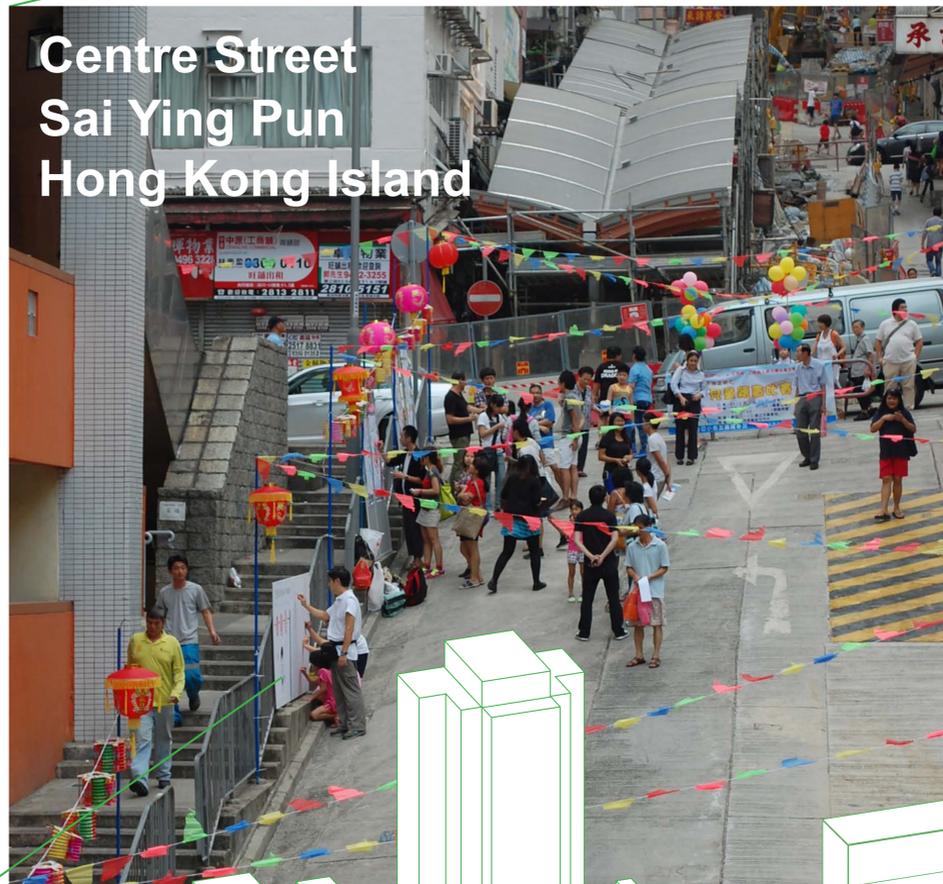
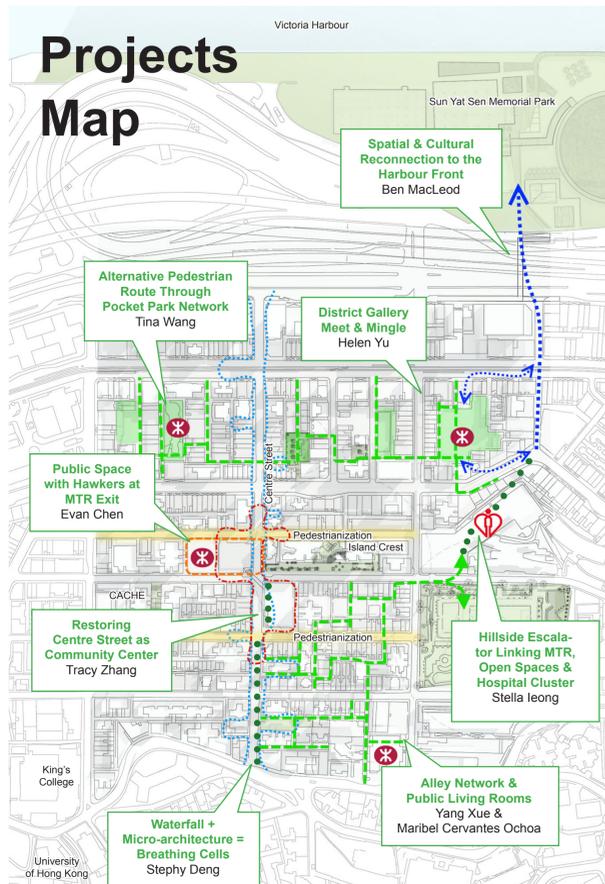
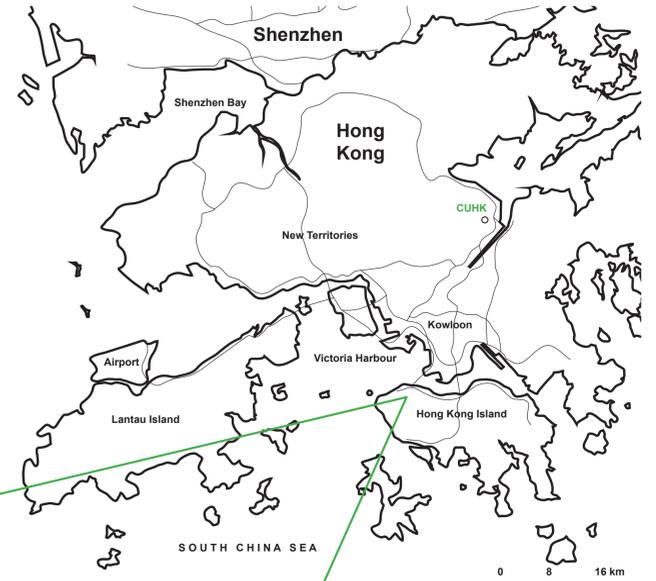


Experiences with a new M.Sc. in Urban Design Programme at CUHK

M.SC. (URBAN DESIGN) x CUHK

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.



Studio Research

The students worked in pairs over the four-week research phase, focusing on the area around the planned MTR exits and the different open space types in the district (streets, alleys and 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. The proposals were to include site-specific interventions as well as design and policy tools which could be potentially applied in similar contexts.

The group research started studies of activities in the different public spaces. Students had to produce videos in each type of public space as a way of learning about local routines and to develop a sense of the place. Among the challenges identified by the students were the rise of property prices and rents, the ongoing gentrification, the general neglect of smaller public spaces such as alleys and ladder streets, the separation of government managed pocket parks from the surrounding buildings and activities, the difficult access due to the steep topography, the negative impact of vehicular traffic, as well as a range of road safety measures which despite their good intentions stifle free movements and social activities.

While a parallel research project traces both physical as well as non-physical impacts of the West Island Line construction, students of the MSc program helped by analyzing existing activities and assets related to the public spaces in Sai Ying Pun and develop design and policy tools for their protection or improvement.

**) The research project "Measuring Community Benefit in Public Space Transformation in Older Urban Districts: A Case Study of Sheung Wan & Sai Ying Pun", a collaboration with co-investigators Essy Baniassad, and Helen Grace, is funded by a General Research Fund (RGC Ref No. 454911), awarded by The University Grants Committee in Hong Kong.*



Street Exhibitions

Street exhibitions proved to be a successful in providing the students an opportunity to interact directly with members of the community. Here, residents were not asked to come to a formal event in an institutional setting, but instead, students brought their works onto the main street of Sai Ying Pun, where they mounted their panels and openly engaged with residents and visitors of the district. The street exhibitions also showed which locations in the district would lend themselves better for public events than others and why. Passers-by less likely engaged in longer discussions on the steep and slippery slope of Centre Street. Rather, the 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 encounters and longer conversations. Students found this place for their second street exhibition, learning from their experience of mounting the first exhibition on Centre Street. After the street exhibition they organized a screening of their videos, thus changing their position from observer to a publicly exposed actor.



Community Forums

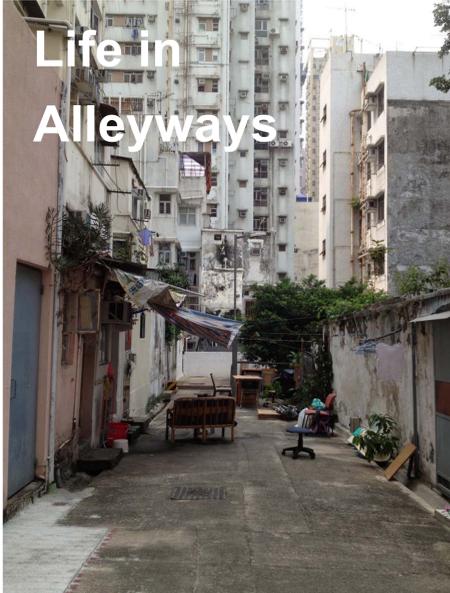
As part of the Urban Processes course interrelated with the Urban Design Studio, two community forums and street exhibitions were held. The community forums took place at the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage (CACHE), a Hong Kong-based resource center in Sai Ying Pun that organizes exhibitions and tours related to a range of expressions of local culture. Representatives of key stakeholders in the district were invited to give their views in the forum. In the presentations and discussions that followed, the invited guests shared their expertise and insight, giving the students a better understanding of the key issues, concerns and infrastructure development of the district. The forums also provided an opportunity for the students to present their preliminary design plans for the district and gain valuable feedback from the community representatives.



Future Projects & Collaborations

The Magic Carpet project aims to further strengthen the link to the community by organizing activities in public spaces of Sai Ying Pun. This project will include several outdoor screening events of video interviews with residents on Centre Street, the heart of the district, followed by a participatory exhibition at the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage (CACHE) in which ideas for the community benefit plan will be presented for broader discussion. Students from the local high school King's College will prepare the video interviews. Through the outdoor screening events, Centre Street will be transformed into a space of imagination and discussion.





Life in Alleyways



Pocket Parks

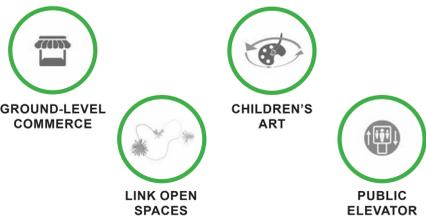


Reconnections Local Heritage Harbour

Since the mid-19th century, Sai Ying Pun and neighbouring Sheung Wan district have been a centre for trade in dried seafood, owing in part to their proximity to the wharves and godowns (warehouses) that formerly lined the waterfront. Products arrived here from sea, were processed in the three or four storey shophouses typical of the time, and dried on the roofs. At first, salted fish was the dominant industry, with over 200 shops selling the product in Sai Ying Pun alone. Gradually, dried seafood became the prevailing focus of businesses in the area, especially as Hong Kong's population became wealthier and could afford a greater variety of products.

While the popularity of the industry peaked in the 1980s, there remains a huge number of dried seafood shops stretching from Sheung Wan to Sai Ying Pun, especially on Des Voeux Road West and the streets which intersect it.

Many old and even the currently designed public waterfronts have difficulties to be well connected to the urban areas, due to the large-scale road infrastructures traditionally built along Hong Kong's shores, causing pedestrians to use the many passageways and footbridges. Access to the waterfront remains an issue in Sai Ying Pun.

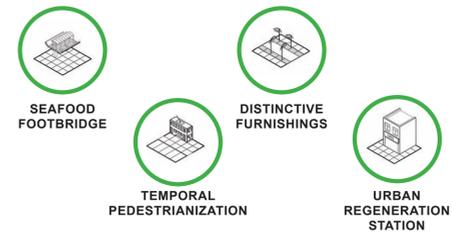
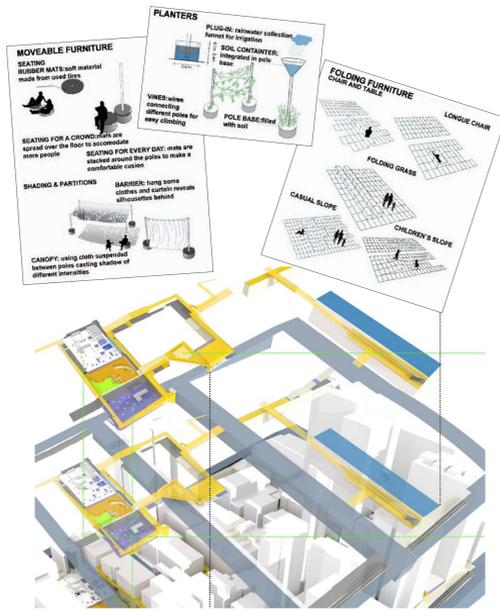


Maribel Cervantes Ochoa & Yang Xue

Alleys as Urban Living Rooms

"Given a fine location, it is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished... People like to sit where there are places for them to sit." (W.H. Whyte, 1980)

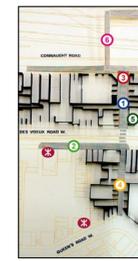
Our project aims to encourage people in Sai Ying Pun to leave their homes and spend time on getting to know their neighbors and appreciating the public spaces in the district. Alleys and terraces offer an alternative open space network to the busy streets. Due to their separation from vehicular traffic they are well suited to become "urban living rooms". However, the steep topography of Sai Ying Pun makes them difficult to reach. After identifying the ruptures in the network, this project proposes to insert ramps and elevators at strategic spots to enhance the accessibility and connectivity within the area. In addition, it provides movable furniture and organizes activities for those open spaces. Thus residents can come and stay on their daily walks, and enjoy the serenity offered by the alleys in Sai Ying Pun.



Ben MacLeod

Harbourfront Reconnection

Sai Ying Pun has long been a center for trade in dried seafood due to its proximity to the wharves and warehouses which formerly lined the harbor front. While the industry reached its peak in the 1980s, there remain a great number of dried seafood shops in Sai Ying Pun. During the 1990s, land reclamation and highway infrastructure associated with the new airport project created a major barrier between Sai Ying Pun and its waterfront. This proposal seeks to reestablish the district's strong connection to the sea, through both a physical connection to the new metro station as well as an emphasis on the heritage of the seafood trade. It introduces a new footbridge design, pedestrianization, street furniture, and an Urban Regeneration Station. Urban Regeneration Stations were launched in Taipei to revitalize older districts and strengthen their community sense. Here the station uses an existing building to reveal the district's history and culture of its seafood trade.



- 1 Pedestrianization of Wilmer Street (except for a shared space to accommodate an existing driveway) and new street furniture.
- 2 Scheduled pedestrianization of a section of the south side of Des Voeux Road, whereby deliveries take place at off-peak hours.
- 3 A new escalator at the north end of Wilmer Street, providing a visible and convenient route to the existing footbridge to the waterfront.
- 4 More diverse and active business at street level, through a more porous streetscape and by issuing hawkler licenses.
- 5 Urban regeneration station (URS): A storefront interactive interpretive centre aimed at educating tourists and locals alike about the uses of dried seafood products.
- 6 Phase II: Reconstruction of the footbridge to Sun Yat Sen Park to accommodate dried seafood processing. Design has sound and weather proofing in mind.

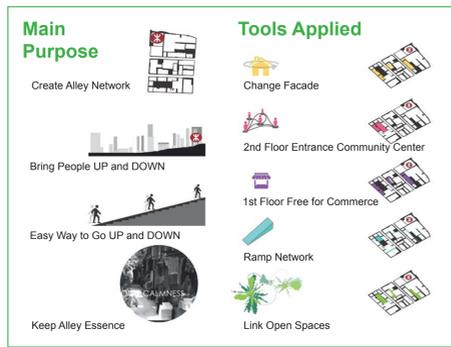


New Ground-Level Storefronts | Improved Access to Waterfront

Permit Business Activity on the Street

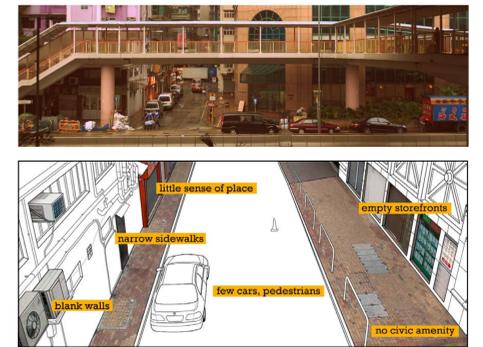


Current conditions of alley and terrace spaces. There is a lack of public-private interfaces affecting social and commercial activities.

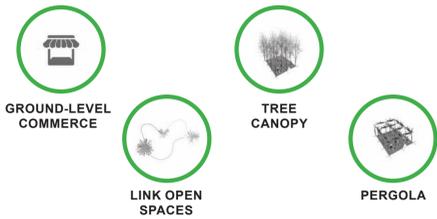


Community Problems

1. Poor access to the harbourside park
2. Congestion, now and in the future
3. Inhospitable street environments
4. Gentrification and urban "renewal"



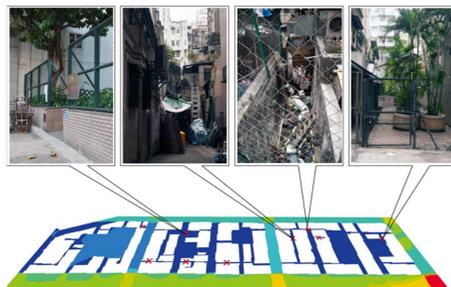
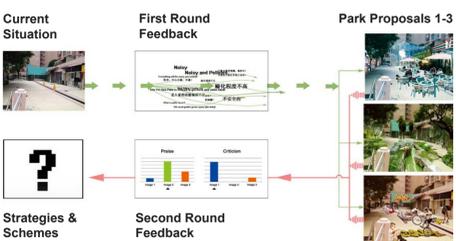
little sense of place
narrow sidewalks
empty storefronts
blank walls
low cars, pedestrians
no civic amenity



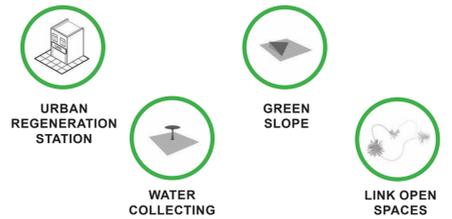
Tina Wang

Pocket Parks Necklace

In the research stage, my team made videos of Sai Ying Pun's pocket parks at different times of the day from an overhead perspective, analyzing the behavior of various users. Then we studied the relationship between physical environment and microclimate using the software "ENVI-met", connecting human activities with environmental factors. During the two street exhibitions we collected feedback of residents about the problems and potentials of the pocket parks, based on which we developed a more thoughtful design for the spaces. In the design stage, we proposed the concept of a "Pocket Parks Necklace" that addressed the vulnerability of pocket parks in urban transformation processes and their problematic accessibility, which was analyzed using the software "Depthmap". The design seeks to provide a barrier-free access system, which could be embedded into the unique topography of Sai Ying Pun to revitalize its pocket parks.



Current condition of backyard spaces. Parts of the government-managed open spaces have been fenced in and used for storage.

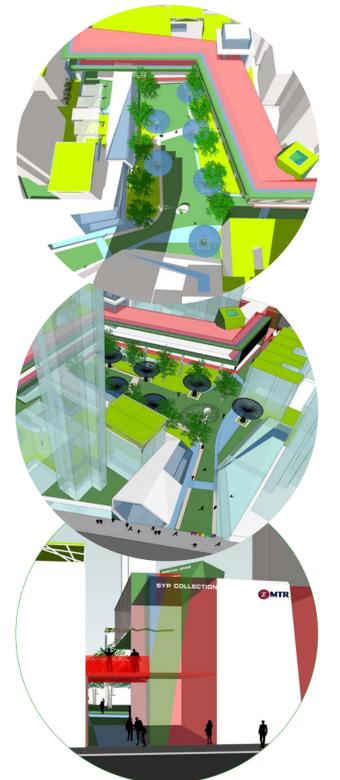


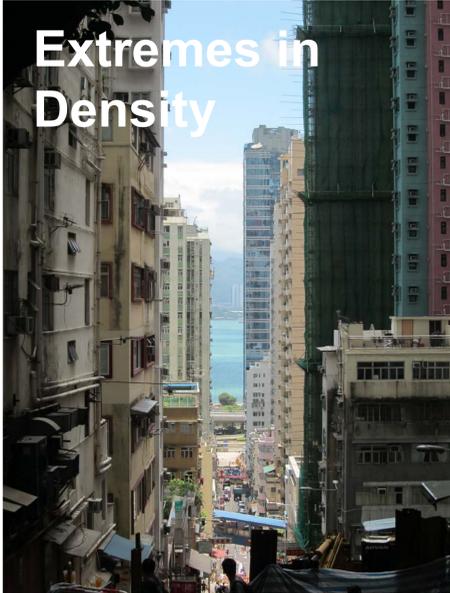
Helen Yu

Increasing Diversity of Pocket Parks

The new Sai Ying Pun MTR station will not only help reduce vehicular traffic and enhance the district's connectivity with the broader metro region, but also bring new opportunities for the regeneration of old districts in Hong Kong. This project was developed based on a team research of the relationship between microclimate and users' activities in Sai Ying Pun's pocket parks as well as the study of their weak accessibility and connectivity. Combining the results of these studies with community feedback, I developed the idea of connecting the isolated pocket parks through a green network, creating new platforms for exchange and sharing between residents and visitors. Currently, Hong Kong's pocket parks are designed according to restrictive standards without community contributions, making them all look the same. The project aims to offer a higher diversity in terms of spatial experience and thus encourage a broader range of activities in pocket parks. Varying designs are proposed for the different pocket parks within the network, according to their specific preconditions and locations. Their characters range from green gardens for the predominant use of local residents to more vibrant hubs next to the new MTR exits, where people can gather, socialize and learn about the district while they eat and relax.

Redesigned pocket park at new MTR exit, providing a covered walking with displays of local culture and history, food and beverage vendors, and places to rest.



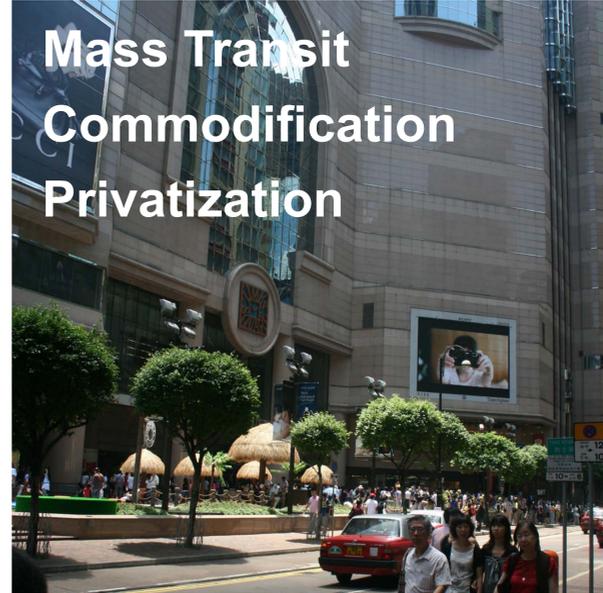


Extremes in Density

The studio focused on open spaces in private developments and spaces not yet privatized but neglected and vulnerable in the ongoing urban transformation processes. In Hong Kong, due to its high density, the traditional spaces of streets, alleys and terraces are the closest places to the everyday life in the urban districts. The studio's approach of micro-scale observations of public spaces was inspired by Michel de Certeau's interest in the personal appropriations of urban spaces in daily life, with the aim to create a more sensible and nuanced understanding of public space in Hong Kong.



The planned station exits of the MTR West Island Line in Sai Ying Pun.



Mass Transit Commodification Privatization

In the new millennium up to the present day, there have been various challenges and opportunities for public space in Hong Kong. In the effort to brand Hong Kong as a "World City", local districts and street markets became the target of urban renewal. This process has been continuing, and now it also occurs in other parts of the territory. The Comprehensive Development Areas built around public transport nodes often comprise of podiums with shopping malls and public transport interfaces, further combined with high residential and office towers sometimes with more than 50 storeys. These developments allow to cross-finance one of the most efficient public transport systems with large-scale, private property developments. However, the weaknesses of this strategy are the creation of mainly internalized, homogeneous and controlled public spaces with weak connections to the surrounding environment.

The construction of the MTR West Island Line in Hong Kong will affect Sai Ying Pun in many ways. As the line is serving long-established, well-organized communities, the MTR Corporation opted for a new approach minimizing the construction's physical impact on private properties in the area and proactively engaging with different local community groups. One of the consequences of the approach, however, is that construction sites and future station exits are making use of the few existing public spaces, further reducing the minimal amount of open space in the district.

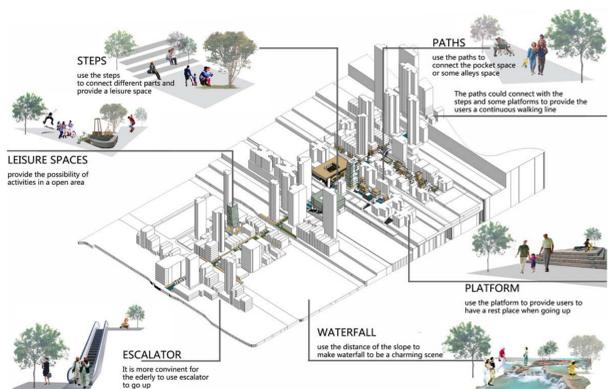
Stephy Deng

Waterfall Street Life

While my team was making a video on Sai Ying Pun's street spaces, 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 to divert the "falling water" can be a way to make the street life safer, more vibrant, and convenient. The district of Sai Ying Pun is built on a slope, which is very steep towards the peak and less so nearer the harbor. In my observation the activities along Centre Street change according to the steepness of the slope. Therefore I decided to make use of the waterfall element to reveal the changing character of the slope. At the same time, the project links the top of Centre Street with the waterfront by a specially designed topography. The water element connects with new micro-architectures to form several small "breathing-communities" to invigorate the whole street and its surrounding.



Stills from research videos.



All Images and Text © MSCUDxCUHK

Evan Chen

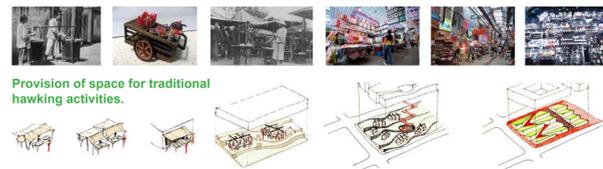
Re-Creating Sai Ying Pun's Public Square

MTR
To make full use of the limited space in Sai Ying Pun to create a comfortable and inviting MTR station exit to remit the potential overload of the new West Island Line and the increasing density of the district.

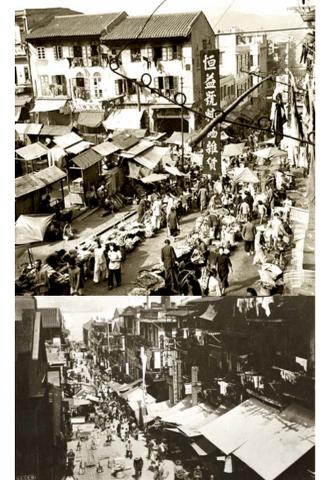
PUBLIC SPACE
To create a new sheltered public space on and inspired by the original public square on the same site. Due to the hot and rainy climate in Hong Kong, this sheltered space offers a possible venue for a public library and a cinema, which according to the public feedback at the street exhibitions seem to be desired by the residents in the district.

COMMERCIAL SPACE
To transform the less successful Centre Street Market into a more effective and lively environment which merges hawkers, stores and the market together and optimizes the use of space.

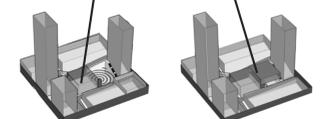
STREET
To widen the narrow sidewalks and connect the new MTR exit with Centre Street through the sheltered open space. The design also offers a solution to the steepness of Centre Street, introducing escalators, elevators, ramps and stairs in the new sheltered space to connect different streets along the slope.



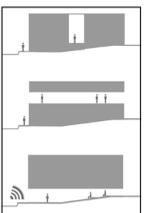
Sai Ying Pun market in 1955. (Photo: H. Morrison)



Centre Street Market Proposed New Location



The building mass is opened to improve public interaction.



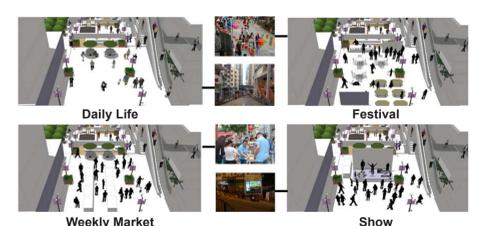
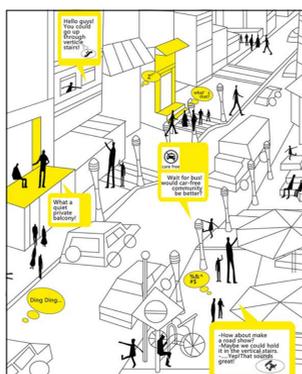
Tracy Zhang

Re-Envisioning Centre Street

This project focuses on the section of Centre Street between the upcoming MTR station exit (on Second Street) and the new escalator (on Third Street). It is the geographic centre of the district and it used to be full of life and activities until the 1970s. However, after the relocation of the old street market into two indoor market complexes and the practice of traffic safety measures in the 1980s, which separated this central community space from daily activities in the surrounding area, Centre Street slowly became deserted. In addition, its steep slope and slippery surface make the space difficult to use. This scheme aims to restore the importance of Centre Street by transforming it into platforms of street space, usable for multiple functions, such as informal encounters, leisure purposes and festivals (e.g. film screenings and celebrations of seasonal festivals). The link of Centre Street to adjacent shops and the Sai Ying Pun Market would be enhanced, so that the street could recapture its role as the center of the district.



MTR B1 Exit Escalator (Third St. to High St.)

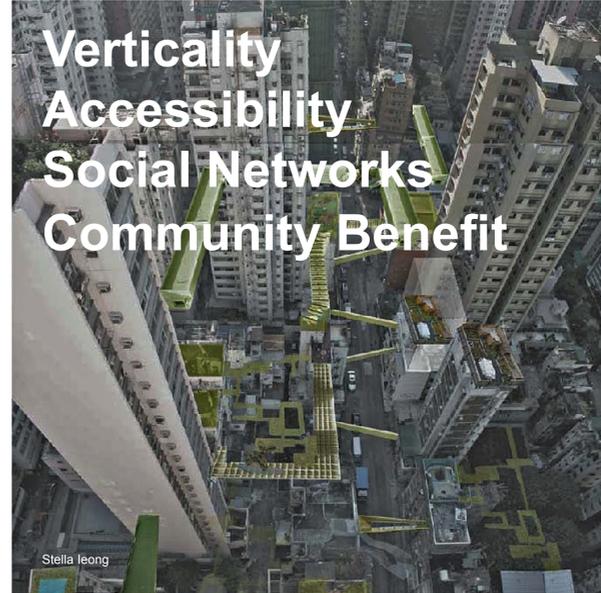




Since 2000, there has been a blossoming of new citizen movements in Hong Kong, including protests against land reclamations and demolition of urban heritage. The underlying motivation for most movements is frustration over political rights and the lack of universal suffrage. The international financial crisis of 2008 sparked an Occupy Movement also in Hong Kong, taking place in the public space under Norman Foster's HSBC 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 era of large-scale, government-led renewal projects. As a response the HKSAR Planning Bureau has reviewed its policies and today major projects go through a participatory process. However, participation often begins too late and remains limited to pre-defined concerns instead of the community's needs.

For a more inclusive participation process to take place, the society at large needs to be empowered. Urban education programs can play a role in the process by providing balanced background information and by helping community members to formulate their own visions. 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.



Street spaces, alleys and terraces are elemental in the experience of Hong Kong's particular culture and history, which is strongly related to the vibrant street scenes. Due to the topography of Hong Kong, these spaces are located on a narrow stretch of land and on steep slopes. This has created challenges for their accessibility but also encouraged the development of Hong Kong's characteristic 3D public space network, which makes use of various mechanical devices such as escalators and elevators, both within private developments or outside in the street.

A general problem of integrating "real world" community participation in educational programs within a limited timeframe is that it first needs a long time to build up relationships and trust with the people living in the concerned area. As the contact is slowly formed the term time is already over and thus the attention turns to other topics. In addition, this program did not start with an official mandate and as street spaces, alleys and terraces are not considered as important and valuable public spaces, there were no governmental schemes to improve those places. These challenges to make a meaningful contribution to community life were knowingly accepted, as the point of this approach is to formulate a "community benefit plan" independent of or as a balance to the dominating property development-driven urban renewal processes.

Stella leong (Related MArch Thesis Project)

Social Hybrid Infrastructure Networking in Sai Ying Pun

In order to cope with a limited land supply, Hong Kong has grown vertically. It is now one of the highest density cities on earth. Streets and public spaces are therefore put under immense pressure, suffering from an increase of pedestrian activity and vehicular congestion. Tension arises in Sai Ying Pun as new development has taken place in this old district of Hong Kong. Conflicts will be exacerbated when a new metro station opens in 2014. Therefore, the principles behind the connectivity on the ground level must be reexamined. The urban form of Sai Ying Pun is uniquely dense and very steep, and thus calls for a reconsideration of our approach to urban development. How can the urban fabric of Sai Ying Pun remain comfortable for residents even when further intensification takes place? In such an environment, can we find new ways for users of public space to traverse both the natural and built topography?



I. Density is not necessarily problematic if we can figure out new ways to approach public space in the vertical built environment.



II. Hong Kong has many instances of 3-D network systems, but most stem from economic purposes: mechanic devices such as escalators and elevators are installed with only commercial considerations.



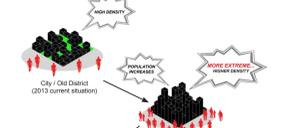
III. But there are other strategies which can plan for more community benefits. This project is a testing ground to experiment with the integration of a 3-D network that can link existing public facilities and assets in the district.



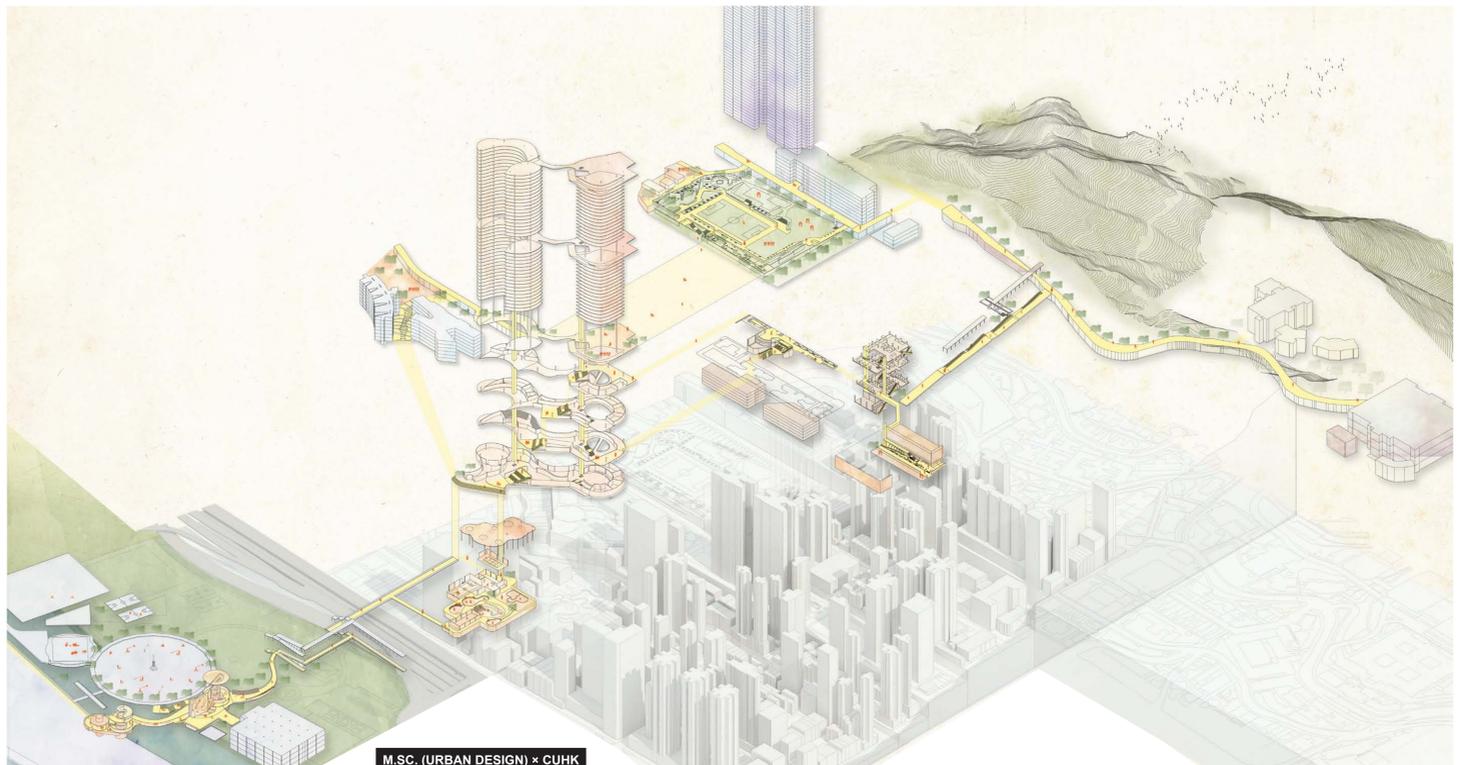
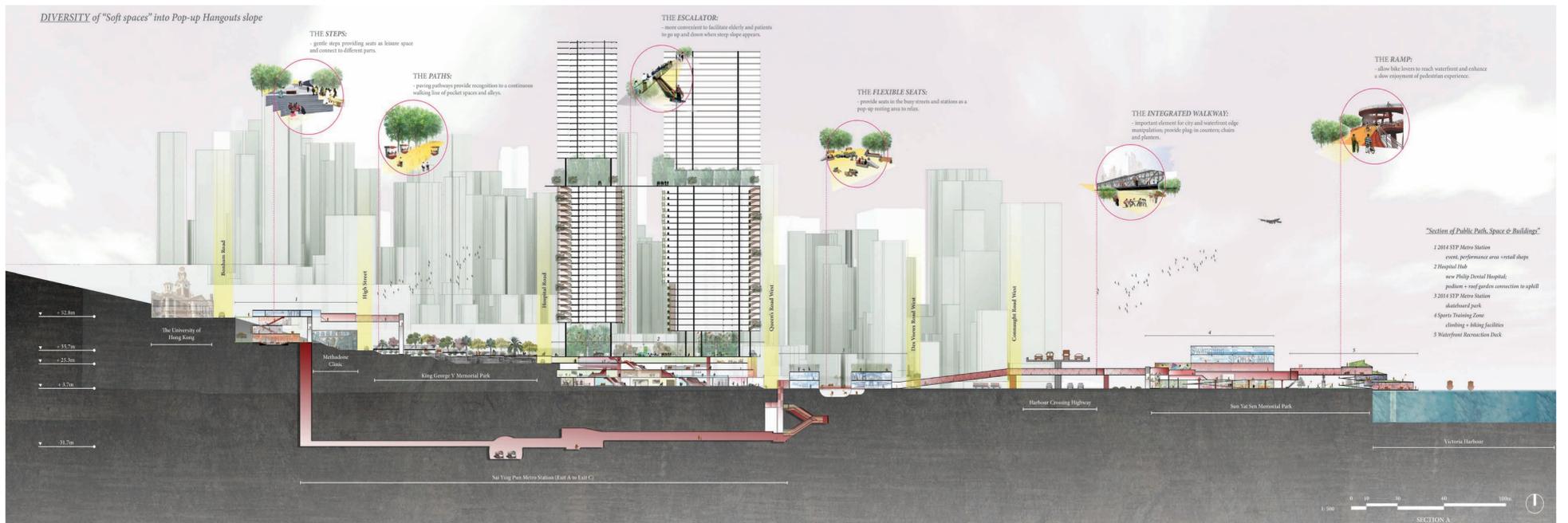
IV. A good precedent project is the new YIA building at CUHK. We can refer to it as a transferable model for high density districts.



Assumption



Result



School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
 The content is based on the article "Negotiating and Designing Public Space – Experiences in a new M.Sc. in Urban Design Program in Hong Kong" by Hendrik Tieben in *IN_BO. Ricerche e progetti per il territorio, la città e l'architettura*, Special Issue no. 1, 2013.
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