

Reflection

Enhance the profound vitality of urban villages in Dalang

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1. the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework(location/object).

This thesis focuses on urban villages in China, which is a complex topic formed in the context of China's fast urbanization and involved a lot of issues such as economy development, migrant workers, land ownership system and so on. The selected research area is Dalang in which large number of urban villages exist. As a study case, Dalang, located in the north part of Shenzhen, is a typical case to discuss the transformation of urban villages and the relationship between urban villages and the city as a whole.

This thesis is in the Complex Cities Lab and Inclusive Cities studio. On one hand, this thesis tackle the complexity of urban villages in China ranging from the the unpredictability of the individual housing block to relation between the physical form of urban village and the social-economic configuration. On the other hand, this thesis paid attention to the lives and needs of migrant workers, who are are the majority of the tenants in urban villages.

The object of the thesis is to enhance urban villages' profound vitality in a way to benefits the migrant workers and city's development. In this thesis, urban village is considered one type of city forms with complexity and interacting social-economic configuration and various actors with their interests. It requires not only a comprehensive understanding of the context, but also a framework to deal with its complexity so as to avoid using simple solution to deal with complex problems.

2. the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework.

The flow of progress of the thesis is in the framework of the complex cities studio, following the methodical line approach, from context and spatial analysis, vision, to the strategy, and then pilot projects.

System thinking is involved in constructing the analytical framework by considering urban village as a system to discuss the relationship between social-economic configuration and space, human activities functioned as bridges to connect both sides. And theoretical framework is built based on the literature review of the definition of the key words such as urban vitality, urban village and self-organizing system and the relations between the social-economic configuration and space.

Besides, to approach the complexity, the space of urban village is divided into several components based on the landownership and interests of various stakeholders. The way of categorizing sub components by its initiative could help to deal with its complexity in a way that strategies are taking the stakeholders into consideration.

3. the relationship between research and design

This thesis integrated design and research, each of which plays an important role in the progress of the thesis.

The research helps to answer the questions related to “why”. In this thesis, on one hand, the research helps to figure out the reasons behind the phenomenon, so as to answer why the urban villages were formed and functioned in such way. On the other hand, it also clarified the interrelationship between different factors, which not only facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the problem and the contexts, but also reveal the logic and relationship behind the surface. The result of the research provides a clear network of various elements and lay the foundation for designers who work on solutions. And by describing the problems clearly as well as the relationships between different elements, the design process could have clear targets to deal with and could widen the solutions from different perspective.

The design process aims to find solutions, which, in other words, answer the “how” question. The design is closely related to the results and answer can be various. In the design process, different spatial resource and elements are organized to make the result products as response to the vision and goal. So designers could take a position on this design process by making connection and recompositions. The relationship between research and design is integrated instead of separated. It's a mutual process that the conclusion of the research could also have impacts on the design process and even the design products, and new questions raised during the design process requires research to give an answer.

As for this project, the research revealed the reasons leads to the urban village problem by narrowing down and specifying the relationships between different factors. Besides, it contributed to the framework of approaching the research question resulted in conclusions and vision to be achieved. Design products show visualizations of the abstract conclusions with spatial design, and what's driving the design is the conclusions from the research.

4. the relationship between the project and the wider social context

This thesis focuses on alternative spatial transformation of urban villages, which is moderate compared to the previous “demolish-and-rebuild” model. By rethinking the urban villages and rediscovering its value, urban village still functioned as the gathering place for the migrant workers and new arrival people but with diverse economy and more social groups. Migrant workers still find their opportunities to survive and live in big cities, which provides vitality to the city's sustainable development in a big picture. And the enhancement on social aspect does good to the integration between the local people and migrants, which helps to achieve a diverse and harmonious society.

Besides, Shenzhen is one of the emerging cities drawing people's attentions in the last few decades. And Dalang, located in the periphery zone of Shenzhen, functioned as a typical area in which the manufactory industry meets urban village. "As a “role model” in China's cities, the discussion and experiment on Shenzhen's urban village issue could also provide more perspective in dealing with the complex issue to other cities in China that facing similar problems.