



Montréal, 21 July 2016

## **Feeding the Delta**

### **Proposal for the M+ / Design Trust Research Fellowship 2017**

The present proposal refers to the candidature of research and design studio FIG Projects (Fabrizio Gallanti and Francisca Insulza), formally represented by Fabrizio Gallanti.

#### *Title*

Feeding the Delta

#### *Description*

Feeding the Delta is a research focused on the role of food in the current transformation of the territory of the Pearl River Delta in light of the major role that the management of resources such as food, plays within the infrastructural and logistics organization of cities and in their relationship with wider territories and complex trans-national networks.

Moreover, the numerous and intricate components of food have become more and more relevant within our contemporary societies as they relate to issues of environment, equality, health, culture and lifestyles. At the international level we are also witnessing a powerful expansion of collective interest in food and therefore of cultural production through numerous media: books, magazines, TV shows, online media are creating a new and extremely popular cultural industry that has determined massive economic investments, significant moves in terms of tourism and in general a new collective awareness that deals with issues of identity in very powerful ways. Culinary bloggers, “foodie” writers, cult producers and talented chefs have become the recognizable icons of a new cultural landscape. In the particular case of the Chinese context, food has always played a central role to the point that numerous scholars have advanced the concept of a “food-center” culture.

The accelerated changes that have occurred in the Pearl River Delta over the past 30 years can be read through this specific filter. On one hand the necessities of a booming population have modified all the successive stages of the production and consumption of food, from its initial origins (cultivation and animal husbandry, foraging, fishing) to the processing and packaging of goods, from local distribution and marketing to the final consumption. On the other hand, the transformation of the Pearl River Delta as a major industrial hub has also altered the traditional agricultural landscape of the region, historically the result of centuries of carefully crafted land reclamations, in order to generate a unique aquatic ecosystem. While the inclusion of the region within international networks has modified tastes and interests in foreign gastronomies, the arrival of internal immigrants from other regions of China has also generated an extremely composite and fluid food culture where multiple influences and dialogues can be registered. The composition of these massive changes is profoundly altering the physical territories of the Pearl River Delta, a phenomena that operates at various scales, from the vast agricultural territories



down to the street stall selling Uygur barbecue skewers, as well as the practices and uses of the local population.

The research intends therefore to establish an analytical description on the contemporary production and consumption of food in the Pearl River Delta and on the effects on the spatial arrangements of this region and is comprised of two main components.

The first consists of a new thematic cartography, one that is able to render legible the underlying systems referred to food in the region (transport and logistic networks; origins, destinations and nodes; statistical information; historical series) and to create new interpretative narratives. The use of a cartographical approach is characteristic of the work of FIG Projects, as in the research on the diffusion of the SARS virus (published in Domus magazine in 2004, <http://www.fig-projects.com/?p=116>), on the industry of digital outsourcing (published in Domus magazine in 2007, <http://www.fig-projects.com/?p=128>) or on the circulation of architectural expertise promoted by the United Nations during the post-war period (presented at the Canadian Center of Architecture in Montreal in 2013, <http://www.fig-projects.com/?p=330>).

The second component consists, instead, of in-depth narratives of specific case studies, executed by following and documenting by text, video and images the trajectories of specific produce through their different stages, from harvesting to final consumption. Specific attention will be dedicated to the locations crossed by each produce and to the people involved in the numerous processes that are necessary in order to provide food to the inhabitants of the region. The changes occurred in the past years have had a significant impact in the ways how cities have been reconfigured, for instance, with the surge of areas tagged as gastronomic destinations with massive investments in terms of architecture and interior design. The particular relationship between a specific territory and the role played by agriculture was at the center of the research and installation Tortona Stories, presented at the 2014 architecture Biennale in Venice (<http://www.fig-projects.com/?p=515>). The project Feeding the Delta will expand and actualize the conceptual premises that were at the basis of that project.

The combination of a set of cartographic representations and the visual and textual narratives of the specific case studies will constitute an atlas of the role currently played by food in the Pearl River Delta, underlining the possibility to consider such topic as an efficient tool to observe the region and to understand its configuration.

### *Research methodology*

The methodology for the research will consist of four components: examination of bibliography, primary and secondary sources; local accumulation of information and data; on-site surveys and documentation; and critical editing.

During the initial phase of examination of bibliography and sources, to be executed before the actual



residency in Hong Kong, existing scholar material will be identified, catalogued and analyzed so as to generate a comprehensive database of reference. Primary and secondary sources elaborated by international and Chinese institutions will be also identified to corroborate the academic information and interpretation. The general tendencies and threads emerging from the analysis of this material will be discussed and confirmed with recognized experts in the field, with particular attention to persons either located in the Pearl River Delta or with an extended track record of expertise about the region.

The local accumulation of information and data will consist of interviews and conversations with different stakeholders in the region, either experts and local actors, so as to guide with further precision the research process, updating the material previously identified in the database, clarifying the contents and themes of the successive cartographic analysis and recognizing the most relevant case studies to be later explored. The meetings with experts will not only guide the successive phases of research but will also be included in further public outputs as complementary content. Local agencies and institutions (some identified in the previous phase, some emerging from the interviews) will be contacted and visited to obtain further information in the form of maps, statistical data, surveys, formal policies, samples, rules and regulations, and other relevant documents. The information contained in such material will then be used as content for the production of FIG Projects cartographic interpretations. With the support of M+, particular care will be put in the translation from Chinese of meaningful information.

On-site surveys will consist of extended on-site visits, following the routes of a series of produce (for example rice, locally fished seafood, poultry, as well as imported goods) in order to create, through the documentation (annotations, video, sounds, and pictures), several case-study narratives that will accompany the cartographic work. Also, on-site surveys will be instrumental to validate and verify several of the large scale hypothesis and ideas at the base of the cartographic component.

The final phase of critical editing will organize the acquired material and translate it into visual and textual apparatuses so as to convey the content towards different audiences, either specialized (architects, urbanists, designers, artists) or to a more general audience. In the process of edition, the results of the on-site surveys will impact on the cartographic production, through a system of feedback loops. The objective is to allow the audience to navigate between large scale macro representations (for example, the map of the fields dedicated to fish farming, or the infographic visualization of the daily consumption of staples such as rice, wheat or corn) with more specific and small scale illustrations of the phenomena, represented by the case-study narratives.

### *Impact and outcomes*

The main intention of the research, paraphrasing a recent conversation with Stefano Boeri, that will be included in the catalogue of the Lisbon Architecture Triennale, where FIG Projects curates the exhibition “the World in our eyes” is to “make the invisible, visible”.



By developing a set of visual and textual representations about the spatial consequences of food on the territory of the Pearl River Delta we aim to stimulate a stronger awareness of this issue. Such awareness might be useful at multiple levels, for policy-making, urban and territorial planning, as well as the more specific design of sites and facilities related to food (restaurants, markets, shops, etc...). Also, the research has the intention of further underlining the nature of the Pearl River Delta as the result of very long historical processes of transformation, where traditions and accelerated innovation coexist. As food is a human necessity that transcends time, it seems to us to be one of the most powerful lenses with which to observe a specific region.

A second objective that transcends the specific context of the Pearl River Delta, is to demonstrate the validity of the interpretative model, which could be applied, eventually to other regions of the world. In that sense the Pearl River Delta would operate as an exemplary condition from which to extract a research methodology, as, for instance, it was the case for Las Vegas in the research by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi in the '70s.

In order to achieve these objectives, the planning, design and execution of a series of outputs is fundamental.

An itinerant exhibition and series of public presentations, offering a summarized explanation of the project, to be presented at various venues (museums, galleries, universities) in different cities of the Pearl River Delta is crucial. Presentations could involve as guest speakers several of the experts and local actors involved in the research. It would be a desired result to present the research or parts of it at some of the specific sites encountered during the on-site surveys, possibly involving the local workers and communities.

Papers and articles stemming from the research will be published through the channels of M+ as well as proposed to magazines and journals, depending on a proper communication strategy determined in dialogue with M+.

An online platform, in the form of a blog will document the successive steps of the research as well as its final results (see for reference, <http://idealurbs.blogspot.ca>, following the conception and execution of an exhibition at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, 2006-2007).

In case of available resources an application for mobile phones could be developed, allowing to access material while visiting the sites.

### *Timeline*

An initial timeline can be detailed as it follows:

3 months prior to residency, phase 1, examination of bibliography, primary and secondary sources.

1 month and a half, during residency, phase 2, local accumulation of information and data.

2 months, during residency, phase 3, on-site surveys and documentation.

2 months and a half, partially during residency, phase 4, critical editing.

A total of 4 to 5 continuous months could be spent in Hong Kong, starting at the end of April 2017.