



Housing – A Critical Perspective.

08-09 April 2015

Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

1. Paper / Proposal Title: A New “Unofficial” Hybrid Housing and Community Model: Farmers, Floaters, Artists and Urban Village Leaders Challenge and Re-Make the City in Early 21st Century China

2. Format: Written paper

3. Author(s) Name: Mary-Ann Ray

4. University or Company Affiliation: University of Michigan

5. Abstract (300 words):

This paper will focus on a new and emergent early 21st century hybrid housing and community building model that is found not in a liberal first world western democracy but rather unofficially and “non-legally” in the cracks and crevices of cities in a socialist one-party state- China. The Urban Villages of Chinese cities currently provide the primary stock of housing for the multitude of arriving rural to urban migrants known as the “floating population”. In addition to fulfilling this important need, the Urban Villages in cities like the capital city of Beijing go even further and produce a new model for dense, diverse, economically sustainable and vibrant communities. Unlike most migrant urban communities in cities around the world, the Chinese Urban Villages are not slums and do not involve squatting, they retain rural and agricultural characteristics and there is a high degree of entrepreneurship attained by the residents.

A close examination of the mechanisms of the formation of the Urban Villages reveals an inventive hybrid model of community building that is primarily built from the “bottom up”, that is, by the resident farmers who transform their land usage from single story houses into multi-storied boarding houses, along with “top down” unofficial contributions to the environments by the government. An even richer mix of participants and ideas occur when, in some cases, enlightened small scale developers, world class artists, activists and designers enter into the equation.

We have been living and working in the Urban Village of Caochangdi in Beijing since 2006 and have witnessed, documented and researched its development and the roles played by the former farmers, the floaters (migrant workers), village leaders and artists including Ai Weiwei (also an architectural designer, activist and owner of a small construction company) and the forward thinking small scale developer that he collaborates with.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Mary-Ann Ray

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Mary-Ann Ray is the Taubman Centennial Professor of Practice in Architecture at the University of Michigan. She has held visiting Chair Professorships at Yale University, Rice University and the University of California Berkeley. She was educated at the University of Washington and holds her Master's degree with honors from Princeton University.

Ms. Ray is a Principal of Studio Works Architects in Los Angeles and a Co-Founder and Co-Director of BASEbeijing- an experimental laboratory for urban and rural research and design. Studio Works is an award winning design firm whose design work and research have been widely published. Principals Mary-Ann Ray and her partner Robert Mangurian are architects, authors, and designers, and were awarded the Chrysler Design Award for Excellence and Innovation in an ongoing body of work in a design field and the Stirling Prize for the Memorial Lecture on the City by the Canadian Centre for Architecture and the London School of Economics. Ray is also a recipient of the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. Among her published books are Pamphlet Architecture No. 20 Partly Underground Rooms and Buildings for Water, Ice and Midgets, Wrapper, and Caochangdi: Beijing Inside Out.