

## BACKGROUND

### Taiwan Acts! Architecture in Social Dialogue

The exhibition "Taiwan Acts" is about a special aspect of the current building culture in Taiwan, which promotes socially engaged architectural projects with more humble origins. Away from large-scale projects by international architects, new approaches have developed that are little known abroad.

Following the devastating Jiji earthquake of September 1999, a number of architectural initiatives emerged and are still emerging in Taiwan that focus on the social role of building to strengthen the equality and sustainability of living conditions. These include measures to improve urban structures and local settlements, but also cultural buildings, international humanitarian architecture, infrastructure and housing in many places on the island. Projects by architects such as Ying-Chun Hsieh and Atelier-3, Fieldoffice Architects and Sheng-Yuan Huang, the urban renewal in Hsinchu, and also community planning and empowering projects will be presented.

In total, more than 100 projects are selected for the exhibition, categorized in 5 themes according to localities or approaches. Although they vary in scale and contexts, they form a collection that illustrates how architects, together with the community, are responding to the challenges and constraints of their respective social, economic, political and cultural conditions through design, architecture and urbanism. Whether initiated by professionals through a top-down approach or by non-professionals driven by grassroots movements, the projects are testimonies to the close examination of issues relevant to society and passionately advocated for. The shared ambition is to advance justice and fairness in a society of increasing division between the haves and the have-nots.

The exhibition "Taiwan Acts!" is the first comprehensive presentation of this topic and will be presented with a variety of photographs, video materials, interviews and models. It is curated by Dr. Chen-Yu Chiu (Bilkent University, Turkey) with Professor Chun-Hsiung Wang (Shih-Chien University, Taiwan), collaborating with deputy curators, including Ya-Chun Chiang, Sheng-Feng Lin and Yu-Chih Hsiao. A comprehensive catalog with accompanying essays by the curatorial team, Sheng-Fong Lin, Shu-Cheng Tseng, Chang-Chih Hsu and Juhani Pallasmaa will be published by Architangle (<https://architangle.com/books>) in summer 2021. A free brochure will also be published to inform exhibition visitors about the various projects in the exhibition. An accompanying program with guided tours is being planned.

The exhibition is structured along five main chapters:

#### 1. Making Places in Yilan

The architect Sheng-Yuan Huang began establishing his career in 1994 in Yilan, a town located at the northeastern corner of Taiwan. He has worked and lived together with his team at Fieldoffice Architects. Together, they have played multiple roles as the initiators, mediators, designers and users of various public projects of different scales in the town. With financial support from the government and the endorsement of their local communities, they have been able to focus their work on revitalizing the historical city center and public spaces of

## **BACKGROUND**

Yilan. The main purpose of their work here is healing the collective memory and imagination, and restoring the identity of its residents.

### **2. Developing Local Communities**

Ten community development projects are selected, including Nou-Li Association, Kids' Bookhouse, Maple Community, Taumi Eco-Village, Zhushan Town, Sin Hua Old Street, Yiwu Community, Kasing Slate Slab Houses, Nanjichang Community (South Airport Community), and Community Planning in Keelung. They came as a result of community members coming together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems through communication, negotiation, design, architecture and urbanism. The joint efforts from civic leaders, activists, involved citizens, and professionals, are aimed at improving various aspects of communities, while reflecting their respective locality, identity and/or interests, in both urban or rural settings respectively. The projects illuminate the substantive role of architecture in promoting participative democracy, sustainable development, human rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, as well as social empowerment.

### **3. Constructing Autonomy of Architecture**

This chapter presents the very individualistic approaches of eight architectural firms to architectural creation, including BMT Architects, D.Z. Architects & Associates, Divooe Zein Architects, HARMONIOUS Architects & Planners, ECG International Landscape consultants, Atelier Or, Behet Bondzio Lin Architects, and EHS ArchiLab. These projects show on the one hand, the architects' attempts to confront the dominant and conservative architectural practices in Taiwan, and on the other, the way these projects aimed to address specific social and environmental problems. The architects find solutions by insisting on upholding ideals manifested through their radical approaches to design and construction.

### **4. Building for World Citizens**

In the past 20 years, few architects from Taiwan have devoted their life and work into the field of humanitarian architecture in general and post-disaster housing reconstruction in particular. One of the most notable among them is Architect Ying-Chun Hsieh and Atelier-3, who completed more than 4,000 houses in post-disaster zones across Southeast Asia over the past 20 years. Since 2012, Guo-Chou Chen, architect and professor at the Department of Architecture of Shih Chien University built several schools and houses in rural areas of Cambodia together with his students. Responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, the architect Chen-Yu Chiu and his team at Studio Cho also designed, constructed and managed the Taiwan-Reyhanli Centre for World Citizens in the far-away town of Reyhanli bordering Turkey and war-torn Syria.

### **5. Regenerating Hsinchu City**

Hsinchu is a windy coastal city with the youngest population in Taiwan and famous for its leading industry in the field of semiconductor manufacturing. With half a million inhabitants over an area of nearly 100 km<sup>2</sup>, it is a small city by Taiwanese standards, and like most such small cities, Hsinchu had suffered from low-quality public projects, poor maintenance of public spaces, and a lack of pedestrian-friendly environments. Since 2014, the then newly elected Mayor Chih-Chien Lin and his team have commissioned a series of public projects to transform and regenerate the deteriorated cityscape with the ideal of a walkable city.