

Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

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COLLABORATIVE SERVICES AND MOBILE NETWORK

Observation of social innovation and anticipation of sustainable lifestyle in China

Abstract

The paper reports the observations of emerging grassroots social innovations as collaborative services and anticipation of Chinese visions of sustainable lifestyle specifically in the perspective of mobile network as collaborative network.

On one hand, Cases of Social Innovation towards sustainability have been observed in Europe (EMUDE 2006) and worldwide (CCSL 2007). Known as Creative Communities and Diffused Social Enterprises, they are bottom-up emerging initiatives that illustrate the real possibility of reorienting the evolution of present society in the direction of a sustainable knowledge and network society (Manzini, Jegou 2003). Therefore, promotion of this kind of social innovation could be a viable strategy for sustainable development, and in this transition strategic design approaches are supposed to play important roles as a social learning process (EMUDE 2006). On the other hand, in China mobile communication application has been diffused rapidly in last 10 year. Till July 30, 2007, the number of cell phone users in China has reached 508,564,000 (Ministry of Information Industry of P.R. China, 2007). In this radical change, the mobile is not only a portable tool for calling, but also a new lifestyle for connections rebuilding with the collapse of traditional social infrastructure.

The aim of this ongoing research is to investigate collaborative services in social innovation in China and the potentialities of mobile communication technologies as enabling system for collaborative services in the transition of sustainable society in China. This paper is an intermediary result of first part of the research. In this part, the research is based some programs including promising cases collection, interviews, a seminar and a design exercises with supports from local partners and research network in China.

The paper starts with a discussion of bottom up initiatives of sustainable lifestyle. We present the observations and results obtained through seminars, interviews to understand the local context of cases. The research leads us to the following: the promising cases could be anticipation of Chinese sustainable lifestyle; the same service idea of the case in China has different content from that of Europe; a new model of service system based collaborative network is implicated in those social innovation (collaborative service); and mobile network could bring new opportunities to facilitate social innovation.

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The paper also discusses the diffusion of mobile communication services and new application in China. It indicates that mobile facilitates the evolution of social infrastructure and everyday life. Furthermore, paper discovers the potentialities of mobile network for sustainable lifestyle as collaborative network. The paper puts in evidence that mobiles and mobile networks have specific qualities to enable the collaborative services. Several scenarios in the perspective of mobile network are built in order to generate Chinese visions of sustainable lifestyle and society.

The outcomes of research contribute to promotion of grassroots social innovation in China and the further research on it. The research benefits the development of the specific proposals, solutions of collaborative services and service ideas towards sustainability. The subsequent research could investigate the systematic application of mobile communication technologies as enabling system or part of it for collaborative services.

Keyword: Collaborative service; Social innovation; Mobile network; Sustainable lifestyle; Case Study

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