INTEGRATING MASS TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT IN HIGH DENSITY DISTRICTS: WESTERN DISTRICT / HONG KONG

2013-14 1st Term, Mondays & Thursdays 1.30 – 6.15 pm

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Hong Kong is a strategically located, compact city known for its high density development on either side of Victoria harbour with its mountain backdrop, very accessible by its world famous public transit system. It is one of the potential models studied for a more sustainable development of cities in Asia and the region. The attraction of the Hong Kong model is based on its highly compact urban areas, their efficient connection by public transport networks and the
conservation of large land resources as country parks. A central question which policy makers, planners and designers face when considering high-density cities is how livable, walkable and sustainable these cities are and, under conditions of extreme density, how a positive living quality can be achieved. This question is crucial as it is linked with costly and controversial long term decisions such as the change of established land use plans, controversial building height restrictions and public space guidelines, as well as plans for urban renewal and new development areas. The views on Hong Kong as a model are strongly divided and reflect contrasting experiences of the city as well as its conflicting values. The 2011 Mercer Quality of Living Survey ranked the Chinese Special Administrative Region on place 70, far behind Vienna (1), Zurich (2), and its main Asian competitor Singapore (25).

The outcome could be different with “spatial adjustments” as proposed by architect Filippo Lovato from the Economist Intelligence Unit. In his “Spatially Adjusted Livability Survey” of 2012, Hong Kong reached the first place, after including aspects such as the “lack of sprawl” and social connectivity. The survey argues that living in a green environment might be more pleasant but is potentially more problematic than in a high dense city regarding the higher land and energy consumption and less social connectivity. Similarly, economists Edward Glaeser in 2011 presented Hong Kong as one of the examples for the Triumph of the [high dense] City. In addition to these views from outside, there are the experiences of people living and working every day in Hong Kong. In recent years, they are increasingly concerned about the condition of the city and demand access to the harbourfront, better heritage conservation, sensitive urban renewal, public spaces, lower property prizes, less pollution, and especially more community participation.

In the studio we will address these important arguments by exploring the condition of Hong Kong’s older urban district and the impact of the new West Island Line planned and currently developed by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC) within the Western District, highlighting some of the key issues and exploring opportunities for better urban integration to ensure sustainable development and community benefit.

*West Island Line (WIL)*

WIL is a 3km-long underground extension of the current Island Line with three new stations west of Sheung Wan – Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong University and Kennedy Town. The cost of the project is estimated at $15.4 billion, of which $12.7 billion would be subsidised by the government. Started in September 2009, the construction of the line is expected to end 2014. So far, almost 70 percent of the project is completed. When the entire line is built, it will take 8 minutes to get from Kennedy Town to Sheung Wan, 14 minutes to Tsim Sha Tsui and 13 minutes to Causeway Bay.

*Sai Ying Pun*
Sai Ying Pun is one of the oldest areas of Hong Kong within Western District, undergoing a major transformation due to urban renewal and infrastructure development in the form of the WIL under construction. Sai Ying Pun station is located near Centre Street with station entrances at Sai Woo Lane and Bonham Road. Ki Ling Lane will be pedestrianized to improve pedestrian access and facilitate interchange with WIL. High speed lifts will be used to gain access to Sai Ying Pun station which is more effective as there is a significant level difference between the station concourse and the entrances.

**Shek Tong Tsui and Pokfulam Area**

Shek Tong Tsui area is at Sai Wan on the north shore of Hong Kong Island in Hong Kong. Hong Kong University Station is a proposed station on the Hong Kong MTR West Island Line, an extension to the existing Island Line. The Station will be located close to The University of Hong Kong on Pokfulam Road and will be served the Shek Tong Tsui area. There have been disputes among locals and district councilors over the station’s name. Some have suggested the previous official name Belcher after The Belcher's, a housing development in the area, as well as Belcher Street and Belcher Bay. Some worried the name University might cause confusion with another existing University Station on the East Rail Line. Some have also suggested Shek Tong Tsui as the name of the station. Finally, MTR named the station Hong Kong University.

**Kennedy Town**

Kennedy Town is at the western end of Sai Wan on Hong Kong Island in Hong Kong. Kennedy Town is the proposed terminus on the Hong Kong MTR West Island Line, an extension to the current Island Line. The station will serve the Kennedy Town area on the northwestern end of Hong Kong Island, Hong Kong. In the studies in 1970, the station was simply known as Kennedy and it was to be built as part of the Island Line in the 1980s. However, the contractors cited inadequate passengers and technical difficulties. Therefore, construction of the line did not commence westwards beyond Sheung Wan. Under the latest proposal in June 2005, Kennedy Town would be served by West Island Line as an extension of the Island Line, after pressure from local community groups.

**STUDIO DESCRIPTION**

Hong Kong's unique culture is deeply linked to its extreme density and intensity. This culture developed first along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island. The first studio of this academic year explores the Western District, one of Hong Kong’s oldest districts and example of its local culture. The studio will learn from the particular character of the district and its urban mobility, transport infrastructure and sustainability; urban fabric, density and public spaces; heritage and socio economic factors and then assess the impact of the WIL being implemented by the MTRC and look for opportunities and develop strategies for better urban integration and regeneration of the older urban district. Since the early 1990s, the Land Development Corporation, followed in 2001 by the URA,
made attempts to upgrade older districts. These attempts were often based on the replacement of existing fabric, with the demolition of the older buildings also traditional businesses and low income residents were replaced, resulting in gentrification. After growing critique, documented in the 2008 Urban Strategy Review, undertaken by the Development Bureau, HKSAR.

Government made first steps towards a new regeneration strategy, which includes more community participation and should lead to individual district based plans. During the initial planning stages of the WIL MTRC also conducted several workshops and forums to ensure that a more sensitive approach to infrastructure development. The studio will develop strategies based on observations of the people living and working in the district and aims to respond to capture their needs and aspirations.

Building on the research and studio work done on Sai Ying Pun last year, this year’s urban design studio focuses on West Island Line and the urban integration of the West Island Line currently under construction with the Western District of Hong Kong. This includes in addition to Sai Ying Pun, the Shek Tong Tsui and Pokfulum area and Kennedy Town. As the study area of the studio, as it currently faces strong forces of transformation due to the ongoing construction of the West Island Line and a public escalator system. Hong Kong’s role as sustainable urban model is closely linked to its highly efficient metro system (MTR), which boosts its vitality and helps to reduce vehicular traffic and carbon emission. Major investments are made to construct the new metro lines, which offer the rare opportunity to fundamentally upgrade old districts, reorganize their traffic system and improve their public spaces. At the same time the construction of the new infrastructure increases development pressure and affects the spatial routine, social life and identity of the district. The impact of Western District in context of the construction of the new MTR stations should respond to the needs and aspirations of the community and increase the livability in this dense older urban district.

The studio is organized together with the Course “Urban Processes” (URBD 5731), which offers the opportunity to engage directly with the community involving the various stakeholders and residents in the district. Students of the MSc in Urban Design Programme should therefore register for this course. M.Arch. students participating in the studio are also encourage to select this course as an elective. Students will form three groups to undertake group research, and group design as well as individual design work.

OBJECTIVES

- Students working in groups begin to understand, map and interpret the urban morphology of the older urban district of Western District. 
  Appreciate the importance of increasing living quality, social interaction and economic vitality in high dense urban districts
• Learning and responding to existing local culture, heritage and social routines, recognizing and enhancing sense of place

• Developing design strategies for urban integration of the new WIL and to respond to community needs and aspirations

• Developing district based plans for better community benefit developing strategies for community empowerment

LEARNING OUTCOME

• Understanding forces and impact of urban transformation by studying existing urban conditions

• Understanding the challenges, impacts and opportunities of infrastructure development in high density older urban environments.

• Understanding the complex relationships between enhancing urban mobility and environmental, economic and social sustainability

• Learning to communicate effectively with different stakeholders and community members from various segments of society

• Developing advanced urban design skills while addressing key issues and developing context sensitive strategies

• Developing methods for critical assessment and peer reviews of design proposals in view of their effects on community life

STUDIO OUTPUT

Students develop individual strategies and designs for the improvement of urban integration including public spaces and street level building interfaces based on prior identified issues and realizing opportunities. Drawings and models in 1:500 / 1:200, plus detail studies, montages and perspectives should show the intended qualities of urban integration including station related development and public spaces usable in various seasons and times of the day. Statements of addressed issues and design intentions should be formulated in text and drawings. With progression of the design project they should be revised and updated. Research findings and projects will be gathered in a joint studio booklet. All students have to submit a digital documentation.

DELIVERABLES

• Group studies according to defined issues
• Develop Site model
• Written description of addressed issues and design intentions (500 words)
• 1:500 group drawings and models with strategic propositions
• Phase evolutions of urban development
• 1:500 / 1:200 urban integration, public space/building design drawings and models
• Photo montages, sketch up models and visualizations and perspectives study of urban integration
• Joint studio booklet

(Digital documentation of group and individual work is compulsory after final review)

ASSESSMENT SCHEME

• Group Research 30%
• Final Design 60%
• Participation 10%

COURSE FORMAT

The course is organized in a research part (group work), overall strategy and group design and individual design. The research encompasses field and precedent studies allowing for team work. The studio is linked to the course Urban Processes which offers the opportunity of community workshops and presentations of the design schemes to different stakeholders and residents in the Western district. In addition, students will take part in the event: Magic Carpet Re-envisioning Community Space in Sai Ying Pun.

FIELD TRIP

In context of the course there will be the opportunity to take part in a field trip to Taipei (over a weekend in October) and of collaboration with teachers and students from the National Taiwan University.

[v] Yes [ ] Local; [v] Overseas Date(s): Destination: Taipei (TW)

[ ] No

SAME COURSE OFFERED BEFORE (please check the boxes)


[ ] No
REQUIRED READINGS


Govada Sujata, 2012, *ULI Calls for a City Champion: Realising ULI 10 Principles for Sustainable Development for a more Livable Hong Kong*, ULI SAND STAGE II: Draft Recommendations, Urban Land Institute


Ng, Edward, Consultancy for Air Ventilation Assessment Services for Sheung Wan and Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong: CUHK, 2010.

RECOMMENDED READINGS


**Schedule**

**Mon Sep 2** Studio Start - Arrangement of studio space and introduction

**Group Research 1 - Sai Ying Pun**

**Thu Sep 5** – Studio/Urban Processes - Introduction – Start Day 1

**Sat. Sep 7** – Urban Processes Day 2 - Preparation

**Mon Sep 9** – Studio Group Work

**Thu Sep 12** – Studio Group Work

**Group Research 2 – Shek Tong Tsui, Pokfulam and Kennedy Town Area**

**Mon Sep 16** – Studio Group Work Review

**Thu Sep 19** – Urban Processes/Community Activity Event – Day 2

**Mon Sep 23** – Studio Group Work

**Thu Sep 26** – Studio Group Work

**Sat Sep 28** Urban Processes – Presentation/Reflection - Day 3

**Mon Sep. 30** – Studio Group Review

**Thu Oct 3** – Group Work

**Group Overall Design Strategy**

**Mon Oct 7** – Studio Group Work Review

**Thu Oct 10** - Studio Group Work

**Sat Oct 12** - Urban Processes/Community Workshop Event – Day 4

**Mon Oct 14** - Studio Group Work

**Thu Oct 17** – Mid Term Review

**Sat Oct 19** – Urban Processes - Presentation/Reflection - Day 5

**Individual Design Work**

**Mon Oct 21** - Studio Individual Design Work

**Thu Oct 24** - Studio Individual Design Work

**Mon Oct 28** - Studio Individual Design Work

**Thu Oct 31** - Studio Individual Design Work
Mon Nov 4 – Studio Individual Design Work
Thu Nov 7 – Studio Individual Design Work

Mon Nov 11 - Studio Individual Design Work
Thu Nov 14 - Studio Individual Design Work
Sat Nov 16 – Urban Processes/Public Forum – Day 6

Mon Nov 18 - Studio Individual Design Work
Thu Nov 21 - Studio Individual Design Work Review
Sat Nov 23 – Preparation for Final Review

Mon Nov 25 – Preparation for Final Review
Thu Nov 28 - Studio Final Review – Last Day
Sat Nov 30 – Urban Processes/Final Presentation – Last Day

Fri Dec 13 - Studio/Urban Processes digital documentation Submission

**IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS:**
Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/). With each assignment, students will be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.