a cooperative providing revenue for the villagers and permits visitors to stay overnight or longer and to engage in other activities in the village. An integrated community orchard and a waste water management system will help upgrade the village towards sustainable development.

The project started in 2015 implementing the social enterprise involving the villagers and with a cross-disciplinary action-research to design and build a community kitchen. The project adopted the methodology of Participatory Design processes (design process, constructed spaces, capacity development and skill extension), involving over 100 participants. The second phase of the project, began in 2017 and was aimed to provide accommodation and improve sanitary conditions to allow groups of tourists to stay for longer periods of time. This second phase consisted in the renovation of existing timber-framed houses and the construction of a new extension to accommodate 20 or more people.

On June 2018 the *Miaoxia Community Guesthouse* has been recognized as finalist of the [2018 AZ Awards](#) for its outstanding achievement in the category *social good*.

In 2019 the prestigious [designboom magazine](#) has published an extensive article on the experience of the *Miaoxia Community Guesthouse*, which has been taken up by a wide range of



international reviews specialized in architecture and design.

The success of this project lies in its choice to tackle common problems in rural areas and to propose advanced solutions and methods that can be replicated in China and in other countries.

The project represents a response to the problems of depopulation and impoverishment of rural areas. These phenomena, due to the rapid industrialization and urbanization processes, generate everywhere the abandonment of the villages, the loss of the natural resources of the territories and the great heritage of the local culture. Focusing on high quality tourism, to attract people interested in learning about rural areas of China and their millenary culture, the project has created an alternative for the local economy. The cooperative created to manage the Guesthouse and the quality of the works carried out have laid the foundations for a new future for the villagers.

The participatory design methodology of the works has allowed to recover the declining tradition of wood craftsmanship skills of this village of wooden buildings, formerly known for its expertise in carpentry.

In particular, the project has recovered the ancient construction methods to make homes resistant to earthquakes and the improved technologies described in the project website can be used by other interested villages. The guesthouse used a through-type Chinese timber frame construction adapted to provide an increased resistance for earthquakes. In addition, the timber structure sits on stone foundation blocks that allow the structure to move in case of an earthquake. The master carpenter's construction skill allows the structure to move in response to ground movements. The guesthouse adopted this type of timber frame construction and served to revitalize declining timber building skills.

Finally, by involving young volunteers in the participatory design and remodeling and construction of new homes, the project has created the basis for enhancing ancient building techniques with their cultural value, improving them to be adequate to meet the modern needs of a sustainable habitat.

The Insitu Project has operated in many villages of several provinces in China since 2015, collaborating with academic institutions, NGOs and community groups. Directed by its founding partners Peter Hasdell and Kuo Jze Yi, the project is managed by a non-profit registered association operating out of the School of Design HK Poly U and Shenzhen U.

To know more

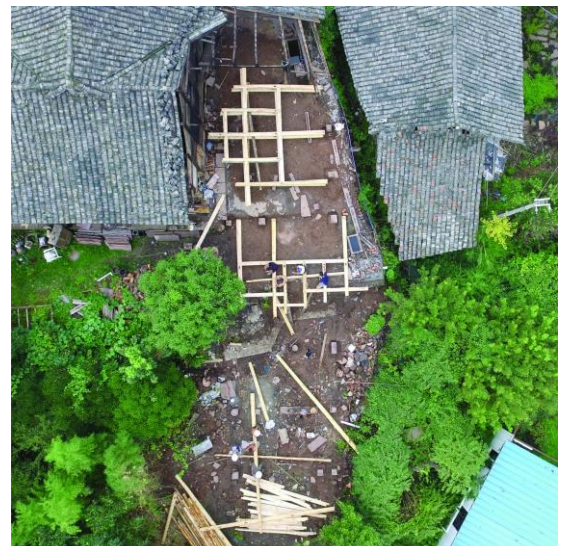
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