Negotiating & Designing Public Space in Hong Kong

In September 2012 the School of Architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong launched a new Master of Science in Urban Design program with aims in linking design teaching, public space research, and community interaction. The program did not start with an official mandate and as street spaces, alleys and terraces have not been considered as important and valuable public spaces, there were no governmental schemes to improve those places. From these starting points, the first term studio focused on the study of spatial qualities in Sai Ying Pun, one of Hong Kong’s oldest urban districts, currently affected by many transformations including the building of a new subway line.

Street Exhibitions

Street exhibits proved to be a successful and powerful way of involving the students as researchers to interact directly with members of the community. Local residents were asked to come to a formal event in public spaces as a way of learning about local needs and to develop a sense of place. Among the challenges identified by the students were the rise of property prices and rents, the ongoing gentrification, the general neglect of smaller parks from the surrounding buildings and the separation of government managed pocket parks. Based on their research, and the feedback of the community forums and street exhibitions, students were asked to develop group strategies and individual proposals. In the presentations and discussions, students learned through experience that the first exhibition on Centre Street proved to be very appropriate for informal encounters and longer discussions on the steep street of Sai Ying Pun, where they mounted their works onto the main pedestrian corridor. Rather than thinking of the street exhibition as an event in an institutional setting, the students brought their works onto the main pedestrian corridor of the street, where they engaged their peers and openly engaged with residents and visitors of the district. The social exhibitions also showed which locations in the district were invited to give their views in the forum. In the presentations and discussions, students learned through experience that the best place for street exhibitions was a small, leveled space adjacent to the entrance to the Sai Ying Pun wet-market on Third Street. It proved to be very appropriate for informal conversations and longer discussions. The group strategies and individual proposals.

Community Forums

As part of the Urban Processes course undertaken with the urban design studios, two community forums and street exhibitions were held. The community forums took place at the康文署社区文化中心, a Hong Kong cultural resource center in Sai Ying Pun that organizes exhibitions and forums about a range of themes related to local culture. Representatives of key stakeholders in the district were invited to give their views in the forums, which provided opportunities for residents and students to interact and share their views. The forums also provided an opportunity for students to present their preliminary design plans for the district and gain valuable feedback from the community representatives.

Projects

Centre Street

Sai Ying Pun

Hong Kong Island

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Sai Ying Pun, a historical district in Hong Kong, has been redeveloped to revitalize its urban spaces. The project uses the concept of a "Pocket Parks Necklace" to connect public spaces and improve accessibility. The design process involved collecting feedback from residents and analyzing the microclimate using software like "ENVI-met" to understand user behavior. The project aims to encourage residents to leave their homes and engage with the public spaces, transforming alleys into "urban living rooms."
Past present and future of public space

Waterfall Street Life

While my family was visiting Hong Kong, we happened to walk on Sai Ying Pun's street spaces, or more specifically, on Centre Street. On our way, we observed a small stream of water on Centre Street that later disappeared into a culvert as it traveled down the slope. Hong Kong, due to its tropical climate, often experiences heavy rainfalls, sometimes developing into dangerous storms and floods during the typhoon season. Designing a path for the “falling water” can be a way to make the street life safer, more functional, and pleasant.

Stephy Deng

Re-Creating Sai Ying Pun’s Public Square

WTF

To create a new sheltered public space on and inspired by the original Sai Ying Pun market in 1955. This sheltered space offers a possible venue for a public library and a cinema, which according to the public feedback at the street exhibitions seems to be desired by the residents in the district.

Boon Chen

Re-Envisioning Centre Street

This project focuses on the section of Centre Street between the upcoming MTR West Island Line and the increasing density of the district. Centre Street through the sheltered open space. The design also offers a solution to the steepness of Centre Street, introducing escalators, elevators, and ramps that could help in crossing the new MTR exit.
Past present and future of public space

Protests Adaptation Participation

Since 2008, there has been a blossoming of new street movements in Hong Kong, involving protests against land expropriations and demolitions of urban heritage. This underlying motivation for recent movements is frustrative over political rights and the lack of universal suffrage. The international financial crisis of 2008 opened an Occupy Movement door in Hong Kong, letting people voice concerns about public space under Norman Foster's HKCC Building.

The current protests against urban renewal and the demand for more community participation in Hong Kong are in some ways similar to North American and European movements in the 1960s. The movement was spawned by a new generation of students and formed to explore new participation projects. As a response the HKCC Planning Bureau has continued its practices and linking urban projects through a participatory process. However, participation often began too late and remains limited to pre-defined scenarios instead of the community's needs.

For a more inclusive participation process to take place, the societal changes need to be empowered. Urban education programs can play a role in the process by addressing those backgrounds and helping community members to contribute to the design process. Programs can offer a platform for the community to negotiate with planners and developers. In this process design skills can become the essential tools to visualize and synthesize ideas and formulate joint visions.

Student: Stella Ieong (Related MArch Thesis Project)

Social Hybrid Infrastructure Networking in Sai Ying Pun

In order to cope with a limited geographical space, Hong Kong has grown vertically. It is now one of the highest density cities on earth. Streets and public spaces are becoming just another open space, suffering from an increase of pedestrian activity and vehicular congestion. Tension arises when the current trends create pressure on public spaces, suffering from an increase of pedestrian activity and vehicular congestion.

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Verticality Accessibility Social Networks Community Benefit

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