

P4 REFLECTION

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Studio: Design of the Urban Fabric

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ALIGNMENT

1. Relationship between motivation and this project

The very original idea to drive this project was from a concern of unjust development in growing cities with the segregation it caused on both social and spatial perspectives. It also related to my personal experiences in a Chinese city that facing rapid transformation, while dealing with its social context as a second priority in some cases. Therefore, to think who, and how people living excluded from the positive side of this change is thought-provoking.

2. Relationship between discourses and contexts, London

This rough idea has translated into two discourses in this project, which are studies of social-spatial segregation and urban justice, which are not new among European cases while both of them are gaining further interpretation in the current and coming years. The abstract discourses affect all aspects during the urban transformation, though in the public realm, both socially and spatially, they come to be the most intensely debated topics. Especially in London, at the forefront of urban transformation with many experimental urban projects, it is facing conditions in the future with much more complexities and possibilities. In order to facilitate its hyper-diversity, future urban designs and management require a high level of social cohesion as a base in the coming years. Therefore, this project is promoting social cohesion in Hackney, London by providing local spatial interventions, which related to both the topics and the context, leading to the main research question "How to promote the social cohesion in Hackney by operating the inclusive spatial intervention of public spaces?".

3. Relationship between topics and graduation lab and master track

Becoming an urbanist after the coming graduation, it is always fascinating for me that to focus on the questions interacted with the social study perspective. The Urbanism studies now have already shown a sign to change towards super complexity. For me, to understand and work with it, starting from a view of the person, is important, otherwise, the proposition might be posted under danger to break away from human nature. The Urbanism track from the faculty provides multiple scopes for students to explore in the first year, thus in the graduation year, I could able to focus on what I am interested in.

This project is under the Design of the Urban Fabric Studio, within the Urbanism track, which is studying physical urban environment with its psychological, socio-cultural, ecological, managerial and economic structures, bridging the tangible structures with the intangible ones. The project added a new case study to the two discourses related to the studio, which are now adequately debated in the abstract domain. Though most social-spatial segregation and urban justice debates are based on traditional urban settings while lacking cases with context. As well, this project expanded the collection of designs in public space, in London local specifically, which fit the aim of this studio to foster a sustainable and vital urban environment.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH METHOD

The approaches of this project have been cycle repeated through the whole graduation period, the project started from a draft idea and a vague debate, then it goes clearer and clearer through the development and feedback from mentors, every further step has redeveloped the existing structures. Therefore a flexible and sustainable research framework is needed for this project. Also, the two discourse in my project are social-spatial segregation and urban justice, they need both extensions in an abstract level as well as in a practical level, that is why this project requires multiple methods and approaches, which are both qualitative and quantitative, as well they are both academic and professional.

The involved qualitative researches in the project contain mainly reviews on program, literature, strategy, and planning, as well it contains observation and interview. This review delivers, on the one hand, frameworks for the project, which consist of definitions and guidelines through different scales. On the other hand, the observation and interviews give the project support with various findings at a local level. However,

observations are also quantitative in this case, by applying the observation tool from Gehl, this project could be able to transform observation to criteria.

The current link between academic method and professional method is weak. During the whole process to generate this project, the key among social cohesion, current urban form and public space design was vague. This difficulty was largely related to the disconnection between the tools from the academic domain and the tools from the professional domain, which respectively working with the theoretical backgrounds and the local context in this project. The academic concepts and tools in researches are somehow isolated from the practices, at the meanwhile the professional observation and design tools are too generic to link the local context to the abstract knowledge. As a solution, by adding local comments to the context and applying observations in different dimensions, this project aligned the abstract terms, such as “segregated”, “unjust” and “cohesive”, etc., with specific behavior and spaces.

ROLE OF PUBLIC SPACES DESIGN IN A LOCAL LEVEL

1. Relationship between research and design

The social-spatial segregation and urban justice discourses have big ranges, the research focus on these two also largely varies from one to another. Meanwhile, the inclusive design is a very elaborated design approach that has been tested with many cases, while it is also very different due to the context. Therefore, in the beginning, the studies of the discourse, which this project spent on, is difficult to associate with the local finding and design in Hackney. There were two main concerns for this project that either the discourses are mismatching the local context and practices, or the design is too generic to answer the questions based on the debate from the discourses. For linking the research to the design, this project applies local comments and observation, from which there is specific local spaces link directly to different groups and local demands. Though honestly, for me now the link between the research and the design, in this case, still has the potential to develop, due to the interactions among the space and groups is not fully discovered in this project.

2. Potential applications

Initially, this project is a try to combine a broad debate with a local context that has huge complexity while changing rapidly in the present and the future. It added materials and information about the local space and local life to Hackney's context, while hopefully provided fresh thinking about a different narrative to develop public spaces and public culture in the local. For me, as an urbanist in the future, the ethical issues are more related to how I would think about people and dealing with them in my practical work, and in study or design which with a similar context I would be more sensitive to deliver an inclusive pattern with it.