RE-MADE (IN) HONG KONG
People's alternative approach to redevelop Tin Shui Wai New Town
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Design as Politics
New Utopia on the Ruins of Welfare State

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Project Description

Introduction:

This project, with people’s redevelopment approach, is an alternative to the tabula-rasa approach used by the government for development and urban renewal in Hong Kong. People’s approach means searching new methods to form a new society where local residents can have more control of their way of living and habitat in different aspects. The case represented here is a Tin Shui Wai New Town in Hong Kong, also famously known as The City of Sadness. The town was fully developed in the 90s from a village with water bund for fish husbandry. Original residents are resettled. A place where its history is lost and totally forgotten. The existing inhabitants are resettled here originally from places all around Hong Kong. Their original connection to their habitat and community network are lost. Due to the disastrous planning of the government, sense of isolation brought about by urban design, lack of local economy, lack of community connection and facilities, Tin Shui Wai became famous for high percentage of family violence, child abuse, commit suicide cases, etc. since 2004.

Hong Kong government’s approach to land development is always relocating underprivileged people further and further away from the city centre by providing them public housing in the New Territories, the northern edge of Hong Kong. Urban renewal in city centre for gentrification of old district is also happening more and more intensively since 2000. More social conflicts revealed between local residents and government due to redevelopment of the inhabited land. Lots of public protests also happen because of huge social spending on large infrastructure and new developments in the New Territories which required the resettlements of existing farming village communities.

Design Assignment: Utopia as design strategy
Heterotopia, People’s Utopia is the New Utopia

In the future scenario 10 years from now, the Hong Kong government decided to help gentrify the whole Hong Kong cities, so decided to demolish all the public housing in Hong Kong and relocate the underprivileged people to “Hong Kong Land” in Mainland China. Tin Shui Wai New Town will be redeveloped once again due to the deterioration of the place with the gentrification approach of the government to private housing estates. The Right to the City is questioned. Who own the city? Who has the right to the city?

In the process of demolition of Tin Shui Wai, protestors occupy the deconstruction site and start their own version of redevelopment. People should be protected to live in their original living place. People should have the right to make decision on their living environment. This project touches on a lot of important aspects happening in Hong Kong, including urban renewal, resident’s right to the land, resettlement, self-building, etc. What is the people’s approach to redevelopment? How to empower the people? A people’s version of redevelopment will be the centre of the project.

Motivation:

Due to the recent occupy movements in Hong Kong, I am inspired by the self-organizing approach which is totally voluntary and bottom-up. As a person from Hong Kong, more problems revealed after Hong Kong return to China. More unfair and injustice without the consideration on the opinion of the general public can be seen in land development, urban redevelopment, large infrastructure investment, etc. and more severe poverty problem. There are many reasons to the injustice need different parties to cooperate to act against it. As an architect, I would like to help thinking of ways to empower people to have more control on (re)development and help people to re-inhabit places according to their own will instead of being assigned to a place which determine their lives.
Location: Tin Shui Wai New Town in New Territories, Hong Kong
1. Demographical: New immigrants with different background and skills

The population of Hong Kong is formed mainly by new immigrants from Mainland China in different years. But recent new immigrants have different educational and political background causing huge social conflicts. Importing immigrants from mainland China is also one of the social engineering tools used by the Mainland Chinese government.

Tin Shui Wai population is mainly consisted of low-income family with new immigrant members. Discrimination and labels by the society is very commonly seen. New immigrants usually came from the village or smaller cities. They have farming or manufacturing skills which cannot be utilized in Hong Kong. High level of unemployment can be found among new immigrants in Tin Shui Wai.

2. Economical: From manufacturing to Service Industry

Hong Kong has transformed from a manufacturing economy in the 50s to 80s to financial, service and tourism based economy nowadays. The shift in economy leads to mismatch of skilled workers and skills required. Without protection and proper re-training schemes, low-skilled workers became unemployed, getting poor and old. New immigrants with farming and manufacturing skills also doesn’t have opportunities in employment.

Tin Shui Wai does not have local economy for the town to be self-sustaining. Low-skilled workers, like many elderly people and new immigrants in Tin Shui Wai does not have choice to work, either travelling for a long time for low-paid jobs in the city centre or became unemployed.

3. Political: From laissez-faire to even more imbalanced reliance on land development

The Hong Kong government always promote “large market, small government” approach. The situation get much worse after Hong Kong has returned to China. Political decisions are made mostly about financial benefits without social concerns. All past chief executives are businessmen except Mr. Donald Tsang. The main source of income come from land selling. Urban Renewal projects and large infrastructure projects are happening intensively which ensured the financial benefits of the four main land developer but the public concerns about the right to the land has be raised.

In Tin Shui Wai, the whole urban development process was top-down, decided by the government and cooperating land developers. Previous and existing residents are different people, both parties did not have the chance to give their opinion or contribute in the decision making and development process.

4. Social Welfare: Not for redistributing income but for the rich helping the poor

The social welfare system is not a complete one. “Our welfare system does not exist to iron out inequalities. It does not exist to redistribute income. Our welfare programmes have a different purpose. They exist because this community believes that we have a duty to provide a safety net to protect the vulnerable and the disadvantaged members of society, the unfortunate minority who, through no fault of their own, are left behind by the growing prosperity enjoyed by the rest of Hong Kong.” stated by Chris Patten in Policy Address 1996.

The main system is Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) for all Hong Kong permanent residence living below poverty line. The incomplete welfare system only differentiate insignificant subsidies for elderly, disabled, unemployed and poor youth, which cannot support their living. The undifferentiating welfare system did not help people according to their real needs and created a collective poverty population.
Problem Definitions (Continued)

In Tin Shui Wai, most of the people get CSSA subsidies. They include elderly, disabled, low-income family, new immigrants, poor children, etc. Lack of employment in Tin Shui Wai and being far from city centre promotes the reliance of Tin Shui Wai residents on government subsidies.

5. Social: Poverty and Social conflicts

Hong Kong wealth gap is getting much wider, the most serious among all cities with developed economy. Poverty population is getting larger and larger each year but the Hong Kong government has no concrete strategy to deal with the unequal distribution of income. There are also social stigma concerning laziness and inability from the society which always promote independency and working hard. The poor are usually blamed on taking social resources for granted.

People in Tin Shui Wai are usually being labeled as “low-income family, new immigrant family or unemployed”. Without real understanding and concern about the core problem of the poverty population, discrimination and social labels are put on the burdens of the victims, Tin Shui Wai residents.

6. Spatial: Poverty population are concentrated and isolated

In Hong Kong, poor population was concentrated at the edge of city centre in the past. Through the development of public housing and the New Towns by the Hong Kong colonial government. Most of the people are relocated in much further away from the city centre in the New Territories. New Towns were supposed to be self-sustainable community neighborhood, but usually not the case. Most of the residents still need to go a long way to work in the city centre because of the lack of local economy. Recent New Town Proposals are in-balance with sustainability without relationship with the surrounding natural environment.
Hong Kong people does not have the right to make political, economic, social, cultural and spatial decisions in favor for their living. The Hong Kong government act against the people. The government is not allied with the Hong Kong people but the businessmen. The ruins of welfare state is the distorted top-down political system, social welfare system barely survive and became insignificant. People are not protected by law or the government to defend their homeland. Hong Kong people does not have the right of decision making in policies and to choose the chief executive to work for the sake of Hong Kong people.

Hong Kong Chief Executive CY Leung said: ‘Democracy would see poorer people dominate Hong Kong vote’

(Interview with the International New York Times, Oct 21, 2014)
1. Social Relevance:

Tin Shui Wai residents suffers from the poor urban planning of the government affecting their employment, daily life and community development. The Hong Kong government does not have any concrete solutions to improve the neighborhood. At the same time, many urban renewal projects and development of infrastructure are intensively happening in Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong does not have the right to decide against government decisions. Land development should be based on people’s need. Bottom-up self-organizing strategies can empower local residents in Hong Kong to rethink how to develop their neighborhood based on their need but not government’s wants.

2. Political Relevance:

There should be legal protection to local residents to their homeland. Protection as well as Local residents’ Redevelopment Policy should be developed to enable people to change their living environment according to their own will. Self-build regulations should be implemented. Self-initiative projects by local residents should be promoted by the government to develop their neighborhood. “Residents plan and develop, Government helps providing infrastructure” should be the final goal.

3. Scientific Relevance:

There are many theories about participatory approach, but a lot less about actual implementation to specifically empower the underprivileged people to initiate, self-organize and utilize skills and materials to (re)develop their society and neighborhood. This project aims at providing spatial strategies, building materials and techniques used as a manual guide to people for actual realization of a community neighborhood by themselves.
1. Situation Research Phase

Firstly the ruins of welfare state are identified, including the failure in policies and realization in spatial reality. Demographical, economic, political, social and spatial contribution and effects on each other will be gathered and analyzed. Conclusions are drawn from the analysis identifying the core failure of the ruins of welfare state.

2. Theoretical Research Phase

Brief utopia idea is developed. Different utopian theories from various scholars are gathered and for relating and comparing to the brief utopia idea. Background of utopian theories are also considered and analyzed. Initial utopia is developed based on analyzing the theories. Position and utopian theory will be developed.

3. Design Research

This phase will be developed hand-in-hand with the utopian theory development. Using future scenarios, involving different actors, developing scenarios of their response and finally the utopian scenarios. Design Concept, urban and architectural design that matches the scenarios will be developed at the same time until the end of the project.
Theoretical Framework - Position Paper

Heterotopia as the New Utopia
People's design approach as the right to the city

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“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” 1
— Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American

Abstract

Modern Cities have always been created by the state with the help of urbanists and architects in a top-down approach using their Utopian visions. But this way also aroused a lot of criticism. This year, the theme of my design studio, Design as Politics, is New Utopia on the Ruins of Welfare State. In this position paper, I will explain the importance of Utopia as a discourse, in form of Heterotopia, a New Utopia that allow everyone to dream and create their own Utopia. In this way, the lost connection of Utopia with the society will be established.

Keywords: Utopia, Heterotopia, Right to the City

Introduction

Nowadays, architects do not talk about utopia anymore. Utopia was once a popular term among architects of Technology Futurism where people have extraordinary imagination about what technology can improve our lives in the future. And then it comes to a stage where architects criticize on utopia and saying that there is no Utopia anymore and even further creating dystopia saying how technology future is de-humanizing us and destroying our future. It was true that technology has made our lives more convenient. But it is also true that technology has become so dominating in parallel with the over-expansion of advanced capitalism. Now is the time for us to reflect and think about the future again.

So what is New Utopia? I believes that the answer lies in Heterotopia. Our space nowadays are so dominated by bureaucracy and institution of large corporate and the state. Housing, schools, hospitals, offices, etc. all exert a kind of control of different parties on us revealed in spatial quality. The totalitarian force to ‘normalize’ and homogenize everything has stimulated the rebellious force among the people. Different heterogeneous groups are formed based on wealth, age, occupation, race, country, etc. The underprivileged groups are forming a great power which call for change. There are recent revolutions around the world especially Occupy Movements which change the use of public space. This is the people who are asking for their right to the use of space. The informal activities and events change the original function of the space. The re-definition of the use of space by the people I believe is the New Utopia in architecture - Heterotopia.
1. Realization of Utopia lies in Heterotopia

Rem Koolhaas claimed that “Architecture can’t do anything that the culture doesn’t. We all complain that we are confronted by urban environments that are completely similar. We say we want to create beauty, identity, quality, singularity. And yet, maybe in truth these cities that we have are desired. Maybe their very characterlessness provides the best context for living.”2 His approach is to accept what it is happening on this world as a fact. He considers it as a way that most people want so things happen in this way. He basically use the reality he observed in the city context to apply in an architectural context without considering social, economic and political aspects. He found the way to explain the logic that The Manhattan in New York is developed and have this vision of Manhattanizing the entire world. He is criticizing on the unrealistic character of Utopia saying that it does not consider the reality situation.

As architects, we have to realize that we are also public servants since we create buildings which affect the space that people live in. We need to see the reality as it is, but find out the things that people are discontented about and wish to change. And we are the one who coordinate these wishes and translate them into spatial reality. Utopia may not very well addressed the problem in reality but heterotopia provide new view of seeing things in reality.

Heterotopia first brought about by Michel Foucault. He first talked about utopia as “sites with no real place ... presenting society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down ... fundamentally unreal places.”3 Heterotopia is the other spaces which is more ‘real’, “something like counter-sites, a kind of effective-ly enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found in the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.”3 He further uses mirror as a metaphor to illustrate utopia and Heterotopia. Utopia is the mirror where a placeless place is shown. “... Heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction to the position that I occupy.”3 Heterotopia is being both real and unreal, real in virtuality and unreal in reality.

Heterotopia being a more ‘real’ space than Utopia can exert its effects in reality. That is the important function that Foucault talked about. “...their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This later type would be the Hetero-topia, not of illustration, but of compensation.”3 Therefore, Heterotopia can tackle the weakness of Utopia by creating a ‘virtual-reality’ to let us act on the reality towards our dream if things are not going the right way.

2. Heterotopia giving new meaning to reality

There are anti-Utopians saying that Utopia doesn’t exist anymore. Colin Rowe said the standardization of architecture is the “rapid devaluation of its ideal content. The intensity of its social vision became dissipated. The building became no longer a subversive proposition about a possible Utopian future. It became instead the decora-tion of a certainly non-Utopian present.”4 Whereas, Manfredo Tafuri said that “intellectual work which has the courage to recognize itself as capitalist science and to function accordingly is objectively separate from the background, regressive role of purely ideological work. From now on synthesis is impossible. Utopia itself marks out the successive stages of its own extinction’. ‘Ideology is useless to cap-italist development.”5 Both architects actually criticize on the loss of Utopia in front of capitalism. Utopia became either misused or useless. Both Rowe and Tafuri suggested being abstain by emptying the content of the architecture to protect it from contamination of capitalism. But then that means authentic Utopia in shaping the reality is more important in this case since the meaning of Utopia is distorted without its original function.

It is true that architecture is corrupted by capitalism and there should be redemp-tion of architecture but not by emptying out but by giving it a New Utopia with real human nature. Being abstain is not enough to voice out because you do not have a provocative image or statement or vision that you want to bring about. It is very difficult to convince people why capitalist nature is not good enough. A new meaning of architecture should be given once again by its people and culture. And architects are the ones who do the coordination and reveal people’s wishes into architecture.

According to Foucault, “… Heterotopia can change in function and meaning over time, based on the particular “synchrony” of the culture in which they are found.”6 The example of moving cemetery from next to the church in the city centre to the suburbs, leads to spatial change based on the change of thought in people’s general mindset. Architecture needs to evolve with people and society. When archi-tecture doesn’t mean anything or only as a tool for capitalism or other purposes, it loses it true meaning to the society but should be vice versa. Architects has the responsibility to keep track on the society and help to evoke a right future where everyone desires.
Foucault distinguishes space as Utopia, reality and Heterotopia while Lefebvre define spaces as conceived, perceived and lived. Heterotopia can be understood as the lived space or space of representation by Lefebvre. What Foucault sees as Heterotopia is the counter-sites, where the alternative reality that can happen, it is also a juxtaposition point where allow in one real place several different spaces; whereas, what Lefebvre sees as the space of representation is the space in between, the space linking the conceived and the perceived, reality and representation space. According to Lefebvre, space of representation is “space that is directly lived, a space that stretches across the images and symbols that accompany it, the space of “inhabitants” and “users”.”7 It is a space where imagination want to change the dominated physical space to form systems of non-verbal symbols and signs. It is also the “terrain for the generation of “counter-spaces,” spaces of resistance to the dominate order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning.”7 Therefore both Lefebvre and Foucault see other spaces in here Heterotopia as a space for reaction, contrast and alternative to reality.

Lefebvre took one step further by proposing the “Right to the City”, a “demand ... (for) a transformed and renewed access to urban life”.8 On top of this idea, he argued “for le droit a la difference, “Right to Difference”, against the increasing forces of homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchically organized power that defined the specific geography of capitalism.”9 It coincide with what Foucault defined as deviants in the Heterotopia of deviation. Lefebvre thought it is necessary for the deviants to take action for “Urban Revolution”. It is the right of the inhabitants to work together, and engage in managing the urban spaces by ourselves. This is highly related to nowadays situation where Occupy Movements are happening around the globe since the Heterotopia of deviation is threatened and engulfed intensely by the dominating power and space.

David Harvey also brought about the concept of “Dialectical Utopia” which can be understood as Lefebvre’s Heterotopia. As Harvey illustrated, “Lefebvre’s concept of Heterotopia is foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories.”10 This is the meaning that people want in their daily lives creating Heterotopic spaces all over the place. “Lefebvre’s theory of a revolutionary movement is the spontaneous coming together in a moment of “irruption; “when disparate Heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different.”10 Heterotopia is the space where allow everyone to dream and experiment it in reality. Space can be anywhere, the important component is people’s quest. So the New Utopia is no longer an optimistic extensive of the future like the Techo-Utopia, and not one dream for all, but more similar to Morris’ Utopia, criticizing the present and creating new alternatives, further appearing as Heterotopia where everyone can test out and develop their own space in reality.

3. Heterotopia allow the right of everyone

Jane Jacobs also criticized the “scientific mind” shared among 20th century modernist urban planners. The urban planning at that time failed to recognized the significance of people’s perception of their environment which she considered as the most important thing in creating lively neighbourhoods.11 Different parties in society have different wishes. It is not anymore individual architect’s own vision to the future regardless of time and people’s interaction with space. Everyone needs to be considered. But there needs to be a coordinator who collect but not manipulate those thoughts. This is the true mission of architects nowadays to change our role not only as designers but also to reach out and listen to the people; designing with people and allow the design to be open for people to inhabit, change and redevelop, etc. People, together with architects, should be the co-creator of any constructed space.

Conclusion

Utopia is the purpose of action. It is actually a vision that you should have whenever you do anything. It is extremely important to have a goal in mind so you know where you are heading. But realization is very important as well. Therefore, one should not stop at the stage of dreaming but relating the vision to the reality. But it is not a time where technology, futurist or modernist Utopia dominates anymore. It is also not anymore the time for individual dictator, architect or urbanist to try to manipulate the future of all people. That’s why we need Heterotopia. Heterotopia allow the imagined world to be implemented in the real world. It is the in-between, the compensation of Utopia, leading to a New Utopia. Heterotopia is also a user-determined space, where the function of a space is not given by institutions or authorities anymore, but users re-define the space when they come together and integrate the spaces, forming their own Heterotopia which varies in different user groups. Architects and urbanists are the ones who try to understand, mediate and help people to build their Heterotopia. New Utopia now means not one to all and not homogeneous but heterogeneous Utopia, giving new meaning to our space, architecture and our world.
Tin Shui Wai Redevelopment Plan has burnt up Hong Kong citizens. Chief executive, Chun-ying Leung, proposed the redevelopment of Tin Shui Wai as another "Common Economic Zone" of Hong Kong and China. Nearly 250,000 existing Tin Shui Wai residents need to resettle in "Hong Kong Land" in Nansa, Guangdong, China.

Chief Executive Chun-ying Leung claimed that Tin Shui Wai Redevelopment can bring HK$200 million profits.

Over 100,000 protestors occupied Tin Shui Wai Demolition Site.

Redevelopment of Tin Shui Wai for attracting investors from mainland China.
Occupy Tin Shui Wai Demolition Site

Site Plan Scale 1:10000
Principles:
- Design based on resident’s life with their involvement
- Empower residents to have more control on the place
- Allow users to define and develop the place continuously
- Engage with surrounding environment

Social Interaction:
- Non-hierarchical overlapping social structure based on work and living place with joint social activities

Cultural Inheritance:
- Cultural Exchange between residents by joint cultural events and traditional festivals

Land Control:
- Progressive Development and Expectative Property Right

Preliminary idea on new society structure:

Political Structure: Bottom-up self-organized neighbourhood and work sector associations jointly form municipal council

Economic control by people: Civic bank and Social Fund & Loan with the help of external social enterprises
Design in Progress

Occupy Phase I - Rehabilitation

Occupy Phase II - Reconstruction

Occupy Phase III - Construction
Design in Progress

Urban Strategy
- Overlapping Zones

Synergy by collision
- promote economic & social activities on streets
- create dynamic market
- introduce mixed use building
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