Generating Social Sustainability through Placemaking: A Study of Everyday Lived Space in Basha Miao Settlement

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the role of placemaking in the process of creating social sustainability through the everyday practice of minority ethnic communities in Guizhou. With the rapidly development in recent decades, the physical and cultural landscape of traditional communities in Guizhou faces heterogenisation and fragmentation problems. From the perspective of everyday life, resonating with Bruno Latour and Henri Lefebvre, this paper examines how social sustainability is generated through the relationships among locals, their practices and the living environment. This study will take the Basha Miao settlement as the case study, investigate the changes in physical spaces and social lives in the village, examine various ways of placemaking and its process, by mapping the practices, the sites and the social networks in the process of placemaking. This study shows how peoples' everyday life practices (re)produce, (trans)form and (re)configure their public space in Basha, with methods of literature review, fieldwork, spatial analysing, and interviews. Through creating space in everyday life practice, multiple participants integrate local knowledge-like culture and collective memories and need into shared places.

1 INTRODUCTION

With rapid socio-economic development, global climate change and environmental issues, as well as frequent disasters in human settlements, the question of how humans can recreate the resilience of settlements through social activities has been a hot topic. The folk wisdom of creating 'Unity of Man and Nature' in Chinese traditional settlements of ethnic minorities may be able to provide some solutions to solve the problem. Against the context of the two-wheeled development of 'Rural Revitalisation' and 'New-Type of Urbanisation', while being propelled with opportunities for the development of agricutarl and tourism industries, traditional rural communities in China are also facing crises such as changes in traditional industries and population migration. Within such context of modern rural development, in this paper we explore how practices in traditional vernacular settlements such as placemaking enhance the social sustainability of the community and strengthen the endogenous power.

From the ecological aspect, the concept of sustainability has been deeply developed with "social concerns" (Dempsey et al., 2011). There is, however, a lack of research to clearly define and fully operationalise the concept of urban social sustainability. (Larimian & Sadeghi, 2021), thus resulting in a real challenge of presenting a clear theoretical framework (Dempsey et al., 2011). Nonetheless, for a rural context, how can we develop a conceptual framework that is aligned but also differing from the urban environment? While exploring these questions and gaps, this paper

also attempts to gain insights into the relationship between the rural and the natural environment, which leads to the imagination of an alterantive vision of urban development.

Situated in an ethnic minority traditional settlement in Guizhou, China, this study examines the process of placemaking by which local residents have been able to preserve their own cultural identity and enhance the sustainability of the community in their everyday lives. Through field research, mapping, and interviews, this study aims to explore how social sustainability in rural areas is generated through the socio-spatial relationships among local residents, their practices and the living environment. This raises several research questions:

RQ1: How can we articulate and investigate this process of placemaking？
RQ2: What are local people's spatial practices and their sites in the settlement?
RQ3: How does the social structure affect the process of placemaking and social sustainability?
RQ4: How do the local understandings of the natural and built environment manifest themselves in the process?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *social sustainability in a rural context*

A considerable body of literature has discussed sustainability in a rural context in recent years while mainly focusing on sustainable development (Billington, Carter & Katamba, 2007; Marsden, 2013; Marsden, 2017; Wang, Eisenack and Tan, 2019; Huang and Zheng, 2022), and energy technology and building materials (Picuno, 2016; Gorbenkova, Shcherbina and Belal, 2018; Deng, Xie and Peng, 2018; Shi, 2022). On the one hand, by foregrounding the relationship between rural and urban in areas such as agriculture and tourism, scholars seem to examine the rural through an external and urban-centric gaze and consider it as 'the less significant other' (Mormonnt, 1990), a supplement of resources and knowledge (Gutierrez-Velez et al., 2022; He & Zhang, 2022). On the other hand, the emphasis on local skills/materials in building construction overlooks the social and spatial politics of the community, seeing space as a 'thing' (Lefebvre, 1991) rather than an outcome of the specific relationship between different groups of people, between human settlements and the nature, between their practices and their understanding of sustainable development. In some cases, drawing sustainable design and low-carbon living without integrating into the local social structure might also lead to a form of social exclusion (Franklin & Marsden, 2014).

Also, as these two strands of discussions both highlight the economic dimension of being sustainable, we need to be aware of the pitfall of 'productive capitalism' with the concept of 'framing everything in terms of the economy' (Soja, 1989; Latour, 2020), and neglecting the hidden discourse and the 'everyday low-carbon practice' of the locale in generating sustainability. Scholars such as Shirazi and Keivani (2018) and Larimian and Sadeghi (2021) have pointed out that social sustainability, despite its significant role in sustainable development, is given far less attention than the others (environmental and economic). Considering the ever-changing and elusive nature of social structure in each cultural context, it would be difficult to grasp a holistic understanding of the local discourse by conceiving social sustainability as an 'add-on' aspect. Larimian and Sadeghi (2021), for example, argue that social sustainability needs to be discussed and examined multidimensionally (including social interaction, sense of place, social participation, safety, social equity and neighbourhood satisfaction). Meanwhile, as the such framework is based upon an urban context and scale, there is a necessity to develop a conceptual framework for the assessment of rural social sustainability within the specific Chinese context.

2.2 *Understanding the locale from an everyday and relational perspective*

To investigate this overlooked discourse of the locale in generating sustainable development, a discourse that is largely based upon their practice and their relationship with both the built

environment and nature, we have to register the lived 'reality' of the rural inhabitants before projecting and imposing a more sustainable future on them. As Lefebvre argues, 'the space of the everyday activities' differs from 'the space of experts (architects, urbanists, planners)', for which the former 'has an origin' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 362). That is to say, the local discourse of sustainability and their 'everyday low-carbon practices' are a 'subjective' outcome of their own history, culture, belief and geography. Such local knowledge, expressed in the socio-spatial order of their living environment and their everyday practice, has to be registered and revealed through 'everyday reality', as it is hidden in the technocratic order of the space and overlooked by scientific knowledge (Lefebvre, 1991; de Certeau, 1984).

At the same time, this emphasis on everyday life is not about examining these practices individually but understanding them as a collective discourse, a 'shared vision' (Li, 2021, p. 282), within the specific context. Drawing on the argument of Highmore (2002), everyday can be seen as a field of negotiation, and a point of confluence between 'microscopic levels' (the commonly recognised everyday practices and objects) and 'macroscopic levels of the totality' (societal understanding of sustainability, culture, national policies, natural environment, etc.) as discussions on sustainability in urban studies have often focused on either 'top-down' policy and sustainable design, or 'bottom-up' individual behaviours (Li, Tan and Rackes, 2015; Schäfer, et al. 2018), a holistic conceptual framework needs to be explored to avoid the pitfall of any unilateral narrative. Scholarships on sustainability have provoked the understanding of a pluriverse (Escobar, 2011) and the politics of Gaia (Latour, 2017). Such understanding of multiplicity becomes extremely crucial in the study of ethnic minority communities, as Homewood's research on sustainability in East Africa revealed the degradation of local idioms through an imposed 'specific evaluation metrics' (2009). With his Actor-Network Theory (ANT) being increasingly referenced in planning theory and practice (Rydin, 2012), Latour's writing continuously reminds scholars of the 'thread-like character' of modern societies that connects not only 'human' but also any other 'non-human' that is 'granted to be the source of an action' (Latour, 1996) - a thread that does not foreground neither 'the personal' nor 'the collective' but an entity through the notion of network (Latour, 2020). In this study, such a relationist perspective can lead us stepping forwards to understand the everyday practice 'beyond their performance' and see it within a 'network of things, norms, and embodied know-how' (Schäfer, et al. 2018). And for Chinese rural communities, this relational nature of everyday space and practice tends to be more apparent due to a relation-based 'acquaintance society' (Ruan et al. 2022).

3 METHODS

To understand the relationship between social sustainability and the everyday practice of placemaking, a set of methods were combined to investigate different meta-dimensions of social sustainability through a critical cartographical perspective (Kim, 2015).

3.1 *Data collection*

- Literature research to understand the general background of Basha village, and the documentary collection of local planning documents and policies
- Fieldwork, including on-site observation, documentation, and Cognitive mapping of everyday practice with semi-structured interviews
- Interviews with other key stakeholders of the settlements

3.2 *Fieldwork*

The research formed three pairs of field teams, each consisting of two assistants from the major of urban planning. One of them was raised in a nearby area and is also Miao or Dong, and can communicate with most people in the village. The other is an outsider, who can hold an objective perspective in observation and choosing interviewees. The field teams conducted fieldwork in the

villages, documenting the activities of 61 groups of indigenous residents, and completed face-to-face interviews and cognitive maps with 20 of them.

3.3 Observation & Documentation

The research team recorded the research path and activity location through the GPS function of outdoor apps and documented the activity and the interview content. They were asked to focus on those factors through observation: (1) who are the actors conducting everyday practice? (The number of activators, gender, approximate age, potential relationships, length of time); (2) what are the activities? (Purpose, process, results, and potentially derivative activities); (3) what is the related spatial condition? (Stools, facilities, transformed furniture, etc.).

3.4 Cognitive mapping & interview

Besides observation and recording actors, activities and the spatial condition of everyday practice, the field team asked local people they could communicate with to draw a cognitive map of their everyday lives. As most residents found it difficult to directly describe their everyday life, the mapping process would be guided by the following interview framework:

Table 1. Interview framework for cognitive mapping

PRACTICE	What are your daily routines outside? What do you do outside every day? What do you play with? What do you see while playing or working outside your house? Where do you usually play?
SITE	Where are these activities happens？ Can you descript the space for me? How do you usually get to this space? Will you cross somewhere to go? Is there any other practice may happen in the site？
TIME	When did all these activities take place? How often is it? How many times a day or a week? Does everyone else do this every day? How long will it last?
SOCIAL NETWORK	Who will participate in these activities? How many people will involve the activities? What is the relationship between you? What do they have to do with you? Will you be involved in their other activities? Like what?

3.5 interviews on other stakeholders

Besides local residents, face-to-face interviews conducted with people who work in village committees and the travel company are essential to understand the social structure, general policies and the followings: (1) the traditional and transformed organisation structure of the community; (2) policies and regional planning from local authorities related to the community; (3) the influence of tourism development.

4. CONTEXT: BASHA MIAO SETTLEMENT

4.1 Spatial characteristics of the settlement

The relationship between the settlement and nature is reflected in its name, Basha (岜沙), literally 'a place with lots of silver grass and cedar trees' in local language. Throughout six periods of migrations of the Miao, each time the community has moved deeper into the mountains of the karst region, where the terrain is more fragmented (Zhou & Feng, 2015). After several migrations, the Miao community settled at the foot of Moon Mountain, a branch of the Ninety-thousand Mountain Range, where the mountain slopes from the ridge to the southeast and northwest with complex variations in elevation. The Miao people built their houses on high ground due to the defence purpose in the past. The houses in Basha are built on the mountain's slopes, along the contours of the ridge and the hillside. The transition between the nature (cedar trees, the bamboo forest) and the buildings in the undulating hills creates a dynamic border. The Basha people have developed a common perception of the collective resources of the settlement over a long period, which is reflected during the cultivation and other practices. In a challenging setting that is not conducive to agricultural development, the Basha people have carefully inhabited the local environment and created a collective living space with shared spatial characteristics due to its geographical features, and a high degree of communal identity (Su, 2018).

4.2 A highly coherent community identity

In addition to a highly coherent spatial characteristics of the built environment, the abundance of cultural activities and community exchanges, guided by a harmonious landscape and shared community belief, has also helped to shape a strong sense of ethnic identity. Without external influences, the Basha people spend a great deal of time producing materials for major festivals with their cultural identity as "Miao". Several significant families in Basha have forged close blood relations through intermarriage between families, while other families need to gain the trust of local people through the act of "brotherhood" to become a part of the main society in the village (Jing, 2018). The Basha people's strong sense of community is reflected in their costumes, working patterns, and the richness of their collective activities and lifestyle. For example, known as the "last gunman's tribe", dresses and gowns in Basha have a unique ethnic significance. Decorated with waist packs, flower belts and tobacco bags, the men of Basha often carry knives and guns with their clothing made of bright cloth dyed by the women. The women of Basha typically wear a hairbrush and a tightly fitted dress of bright fabric with flower bands sewn into the hem of the sleeves and a heavy, multi-layered silver collar for festivals. The colour of the pleated skirt also indicates the woman's marital and reproductive status.

4.3 Changes in the social organisation after the development of tourism

Under the constraints of the traditional ethnic beliefs since the founding of P.R.China, the Village Committees have gradually replaced the administrative duties from Zhailao (an elected elder with prestige in the village who once served as the social leader of Basha Miao Village) and the ghost master (the spiritual leader). The village rules and people's covenant formulated by the Zhailao, ghost masters and the village committees have effectively maintained the social order of Basha for many years. After the launch of national policies, the first secretary and cadres appointed by higher-level governments, and the members of village committees elected by villagers, have become agents for administrations and developments. With their original spiritual and cultural symbols of the community, Zhailao and the ghost mater have been integrated into the new diversified organisational structure in varied ways. Current Zhailao, for example, served as the former director of the village committee and has been actively participating in the decision-making of the village after retirement. A mechanism has been established in Basha where the interests of 'companies + village collectives + cooperatives + farmers' are linked with tourism companies in terms of village construction, scenic spot management, ticket revenue, and performance dividends. However, this new organisational relationship did not have a profound impact on traditional social relations of the community (Su & Sun, 2017).

5. CASE STUDIES: EVERYDAY LIVED SPACES IN BASHA

5.1 Everyday Sitting Spaces in Alleys

While the men tend to go to the fields or the city to work, local women usually stay at home for maternal care and domestic activities, as well as pulp dyeing and embroidery making. In a group of more than three people, they often gather and make traditional costumes together in the space outside the residential buildings due to the limited lighting inside the building and local dry climate. As the settlements are densely arranged and appear in clusters due to local geographical feature and early defence needs (Huang, 2019), these gatherings are not concentrated or projected; rather, they occur spontaneously and become an embodiment of the social relations. Most of the gathering spaces are located next to the streets and alleys in several adjacent residential buildings or an open field in front of the house, surrounded by varied elements such as wall, eave, corridor, piled firewood and the tool shed - all enhancing the sense of enclosure of the space. In some spaces outside the backyard, one may find a clean and flat rock of about one square meter in size. These rocks are often used as a platform by residents to repeatedly hammer the dyed cloth, or as benches and table for embroidery tools and food during gatherings. The centre of the gathering space usually defines the theme of the gathering: food, charcoal braziers, barbecue grills, or small foldable table. Bamboo racks, used for drying silk thread and strips of dyed cloth, could be moved onto the border of the space in order to provide shade. When the gathering space coincides with the tourist route, the informal structure also creates a flexible barrier for local women to escape from the external gaze and avoid communication with strangers.

Internally, this type of everyday space provide a welcoming environment for local women in the village where they make traditional costumes through weaving, dyeing, hammering and sewing, a complete process that requires multiple women to complete together. They often bring their own wooden stools, sitting together for needlework, barbecues, chatting, or producing tools. With their children and infants playing around, observing the process of embroidery and pulp dyeing, and learning from their mothers, it is through this informal way of everyday gathering on the street that local knowledge (of cooking, cloth making) is produced, exchanged and passed on to the next generation.

5.2 Water Well

Due to the perennial shortage of water in the region, local residents carry buckets to the well everyday to fetch springs from the mountain. Most wells are close to the road, and according to the interview, local villagers would put the buckets along the road queuing for the water due to the slow fetching process. While they are waiting for the water or on the way to the well, people often greet each other and share information related to their everyday life. With pavilions, stoves and other structures for people to stay near the well and gather together, the well and its surrounding area have been gradually transformed from a water fetching point into a public space for varied activities. Before planting seedlings in March of the lunar calendar, for example, a large pot will be set up on the stove by local people to boil water to boost the sprouting. In June and July of the lunar calendar, local women will meet near the wells to rinse the dyed cloth. They also gather around the well at a more daily basis to wash their hair and clothes, for which the wooden rails of the well pavilion become temporary drying racks. While their mother gathering around the well, children also play in the open field near the well, echoing the character of gathering spaces on the streets.

The importance of well for local residents is reflected not merely in these daily activities, but also in their cultural practices which are related to their faith in nature. Near one well, there are huge rocks tied with bamboo baskets and straws for rituals. Different materials will be added to the rocks according to the requirements of the ghost mater for blessing activities. Accommodating varied practices at different rhythms throughout the year, the well (the pavilion and the water) becomes a material ground that maintains and expands the social relationship of the local community. It is a space with the character of publicness where daily practices, production works, and cultural activities overlap, all being closely aligned with the social structure, local climate, the transformation of natural environment in different seasons.

5.3 Lusheng Ping

Redeveloped and planned in the typical form of a public square, the Lusheng Square was originally used as a gathering place for major events such as Lusheng Festival, where local villagers would assemble there for ceremonies such as the Lusheng Dance. The square is recognised as a key public space in local tourism maps and top-down planning documents, as well as the centre of cultural activities in many Pasha-based literate (Huang, 2019; Zhuang, 2005). In recent years, driven by tourism development, the square has been transformed into a stage for cultural performances from local people, which are managed and operated by one tourism company. However, at daily life, local residents barely use this area as the square deviated from their routines. During their performance with the tourism company, villagers who participant in the performance often gather in a closer group of acquaintances waiting for the show to start, and then, the crowd will retreat from the square after the performance without further stay. The square is also not very popular among the young generation, as young men and women of the Miao ethnic group are also prohibited to date in the square based on their custom (Wu and Jia, 2017). From our survey and interview, the presence of villagers in the square was seen only during major festivals and tourism performances. Most interviewees pointed out that few villagers would visit the square on a daily basis. Shaded by huge tress and covered with pavements, the Lusheng Square as a modern public space somehow fails to integrate into the everyday life of local residents with its underused status..

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Parallel spaces: from developers to the locale

There is a difference between the important nodal spaces perceived by the outside world and the spaces where the villagers of Long Horn gather for their daily activities. From the tourism map, the traditional village conservation planning, and the research of previous scholars, the important spaces in Basha perceived by the outside world are the village square, the Lusheng ping, and other spaces that are related to important ceremonial activities and the development of the tourism industry. However, from the cognitive maps, our observation and interviews, it is the everyday space produced by local residents that accommodates most of their daily activities. From sitting spaces in the alleys to the wells, these spaces may find no traces in the tourism map or official documents. Yet, with drying racks, stoves and dyed cloth, local residents with varied tools and resources produce their own social space in a clever and participatory way, and generate a great sense of social sustainability through their everyday low-carbon practices and their shared understanding of the settlement.

6.2 Beyond the built environment: society and nature

The traditional production methods of Basha are highly dependent on nature and the Basha people claim to be the descendants of maple trees. In the culture of the Basha, trees have an important

connection with human life, the important stages of birth, illness and death of the Basha people have ritual activities related to trees, and group marriage activities that occur during festivals such as "Guarding" and "Swinging" in Basha also occur in the woods outside the group of folk houses. Since childhood, children in Basha have been chasing and playing in the alleys and fields with miniature wooden bullhead toys. When asked about the everyday leisure activities of local adults, the words that often appear are "uphill" and "watching the mountains and water", which are non-organized collective activities in the fields, and the living habits formed by the Basha people who have lived in the mountains and rivers for many years, combined with production activities. In Basha, people are only a part of the nature, and the territory of their home is not limited to the scope of the human settlement or the walled gate, but the land among mountains, rivers and forests where the buildings are located. Their tree worship, high symbiosis with nature, and ecological maintenance behaviours are all part of the indigenous understanding and knowledge of the relationship between human settlement and nature. Human society here stands at nowhere near the centre of the land and the nature is not merely a resources for production but an 'absolute and alive field (the trees) to breath together (Lefebvre, 1991). Basha, then, being far away from the system of urban development, reminds us that the idea of 'framing everything in terms of the economy is a new thing in human history' (Latour, 2020).

6.3 Placemaking: a space of care

Being lonely, the accompany and care, The small irregular open space behind the folk houses in the Basha settlement is often an important place for the villagers to gather at an everyday basis. The growth and reproduction of a family are also reflected in the geographical relationship of the village, and the small open space is often surrounded by villagers with kinship. Basha women often gather in the "sitting space" around their houses to work together or gather for leisure and food. Compared with the phenomenon of women generously occupying the centre of the site while accompanied by group work, women are more inclined to sit in the corner of the venue, or even curl up and hide in a space that is not easy to see from the outside world while when working alone outside the house. Women in Basha often go in groups to wash their hair, carry water, embroider, do laundry, feed livestock, and "watch the mountains and water". The act of care and the accompany under this kinship relationship is an important way for female villagers in Basha to provide silent support to each other, and it is also an effective way to improve the fairness of the use of space.

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