

ZERO1 American Arts Incubator

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Main Project Proposal – Mongolia – May 2015

The **Nomadic Mapping Collective (NMC)** is a new media project that engages with social practice and new technologies to use art and data to empower local residents. Focused on economic empowerment and issues of urbanization, the project has output through two forms: an artist's edition of land documentation for each participating household and an engaging and interactive public exhibition where these editions are shown alongside mapping data of Ulaan Baatar.

The NMC addresses some of the most pressing issues in Ulaanbaatar's urbanization, namely the need for detailed surveys and registrations of ger district parcels as a means of economic empowerment for the many residents who are moving to the city. From 2000 to 2011, 380,000 Mongolians left traditional nomadic pastoralism to settle in three of the country's main urban centers – Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet and Darkhan. Under Mongolian land law, each citizen is entitled to .07 hectares of land in urban centers. As a result, property rights registration means that an individual holds official title on an area of land. This registration process is crucial for several reasons: to protect the environment, ensure waste is properly disposed of, protect and care for the well-being of new migrants ensuring their settled area is not in a flood zone or a high voltage zone, protecting migrants against financial loss in case they move and the land is claimed by someone else, and contributing to overall accessibility and sustainable city planning. Most of all, land tenure security is increased, empowering citizens, especially low income ones, with access to a broader economic market and financial security, using their privatized land as an asset to build a home, plant a garden, or use as loan collateral. Official land ownership title registration also addresses the gender gap in economic inequality, an emerging condition as the country acclimates to free market systems.

The NMC will be formed during the workshop/incubation period in the first week of the AAI program, with the workshop participants acting as members of the NMC. With sustainable systems as a focus, the NMC will use the equipment and tools from the workshop as its initial service toolkit. Over my four-week stay, artist Xiaowei Wang will lead and facilitate the NMC in serving its first clients. For example, she will create, design and make the template for the “Artists Edition” documentation. This documentation will be a booklet of information, compiled by NMC members, that may include aerial views of a single ger parcel, related drawings, analysis and a compilation of local knowledge on the land's relation to local climate, hydrological and other landscape forces. In the NMC documentation booklet, citizen clients will also be asked the simple question: Describe how you get home from a place you go to daily. They will be asked to sketch this route, as a way to encourage public dialogue on what “home” and the urban fabric looks like in Mongolia today, as it undergoes rapid change from socialism to a free market system. These drawings will be integrated into the documentation and the originals will be shown as part of a public art exhibition at 976 gallery. The exhibition of drawings, and the gifting of the artist edition/documentation to the ger residents, is a means to open dialogue on the local level about land rights, while addressing economic empowerment through artistic means by asking the question: what kind of city fabric and urban environment do Ulaan Baatar residents imagine for their future?