

# Designing Experiences: Connect Yourself to Everyday Surroundings to Discover the Place a new

-Based on analysis of the stairway redesign project with the *Haesong Local Child Care Center* in Korea-

## Topic Area:

Art Education

## Format of Presentations:

Paper Session

## Paper Description:

What is the main purpose of design? Authors believe that it is to connect users to their surroundings and objects to create a sustainable relationship between them so they experience long lasting design. Through the process of building an intimate relationship with the space through acts of playing, users become self-motivated participants. In order to illustrate this, the paper analyzes a project at the *Haesong Local Child Care Center* in Seoul, South Korea.

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## **Abstract**

With rising interests on design thinking methods in resolving social and environmental problems, there have been many experimental practices with human-centered design approaches in solving problems in our local communities. However, in April 2016, the mural of *Ewha Maul* (Village), which was considered as a successful example of collaboration between local residents and external design experts, was vandalized by residents themselves. In the meantime, new discussions on the role of design in overcoming social issues have started. In this paper, we aim to draw implications of human-centered design for social issues through studying a case redesigning the local “stairway” with *Haesong Local Child Care Center*, located in Changsin-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul, in which surrounded by sewing factories. Initially, this project aimed to improve the environment of unorganized neighborhoods with help of the center’s children. We took notice on the “stairway” leading up to the center as our object of design. To scout the spot and look for loopholes of this place to improve, we planned to hold workshops with children using design thinking toolkits every second week over the next 10 weeks from April until June, 2016. However, we soon came to realize that how inconsiderable and lack of understanding we were on children, the main user of the place.

After experiencing errors and failures to communicate with these children, we decided not to use design guidelines for the remain workshops, but to play with them. Drawing beautiful murals on the walls or cleaning the staircase was not a solution, but a temporary installation or an event. Hence, our goal for the project had changed to make children feel connected to the space through designing games that could imprint their fun memories on the place. Based on this project with the *Haesong* center, we also conveyed a design thinking workshop with educators to seek applicability of the experience toolkit we developed in schools.

The outcome of this project was a process of activities, the intangible experiences. The lesson we got from this study was that we were able to discover “true user experience design” by which practiced with self-motivated users. Namely, user experience is not given by external experts nor designed by technology-driven products, but it is designed by sharing experiences and memories of the users of the space.

*Keywords: experience design, intangible design, self-motivation, public design, design education*

## **1. Introduction**

Rittel and Weber (1973) defined social, environmental, and cultural issues intermingled together as ‘wicked problem’ [1] because those issues are interconnected and that complex relationship make them hard to solve with a single approach, although they are worthwhile to resolve. In the recent times, as many put efforts on these hard-to-solve problems, design thinking with human-centered approach received attention as a champion for those projects. Many of recent design projects tackled problems of education, water shortages, lack of daily necessities, and environmental improvement of the third world. However, many questions on how sustainable the outputs of those projects are with local people and surroundings.

In May 2016, the mural of *Ewha Maul* (Village) in Seoul which was considered as a successful example of collaboration between local residents and external design experts, was vandalized by residents themselves [Fig. 1]. Due to this event, critics started to talk about validity of public design. One of the main reasons for the conflict in *Ewha Maul* is that routine life of local residents whom the main stakeholder of the design, was violated by the change of their living environment as many tourists visited their community and even their front yard.

In this paper, we would like to raise a questions, if then, how should design approach be to consider various stakeholders of different interests and sustain well within the context of use in terms of design education. Based on reflection from a term project to redesign the long curvy stairway leading up toward the *Haesong Local Child Care Center* [Fig.2], an after-school located in Changsin-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul, with their students, this research aims to discuss issues of human-centered design approaches and search for an answer for the previous question. In this regards, we will reflect on how the project aim and process had changed with three phases through the course of conducting five workshops with them. As a result, we will review implications of the output of this project compared to existing design thinking toolkits for educators.



**Figure 1.** (Left) Before and (Right) After of *Ewha Maul*



**Figure 2.** The *Haesong Local Child Care Center* and the curvy Stairway

## 2. Process of “Stairway Redesign Project”

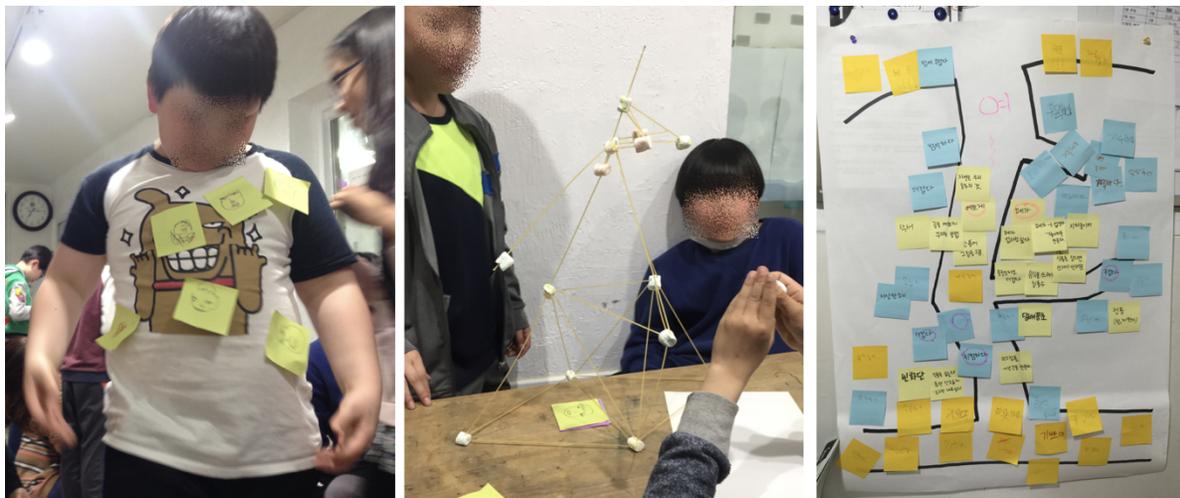
### 2.1 Phase 1: Initiative

The long curvy stairways, our design target, is the path to school, main streets, and the old fortress, and has many passers-by. At the same time, however, it was the place that nobody cared for. Therefore, we found it was important to make participants to have a sense of ownership to the place to solve the problem. This project initiated from ideas to develop ‘Design Thinking Toolkit for Children.’ The aim was to practice methods in the toolkit with children and redesign the stairway from solution discovered from toolkit workshops, and as a result develop a design thinking toolkit to fit the eye-level of children like *Khandu* [2]. *Khandu* is a kid-centered design thinking toolkit in the form of card game which kids ultimately share their solutions and other resources on online community, designed by *Seven Thinkers*, a Madrid based service design and design thinking studio.

Most of the parents who sent their children to *Haesong Center*, are working in sewing factories until late at night so that they have little time to spend with their children. In that context, these children lack outdoor experiences to stimulate their creativity unlike their peer-group in school.

This redesign project started coincidentally when we met a teacher who is in charge of the center while we were roaming around the area in search of inspiration. In the beginning, our ideas for the project were not that much different from Ewha Maul Project, to clean off dirty garbage bags and place a nice installation on the wall of the staircase with children to make it look more attractive.

In the first workshop, we played an icebreaking game and built a tower with marshmallows in order to be friendly with them as well as to see their creative possibilities [Fig.3]. Then in the second workshop, to discover problems of the staircase, we put a map on the wall and handed out post-it to children to write down troubles they have with the place and stick them on the map [Fig.3; right image]. Our approach using post-it just like grown-up design thinkers were not successful, although we found that these children have negative impressions on the staircase and would like to escape from the space as soon as they could. We soon realized that this 2 hours of workshop without playing any games just killed their interest on the project and left them as passive viewers to the situation.

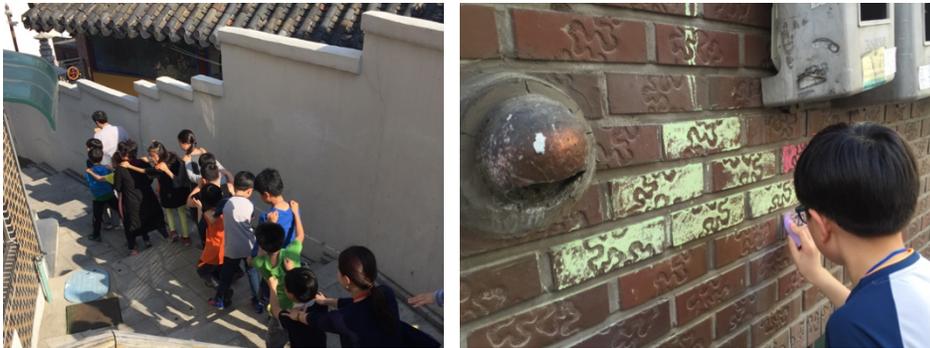


**Figure 3.** (Left to Right) Ice Breaking, Marshmallow Tower, and Map Tree with Post-its

## 2.2 Phase 2: Empathy with Users (Local Children)

After two workshops, we realized how inconsiderable and lack of understanding we were for children to deliver our ideas, the main user of the staircase. From the previous workshop, children received this problem finding approach using post-it as another boring and dull classwork which has to be done under control and step-by-step instructions. Accordingly, we decided not to follow existing design thinking approaches, instead we prepared tools and games that children could play in the stairway in order to build fun memories at the place. And throughout the play sessions, we expected them to feel connected to the place. We believed that designing positive experiences for the children is the ultimate goal of this project. In this regard, we tried to understand the stairways from their perspective for the following workshop. As a

result, we have concluded that letting the children to play at the site is the best way to overcome this situation[Fig.4]. It will make them naturally feel comfortable with the space, therefore become to like it. One of those games we played was paper-rock-scissor at the stairway without rules but only guidelines so that children could create their own. We brought dozens of washable sidewalk chalk to help children to draw rules, but first express their thought about the stairway on the wall. Before the third workshop, we were excited to bring this new game and play it with children. However, these children, unlike our expectation, went crazy with the chalk in their hands.



**Figure 4.** (Left to Right) Train Play as IceBreaking, Discover New Patterns, a New way of Cleaning

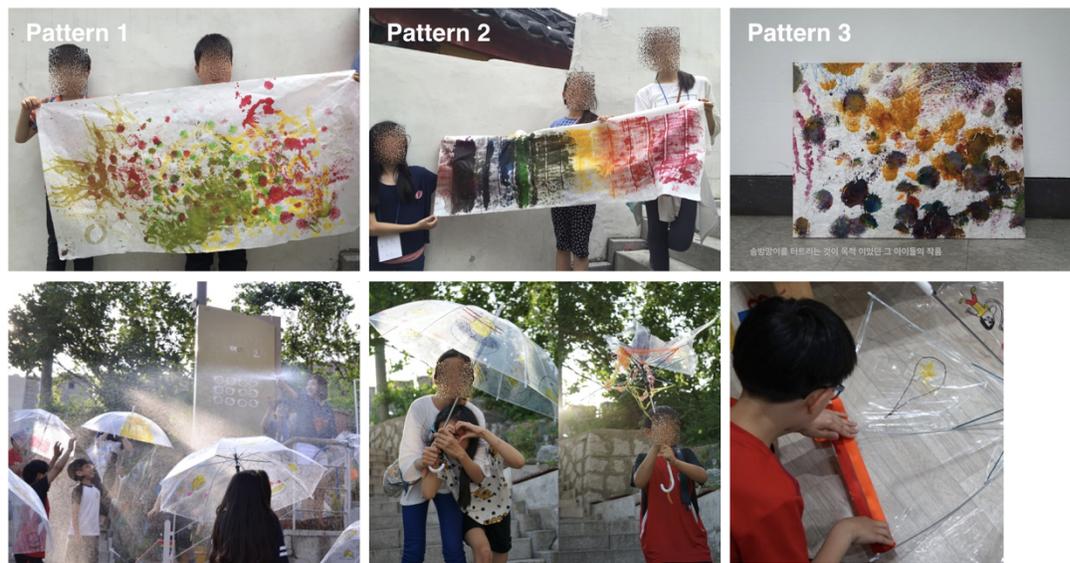
Through this experience, although we did not complete what we have prepared for, children by themselves discovered new patterns of the space as they were examining and observing it with a new given tool. In this workshop, children created their own game, like a map on the bottom to the secret place of which led us to his friend's home. That is to say, with self-motivated act of playing, they were able to discover unknown aspects of this space. They even fully enjoyed cleaning off time playing with water sprays and smashing a mop on the floor as a new way of cleaning. From this example, we have learned it is more important to design a right platform that users could start playing rather than lock them up in the fixed processes of design. In terms of design education, educators should not push students to follow a certain guideline, because it will only kill their creativities.

### 2.3 Phase 3: Design a Toolkit to 'Be a Friend with Stairway'

With lessons from the third workshop, the object of this project have changed to design a playing experience toolkit that children to 'Be a Friend with Stairway.' The experience toolkit is to connect users to their surroundings by helping them to see the place with a fresh look through exploiting the space. Through this journey, we were finally able to search for a meaning of the space and design from users' perspective.

In fourth and fifth workshop, we conveyed other play sessions at the stairways to deepen children's attachment to the space. In order to help children to have a fresh look on the space, we brought rubbing tools that children could print any hidden patterns they found interesting [Fig.4; pattern 1,2,3]. On our last day with the *Haesong* Center children, we simulated as if the day is a rainy day with a water spray gun, and children played with decorated poly vinyl umbrella with markers, color velcro, and kitting wool[Fig.4: bottom lane]. In the end, the outcome of the project was not an installation that could be easily seen from other

public design examples, but a process of activities and intangible experiences that will be remembered for a long time. And this is how we defined sustainability of design. By experiencing this whole workshop process, children had grown affection and created an attachment relation to the space which was the ultimate goal of the project. For children, the experience at the stairway became a chance to discover various possibilities of expressing their selfness. For us, we experienced the power of self-motivation in design education for extending creativity. While reviewing the project and process we have been through with children, we were able to summarize the project into five steps and three phases as arranged in this section [Fig.7].



**Figure 5.** Discover New Patterns of the place, and have Playful Experience on Rainy Day at the stairways

### **3. Workshop with Educator based on Activities : ‘Play with Your Surroundings’**

Based on the *Haesong* project, we conducted a design thinking workshop for educators in 25 June 2016. One of the main goal of this workshop was to design a new game to play after experiencing icebreaking and pattern seeking to help them to see the classroom(a routine space for teachers) with a new perspective. Differences between this workshop and the *Haesong* project were that the workshop was an indoor activity with educated grown-ups who can be easily controlled while those children at the center had freedom to do many activities outside such as smashing a color ball to the floor to tear up paper and draw murals as much as they want on the wall (since they used washable chalk) and they were also way more wild in reaction which we found as their hidden possibilities for creativeness.

This workshop with educators were conveyed with four steps which are 1) Icebreaking, 2) About myself (Create a Manual of oneself), 3) Discover the Place a new, 4) Design a Game based on Activities. Since it was the first day of 10 days of workshop, icebreaking game was a great tool for participants to be familiar with each other. We did the classic paper-scissor-rock train play in the classroom as the first icebreaker, and as the second we played ‘Guess my Number,’ the game 5% Design Action [3] of Taiwan developed

[Fig.6: first two images]. After then, we asked people to draw each other's faces (5 faces within 5 minutes) on post-it without looking at the drawing paper [Fig.6;third image]. With these quick drawn portraits, people created a self-introduction manual of themselves to classmates.

The third step to discover the routine space a new was to find new possibilities for art and design education which was the main purpose of this workshop. From the experiences with children, we applied this curriculum to seek new patterns of the classroom environment by rubbing them on paper with watercolors [Fig 6; fourth image]. Participants were excited to discover new patterns, signs and textures of the indoor space, and imprint them on a paper. After this exercise, we asked them to design a game based on activities and objects discovered in space. As a result, we found that there are new possibilities for this kind of art/design classes based on activities and processes to foster active and self-motivated students(users).

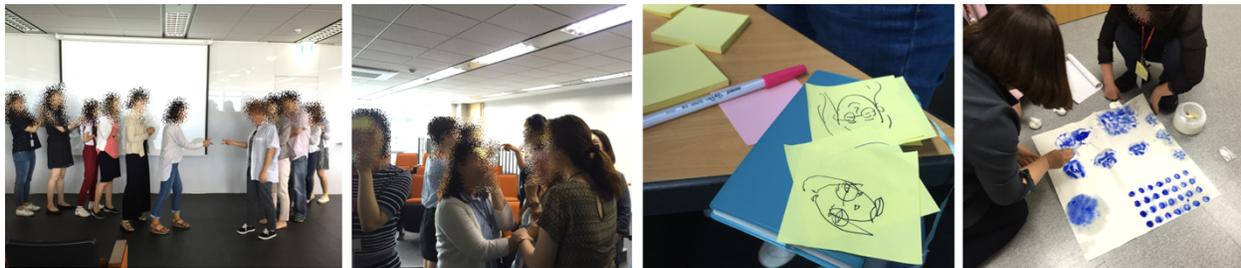
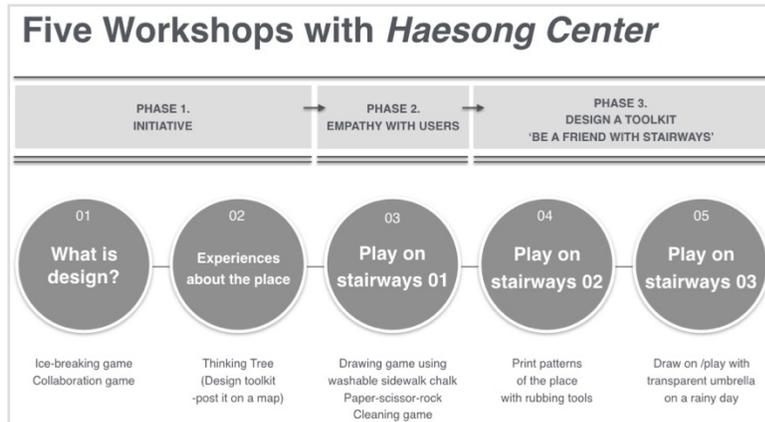


Figure 6. Icebreaking Game to become Friend with each other, and Rubbing Game to seek Sew Patterns of the Place

#### 4. Conclusion

Current design education is mostly focusing on presenting decent looking results or superficial outcomes. Hence, in this paper, through sharing the experience with the *Haesong* center children with educators, wanted to bring up those problems of current art education in Korea to discuss practicabilities of connecting students and their surroundings as a new possibility for creative education.

The outcome of the *Haesong* project was a process of activities, the intangible experiences. Through analyzing this project, we learned about the power of “true user experience design” based on self-motivated participations. Namely, user experience is not given by external experts nor designed by technology-driven products, but it is designed by sharing experiences and memories of the users of the space. Furthermore this principle can also be applied on current art and design education. As a result, this study suggests that the essence of human-centered design is to build design concepts and designing action plans to create shared memories with users. Otherwise, it has no meaning.



**Figure 7.** Three Phases of the Project

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