Catalysts of Urban Potentials: Cases in Singapore and East Asia

ZÜRICH – Globalisation has had a profound impact on the shape and dynamics of cities. This impact can be felt both in the historic urban centres as well as in rural peripheries. While comprehensive historic centres may remain important, today they have to be conceptualized with multiple centres, hubs and nodes. Together, these eccentricities are drawn together in a network of communication infrastructures to form complex polycentric urban systems serving whole regions. The scale, reach and network quality of these urban configurations have generated both positive and negative forms of urbanization at the local, regional and global levels.

This module examines these emergent urban conditions by focusing on sites that concentrate spatial, economic, social and cultural activity. Thus these eccentricities are stimulated by the interaction of local sites (topographically) and trans-local networks (topologically). Particular attention is paid to the catalytic circumstances or specific resource potentials that give rise to these productive and sustainable forms of urban coexistence. The module will focus on two exemplary and significant urban centralities: the urban breeding ground, which is the emergence of diverse, culturally significant neighbourhoods as generative nodes in the urban fabric; and the airport as a particular kind of urbanization. Zürich, Singapore, Shenzhen/Hong Kong and Shanghai. Combining empirical field-work, analytical approaches and projective scenarios the module will try to deliver policy recommendations and design-guidelines for these areas.

KEES CHRISTIAANSE

Biography. Professor Kees Christiaanse (1953) is internationally recognized among today’s foremost researchers and practitioners in the fields of urban design and architecture. He studied architecture and urban design at TU Delft. From 1980-1989 he was a partner at OMA in Rotterdam and subsequently founded KCAP Architects & Planners with offices in Rotterdam and Zürich.

From 1996-2003 Kees Christiaanse was Professor of Architecture & Urban Design at the TU Berlin; since 2003 he has been Head of the Institute of Urban Design at the Network City Landscape of the ETH in Zürich. In addition he is a visiting Professor in the Cities Programme of the London School of Economics. He curated the fourth International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam on the theme of Open City. Designing Coexistence in 2009-10. He is actively involved in concrete urban projects such as the revitalization of port areas in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Hamburg. In addition, for the Olympic Legacy Masterplan in London, he is designing an ‘urban breeding ground’ with delicate systems of public spaces on which interactive cultures of mixed use can unfold, catalysing the redevelopment of the surrounding city.

Creative as Catalyst: The Hong Kong and Shenzhen Cases

Keywords. Hong Kong, Shenzhen, open city, creative sectors, socio-economic development, sustainable urban development.

SINGAPORE – Hong Kong and Shenzhen are economically coexistent twin cities which are differentiated from each other in terms of social and urban practices. This can be seen in their own urban ‘breeding grounds’. Within a free market environment, Hong Kong, a former British-administered territory and is currently a Special Administrative Region of China, has developed a high-density approach to urban construction and renewal on its limited buildable land. During the last few years the overgrown commercial capital and the improper governmental enthusiasm have intensified the gentrification pressure on the city’s several creative neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, the well-established democratic urban development process, based on a reliable legal and judicial system that guarantees the contribution of non-governmental agencies, has helped in securing energetic urban breeding grounds. Within a much more controlled market economy, Shenzhen, an experimental fast-made city in Mainland China, has been learning city planning through the hurried urban practices under an oriental authoritarian arch. Since a few years ago, the city has endeavoured to greatly accelerate the ‘upgrading’ of its socio-economic structure. Not only through creating several socially homogenised ‘optimised’ clusters of tertiary industry, but also trying hard to eliminate, diminish or gentrify its old, not so bright neighbourhoods, which should nonetheless be a strong demonstration for an ‘open city’ with real potential for creativity.

Through the comparative study of these two cities, we try to discuss how effective urban strategies in different socio-economic environments might be developed, taking the advantage of existing systems, to trigger, maintain, and strengthen urbanity as well as creativity.

Ting Chen

Biography. Ting Chen, was born in Zhuhou, Hunan province of China. She studied architecture at Tsinghua University from 2003 to 2009 in both the Bachelor and Master programmes. Within this period, she took part in several projects including historic research, architectural design, urban design and research. Subsequently she went to ETH Zürich to work as a researcher in the Chair of History of Urban Planning. She took up a PhD post in the Future Cities Laboratory at the beginning of 2011.

Making Future Cities

First International Conference 12-14 September, Singapore

SINGAPORE – A key feature of a city is the diversity of opportunities it offers to its inhabitants. Fuelled by economies of agglomeration and twisted by historic traces and territorial conditions, those opportunities tend to cluster together. Investigating the centralities and their interconnections both within and across cities is the focus of the research presented in this Gazette issue.

Ying Zhou focuses on Shanghai (the city she calls her home town) within the eventful planning and economic history of that city. Hong Kong, the city that once profited from Shanghai’s (policy induced) decline, and its mainland twin Shenzhen, constitute a second site where contemporary economic, social and urban practices are manifest. Ying Chen investigates how the two cities, we try to discuss how effective urban strategies in different socio-economic environments might be developed, taking the advantage of existing systems, to trigger, maintain, and strengthen urbanity as well as creativity.

FCL – Future Cities Laboratory

Published by

SEC

Making Future Cities

First International Conference 12-14 September, Singapore

12 September AM

1. Catalysts of Urban Potentials: Cases in Singapore and East Asia

2. ON, ON, ON: The Politics of Excess

SINGAPORE – A key feature of a city is the diversity of opportunities it offers to its inhabitants. Fuelled by economies of agglomeration and twisted by historic traces and territorial conditions, those opportunities tend to cluster together. Investigating the centralities and their interconnections both within and across cities is the focus of the research presented in this Gazette issue. Ying Zhou focuses on Shanghai (the city she calls her home town) within the eventful planning and economic history of that city. Hong Kong, the city that once profited from Shanghai’s (policy induced) decline, and its mainland twin Shenzhen, constitute a second site where contemporary economic, social and urban practices are manifest. Ying Chen investigates how the two cities, we try to discuss how effective urban strategies in different socio-economic environments might be developed, taking the advantage of existing systems, to trigger, maintain, and strengthen urbanity as well as creativity.

Ting Chen

Cultural Production and Elements of Urban Potentials: The Singapore Case

Keywords. Singapore, cultural industries, open city, heterogeneity, sustainable development.

SINGAPORE – Singapore’s remarkable economic ascent in the recent past and its strategic location in the Southeast Asian region mark it as a unique case for understanding the relationship between the role of the state in development and urban production. Central planning for Singapore to specialise in a high-end global service economy is paralleled by the state’s recent cultivation of creative industries to enhance a sustained competitiveness in the global knowledge economy.

Taking Richard Florida’s claim that ‘human creativity is the ultimate economic resource’, productive potentials for urban development have been primarily sponsored by the state in the selective rejuvenation of existing parts of Singapore and in the creation of new nodes for creative hubs. Urban criteria such as openness and heterogeneity, along with scalar gradation, adjacencies and edge conditions will be part of an analysis for selected sites in the Singapore case to identify the elements of the design ecosystem, its agents, policies, processes, along with the urban morphologies, which provide the ground for development. The cultivation of cultural industries into creative economies is also examined from the perspective of the agents of cultural production for the potentials of intersections between the private agents and the state.

YING ZHOU and TING CHEN

Making Future Cities
Cultural Capital, Spatial Productions, Protagonists, Landscapes:

The Shanghai Case

Keywords. Post-socialist urbanism, modernity and industrial heritage, typological resilience, cultural production.

SINGAPORE – As China cares toward a better city today, systematic opportunism is the urban strategy of survival, where typological resilience becomes inextricable from globalised heritage, and cultural capital is re-calculated as part of the new economy. Shanghai spearcheads and exemplifies this condition. Post-socialist landscapes from cultural production from the metropolitan region of Shanghai, this paper looks at the changing value of cultural capital in systems of spatial production intersecting with both the maturings of post-socialist urban development by state capitalisms and the urban transition from manufacturing to service economy.

The state’s role in the cultural rehabilitation of industrial buildings as a strategy to rejuvenate urban fabric dilapidating since the 1990s, and the economy of systemic opportunism is paired with the emergence of urbanism of the new economy. From globalised heritage, and cultural capital typological resilience becomes inextricable from systemic opportunism. The Politics of Excess is introduced as one of the core research topics of our team in Shanghai and backpedaled by initial studies and projects currently undertaken in Beijing. With these projects I will also try to explain the way we envision research as projective speculation: generate and interpret interpretations of our built environment that either imply or require action.

ALEX LEHNERER

The Production of Space Driven by Airports:
A Comparative Study of Singapore and Brussels

Keywords. Urbanisation, airports, guidelines, scenarios, Changi.

SINGAPORE – The subject of this research is the urbanisation of global air traffic hubs, taking Changi International Airport and Brussels Airport as two comparative case studies. Singapore was chosen because of its large airport, which has been a major driver of economic growth for the country.

Biography. After joining FCL, Ying Zhou taught and researched the processes of complex systems, urban planning, and has been a visiting lecturer at University of Kaisersrot in Zürich, and founding director of the De-Log: Journal for History and Technology.

ON, ON, ON:
The Politics of Excess

Keywords. Urban design, excess, politics, research

CHICAGO – The lecture will focus on the exploration of the politics and culture in the excess of urbanism, focusing on the contemporary metropolitan and its potential form and future. Although the zeitgeist might expect the contrary, the discussion is based on the hypothesis that moments of excess, abundance and redundancy with regard to use and interpretation of any urban matter (whether: supply or demand) have been and will be the primary virtue of the city and its urban aggregations. The city is the one location where limits and thresholds are regularly transgressed to an extent, which continuously as well as apologetically challenges the balance among individuals and the collective. Moreover, it is exciting to see how limited or missing resources trigger the city to productively search for (artificial) substitutes in order to maintain its exuberant lifestyle(s). This talk acknowledges that urbanists are responsible not only for generating urban form and function but also for some of the city’s key qualities. For example, the realisation of a positive kind of redundancy finally allowed urbanism to escape a functionalist delimitation that tried to precisely match programmatic supply and demand in the city. Furthermore, any project (as a projection on/of reality) in some way or the other has to be defined as a result of an excessive use of a limited resource. The Politics of Excess is introduced as one of the core research topics of our team in Singapore and backpedaled by initial studies and projects currently undertaken in Beijing. With these projects I will also try to explain the way we envision research as projective speculation: generate and interpret interpretations of our built environment that either imply or require action.

ALEX LEHNERER

Transborder Infrastructures: Mapping Air Passenger Flows in the Pearl River Delta

Keywords. Airports, infrastructure, mobility, East Asia.

CAMBRIDGE, MA – Around the world, the number of air passengers has quadrupled since 1980. During the same time, air traffic in the Pearl River Delta has increased by a factor of 50. Architects have typically documented these parallel transport systems: from airports to trains to cars to buses. However, these systems have been and will be the primary virtue of the city and its urban aggregations. The city is the one location where limits and thresholds are regularly transgressed to an extent, which continuously as well as apologetically challenges the balance among individuals and the collective. Moreover, it is exciting to see how limited or missing resources trigger the city to productively search for (artificial) substitutes in order to maintain its exuberant lifestyle(s). This talk acknowledges that urbanists are responsible not only for generating urban form and function but also for some of the city’s key qualities. For example, the realisation of a positive kind of redundancy finally allowed urbanism to escape a functionalist delimitation that tried to precisely match programmatic supply and demand in the city. Furthermore, any project (as a projection on/of reality) in some way or the other has to be defined as a result of an excessive use of a limited resource. The Politics of Excess is introduced as one of the core research topics of our team in Singapore and backpedaled by initial studies and projects currently undertaken in Beijing. With these projects I will also try to explain the way we envision research as projective speculation: generate and interpret interpretations of our built environment that either imply or require action.

MAX HIRSH

Biography. Max Hirsh is currently completing his PhD in Architecture at Harvard, his dissertation - Airport Urbanism: The Urban Infrastructure of Global Mobility – investigates the expansion of international air traffic and its implications for architecture and urban design. Max has been a visiting lecturer and design critic at Harvard, Columbia, Yale, University of Amsterdam, Technion, and Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture. He has also been a fellow of the Social Science Research Council, the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, and the German Research Foundation.

Academic Qualifications. BA Harvard, Magister Technical University of Berlin, MA Harvard, PhD Harvard.

Publications/Awards/Exhibitions.

Log: Journal for Infrastructure of Global Mobility – investigations of our built environment that either imply or require action. Peer-reviewed article commissioned by History and Technology (2011). "What’s Missing from This Picture? Using Visual Materials in Infrastructure Studies". Peer-reviewed article commissioned by History and Technology (2011). "Does Your Mall Have an Airport?".

ON, ON, ON:
The Politics of Excess

Keywords. Urban design, excess, politics, research

CHICAGO – The lecture will focus on the exploration of the politics and culture in the excess of urbanism, focusing on the contemporary metropolitan and its potential form and future. Although the zeitgeist might expect the contrary, the discussion is based on the hypothesis that moments of excess, abundance and redundancy with regard to use and interpretation of any urban matter (whether: supply or demand) have been and will be the primary virtue of the city and its urban aggregations. The city is the one location where limits and thresholds are regularly transgressed to an extent, which continuously as well as apologetically challenges the balance among individuals and the collective. Moreover, it is exciting to see how limited or missing resources trigger the city to productively search for (artificial) substitutes in order to maintain its exuberant lifestyle(s). This talk acknowledges that urbanists are responsible not only for generating urban form and function but also for some of the city’s key qualities. For example, the realisation of a positive kind of redundancy finally allowed urbanism to escape a functionalist delimitation that tried to precisely match programmatic supply and demand in the city. Furthermore, any project (as a projection on/of reality) in some way or the other has to be defined as a result of an excessive use of a limited resource. The Politics of Excess is introduced as one of the core research topics of our team in Singapore and backpedaled by initial studies and projects currently undertaken in Beijing. With these projects I will also try to explain the way we envision research as projective speculation: generate and interpret interpretations of our built environment that either imply or require action.

ALEX LEHNERER

Transborder Infrastructures: Mapping Air Passenger Flows in the Pearl River Delta

Keywords. Airports, infrastructure, mobility, East Asia.

CAMBRIDGE, MA – Around the world, the number of air passengers has quadrupled since 1980. During the same time, air traffic in the Pearl River Delta has increased by a factor of 50. Architects have typically documented these parallel transport systems: from airports to trains to cars to buses. However, these systems have been and will be the primary virtue of the city and its urban aggregations. The city is the one location where limits and thresholds are regularly transgressed to an extent, which continuously as well as apologetically challenges the balance among individuals and the collective. Moreover, it is exciting to see how limited or missing resources trigger the city to productively search for (artificial) substitutes in order to maintain its exuberant lifestyle(s). This talk acknowledges that urbanists are responsible not only for generating urban form and function but also for some of the city’s key qualities. For example, the realisation of a positive kind of redundancy finally allowed urbanism to escape a functionalist delimitation that tried to precisely match programmatic supply and demand in the city. Furthermore, any project (as a projection on/of reality) in some way or the other has to be defined as a result of an excessive use of a limited resource. The Politics of Excess is introduced as one of the core research topics of our team in Singapore and backpedaled by initial studies and projects currently undertaken in Beijing. With these projects I will also try to explain the way we envision research as projective speculation: generate and interpret interpretations of our built environment that either imply or require action.

MAX HIRSH

Biography. Max Hirsh is currently completing his PhD in Architecture at Harvard, his dissertation - Airport Urbanism: The Urban Infrastructure of Global Mobility – investigates the expansion of international air traffic and its implications for architecture and urban design. Max has been a visiting lecturer and design critic at Harvard, Columbia, Yale, University of Amsterdam, Technion, and Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture. He has also been a fellow of the Social Science Research Council, the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, and the German Research Foundation.

Academic Qualifications. BA Harvard, Magister Technical University of Berlin, MA Harvard, PhD Harvard.

Publications/Awards/Exhibitions.

Log: Journal for Infrastructure of Global Mobility – investigations of our built environment that either imply or require action. Peer-reviewed article commissioned by History and Technology (2011). "What’s Missing from This Picture? Using Visual Materials in Infrastructure Studies". Peer-reviewed article commissioned by History and Technology (2011). "Does Your Mall Have an Airport?".