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ID 1441 | BRINGING LIFE BACK TO STREETS THROUGH LANDSCAPE DESIGNS: A CASE STUDY IN SUZHOU INDUSTIAL PARK, CHINA

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ABSTRACT: Previous research shows that the quality of street space would determine the outdoor activities, public health conditions and people's perception of place identity. This paper explores how the existing street landscape can be re-designed to bring public life back to streets – a concern arising in city regeneration. Due to the rapid urbanization in the last three decades in China, streets in major cities were often designed and built to prioritize and facilitate vehicular circulation. Although the well-known design principle – streets should be designed towards pedestrian-friendly – has been incorporated into textbooks and street design guidance. Less attention has been paid to the pedestrian's needs in practice. As a result, existing streets are often lack social activities. Public space design has now become a major concern of the Chinese public. How can existing streets be redesigned to bring life back to the streets in residential areas, especially in a given urban context with gated communities? To answer this question, a wide range of literature has been reviewed. Key factors that would contribute to a vibrant street life have been summarized into a design framework. Then a design research has been conducted to verify the effectiveness of these key factors, based on a case study in Suzhou Industrial Park, China. It is expected that the research findings would inform the retrofits of existing streets in the city regeneration process.

1 INTRODUCTION

This design research aims to explore landscape design strategies that can bring life back to the streets in residential areas, especially in a given urban context with gated communities. It is expected that some findings would be used to inform the retrofits of existing streets during city regeneration.

1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF STREET LIFE

In this paper, street is distinct from road. Street with a sense of life leads to a livable, safe, sustainable and healthy city. Gehl (2011) highlighted the importance of the street life from a social perspective. His research showed that pedestrian-oriented street with mixed use frontage was safer than street with few people and activities. Wu (2013) agreed with this statement, and further explained that more people showed up and gathered on the streets would prevent criminal behaviors. Ashihara (2006) stated abundant street activities could be a substitute of physical wall in communities. Frequent meeting and occasional discussions on the street would allow inhabitants to be more familiar with their neighbors (Zayed 2016). Additionally, once walking become as a part of people's daily life, health related benefits would be brought to the public. As mentioned by Nieuwenhuijsen and Khreis (2016), strengthening outdoor

activities can address the health problems caused by car comminuting such as obesity. Mentally, Harden (2014) and Wu (2003) summarized it up succinctly, vibrant street life can help inhabitants to get rid of the sense of loneliness. Besides, streets with place function always encourage people to choose travel on foot (Alexander and Tomalty 2002). Fewer cars on the roads will result in energy saving and fewer traffic problems (Wu 2013). Thus, sustainable and environmental friendly community would be achieved once more people are back on the streets.

1.2 BRING LIFE BACK TO THE STREETS

The loss of living atmosphere in urban streets now becomes the major concern of many local authorities worldwide. A UN-Habitat (2013) report showed that cities that failing to integrate the multi-function streets tended to have less infrastructure development, lower productivity and a poorer quality of life. In China during the past three decades of massive urban construction, human-related subjects have often been overlooked (Wang et.al, 2015). New urban areas in Chinese cities are characterized by systematic street networks, separated land use zones, big scale blocks, high-rise commercial flats, and huge open spaces between buildings (Wu and Huang 2013). The historical role of the street as a social communication place is vanishing. This urban form overlooks people's social needs because it puts a low priority on the role of the street as a meeting place. Jacobs (1993) and Gehl (2010) commented that great distance between people, events and functions promotes automobile dependence. To solve this problem, some pilot studies have been conducted to bring social life back to the streets. The municipal government of Shanghai issued the 'Shanghai Street Design Guidelines' in 2016, which showed an initial concern for pedestrian-oriented street design. However some questions remain unclear. For instance, how can the existing landscape be redesigned to bring life back to the streets in residential areas, especially in an urban context of gated communities? This paper aims to explore the key design factors that can bring life back to the streets. To achieve this objective, this paper will redefine the concept of 'vibrant street' based on literature review. A case study will be conducted in the Suzhou Industry Park (SIP), China. It is expected the research findings would inform the retrofits of existing streets in other comparable cities.

This paper includes three parts as shown in figure 1. Firstly, to answer the question 'what are the issues contributing to vibrant street life?' Literature on urban streets has been reviewed. As the outcome, key factors contributing to a vibrant street were summarized into a design framework. The second part identifies the main problems of the street in residential areas located in Suzhou Industrial Park. In this process, on-site observation, questionnaires and interviews were conducted. Direct observation is essential to study public life, and it is simple and efficient (Byman 2012, Gehl, and Svarre 2013). Through on-site observation, existing and non-existing activities were identified. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to develop a deeper understanding of people's behavior. The third part provides re-design strategies for existing residential streets that can revive street life, incorporating the findings of the literature review and field research.

Figure 1. Research Framework

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CLASSIFICATION OF STREET ACTIVITIES

Rebuilding street life is aimed at shaping a shared and integrated street environment rather than merely for circulation. Gehl (2011) divided street activities into necessary activities, optional activities and social activities according to the extent of the external environment requirement. Necessary activities happen with a kind of compulsion such as commuting, waiting for cars and buses. Optional activities are strongly associated with the condition of the external environment. For instance, sitting on the roadside or standing under trees only appear under certain desired situations. Social activities refer to activities dependent on the presence of others in public like children at play or greeting with acquaintances. Mehta (2013) further analyzed the behaviors occurring on the street from the perspective of social communication and sorted out the street sociability into passive, fleeting and enduring. Usually, passive sociability refers to individuals appearing in public space without any direct verbal contact with others. They appear street alone and focus on themselves, such as eating, reading, playing mobile phone or watching passersby (Mehta 2013). Subsequently, Mehta (2013) stated that fleeting sociability often happens in the neighborhood street with commercial functions. Greeting with an acquaintance, a short stop for a chat with neighbors, even a simple eye contact, a nod or a smile is the sign of fleeting sociability. Enduring sociability depends on more frequent and repeated contact among people. It is composed of weekly gatherings of intimate friends in cafés, or a family dining in the outdoors, as well as acquaintances standing outside to chat

2.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STREET ACTIVITIES AND DESIGN ISSUES

Necessary activities: As for the width of sidewalk, Whyte (2001), Mehta (2013), Marcus and Francis (1998) all agree that enough room for pedestrians is significant to support walking. Elevation treatment is another key issue. As Gehl (2010) pointed out people generally tend to avoid areas where level changes are large. It is noteworthy that frequent level changes in sidewalks produce problems for pedestrians, particularly for disabled people. Additionally, considering the situation of wheelchair users and people pushing prams, it is necessary to minimize obstructions on the footway. Meanwhile, planting (trees and shrubs) should not obstruct the sightlines of pedestrian. Pedestrian traffic is also quite sensitive to pavement. Jacobs (1993) and Gehl (2010) highlighted that the uneven ground surface is unsuitable for those with walking difficulty. Whyte (2001) also indicated that different pavement materials would be linked with various functions.

Passive sociability: As mentioned by Mehta (2013) and Whyte (1980), individuals seek relaxation in public spaces, and in the meantime, they do not want to be separated from city life. Even if they are temporarily alone, they still tend to pay attention to the streets where people hurry by since there is a feeling of liveliness and engagement. Just as indicated by Mehta (2013), businesses like bars, restaurants and stores are conducive to passive sociability. Admittedly, people are often engaged in some parts of the street where there are small businesses. Mehta (2003) argued people have more preference for small stores than large businesses in a community commercial street. Meanwhile, to ensure the environmental comfort, it is critical to provide comfortable microclimatic conditions, including temperature, sunlight and shade, and wind, for supporting outdoor activities. It also vital to set up enough seat places for both primary seats (chairs, bench) and secondary seats (stage, ledge) (Gehl, 2010; Whyte 2001 and Mehta 2003). Visual complexity is desireable for well-liked and well-used open space. An empty space without any interesting detailed design is hard to attract people for staying. It is vital to avoid a dull street view, which usually presents a clutter of elements of the same type (Whyte, 2001; Lynch, 1980; Marcus and Francis 1998). Animated edges of streets can catch the eyes of pedestrians and stop them.

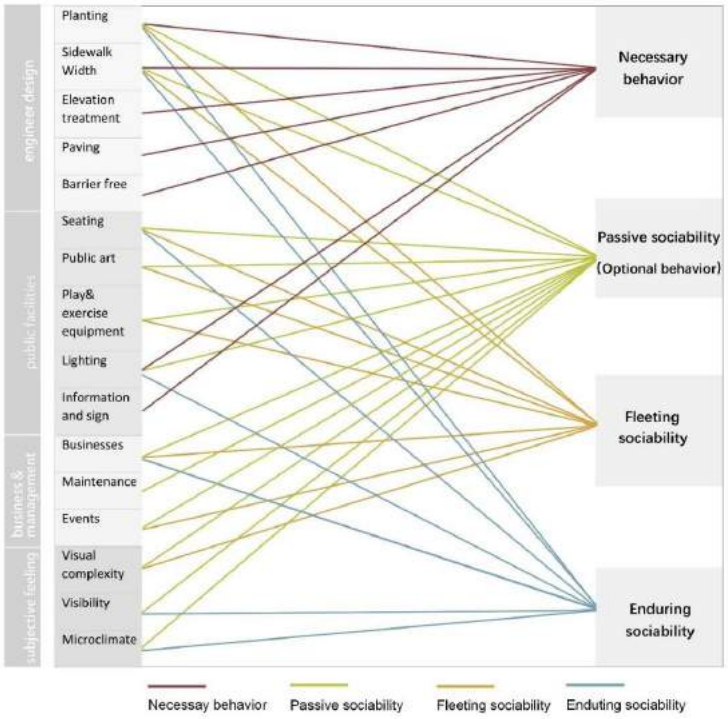

Figure 2. Relationship between design issues and street activities (Author 2017)

Fleeting sociability: First, the width of sidewalks should consider enough room for strolling, walking pets and children playing. Then, it is worth mentioning that street fronts with semi-enclosed sheltered space away from the pedestrian flow allows people to talk in a comfortable shade. To satisfy people who are staying on the street, sitting space should be provided. According to Mehta (2013), the street furniture should be designed and managed well, which sometimes supports casual forms of play. Playing in the street also produces opportunities for fleeting sociability since it sometimes attracts people to watch. The importance of play and exercise equipment has been stressed by Marcus and Francis (1998). Additionally, artwork and street events are very important.They can encourage people to stop and exchange comments Whyte (2001). External stimulus produces communication among individuals in various ways. Artwork can motivate people to stop or stay to promote social interaction (Gehl 2011). Triangulation can also be created by special events such as street parades, outdoor sales, festivals, and street musician performances (Mehta, 2003).

Enduring sociability: Generally, streets place which support enduring sociability are associated with space-fronting stores. It is crucial to have a certain proportion of businesses on the ground floor. Just as suggested by Whyte (2001), more than a half of frontage space in residential areas ought to be used to locate commercial services. Not limited to stores and open-air catering, businesses also refer to small stalls and handcarts. Informal businesses should be encouraged as well, which can both increase the vitality of a place and provide convenience for residents, thus improving the visual complexity (Whyte, 2001; Jacobs, 1998 and Gehl, 2010). Then, when finishing dinners in a restaurant, people may continue their talking and strolling along the street. According to Mehta (2013), an ample sidewalk space is obviously of significant importance in accommodating fixed activities (Ashihara 2006 and Jacobs 1993). The adjacent space on the businesses and the sidewalks as well as street corners must be equipped with safety and comfort to create an atmosphere for gathering. It is vital to design wide sidewalks with sitting places and pleasant microclimate. It is better to maximize the sitting places and fully use the secondary sitting areas (Gehl 2010, Whyte 2001). It is feasible to apply movable chairs because of their flexibility and comfort. In addition, to not disturb people standing outside for a long time, sheltered spaces are necessary to isolate the unpleasant environment condition microclimate. Marcus and Francis (1998) explain that, in generally, shade and shelter from the sun and rain are prerequisites for almost all sociable spaces.

3 CASE STUDIES IN SUZHOU INDUSTRIAL PARK

3.1 TARGET STREET

This part explores the problems in existing residential streets through a case study in Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP). XingDu Street is a secondary road through a residential area connecting the main avenue, which is located next to the central business district of SIP. Figure 3 shows the location and current images of the studied street. The distance between the central park and the studied street is just less than 300 m. The street is near the metro station within 5 minutes' walk. XingDu Street is a typical four-lane residential street in SIP, and problems on this street are typical of problems throughout residential areas in SIP. There are four motor lanes and two cycling lanes on this street. The motor lanes and cycling lanes are separated by 1-meter-wide green buffers. A 0.18m height difference exists between sidewalks and cycling lanes. In the 3m cycling lane, more than half the width is occupied by one-side parking. The space of street and community are separated by a 1.5m wide planting space and a 2m high fence. The width of the sidewalk is less than 2m.

Figure 3. Location and current images of the studied street(Author 2017)

3.2 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION BASED ON ONSITE SURVEY

To identify the main problems of street life in the studied residential street, on-site observation, questionnaires and interviews were conducted. Existing and non-existing activities in selected sites are identified through on-site observation. The studied streets were visited at different times, during the night, day, working days and weekends. The visits took place between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm twice a week for a month by the author for an hour each time from May to April in 2017. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to identify the reasons for the absence of street activity.. Residents were asked to share their opinions on activities in the street.

Figure 4 shows the category of existing activities on XingDu Street. The majority of activities observed are necessary activities consisting of commuting and waiting, which occur compulsorily. The quality of optional individual activities in the studied street is poor. Almost all individuals walk through the studied sites hurriedly without staying in the public space. Sitting on the roadside or standing under trees for a rest did not occur. Pet walking and kid playing occurred, but the frequency was low. Fleeting sociability occasionally occurred including children playing, greeting with acquaintances and short consultation of the house sale. As for enduring social communications, ambling and chatting with peers happened only occasionally. It is interesting that the lack of street facilities cannot support current requirement for enduring sociability. For example, although residents sit near the entrance of the community, they brought chairs by themselves.

Figure 4. Category of existing activities in the XingDu Street (Author 2017)

In the questionnaire, “enjoy the street view” and “sit & relax” are perceived as activities with the poorest environment design followed by “play”, “physical exercise” and “have a conservation”. The main reason for the low marks in optional and social activities like “enjoy the view”, “sit and relax” and “have a conservation” is the dull visual feeling delivered by the place. Then, “poor street planting” was regarded as a problem for both optional and social activity, especially for “have a conservation” and “sit and relax”. Poor design of sidewalk width and paving plays a key role in low satisfaction of all necessary, optional and social activities. Especially for “ambling & jogging”, “waiting,” “play”, and “physical exercise”. Inadequate street furniture negatively impacts the optional activities “sit & relax” and social activity “have a conservation”. Lastly, it is found that low outdoor comfort of microclimate decreased the intention of duration of social activities “play”, “exercise” and “have a conservation”. As for the expected street activities and functions in the studied streets, “street furniture” and “play & exercise facilities” are very desirable in the studied street. People in XingDu street also have a preference for work, venders, street business and street performances. Almost all respondents believe the current street does not have a pleasant environment for staying a long time. 80% of them agree that the street view is dull and lacks visual attraction. They have a strong feeling about the boring walking experience. Then, 90% of residents agree that car parking next the sidewalk is a serious problem as it often cause traffic conflicts and leads to a high safety risk. In term of the fence, around one-third of residents strongly approval of the statement that the fence damages visibility and visual complexity on street. 60% of them believe the fence should be removed or be designed in some other from.

3.3 RESEARCH-BY-DESIGN

3.3.1 DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR NECESSARY ACTIVITIES

Existing Problem: Walking is the fundamental street activity, but current street design gives the priority to traffic flow and car parking while the pedestrian is not the main concern. Present pedestrian circumstance is unfriendly to the disable or people with baby carriage or luggage. Improper paving, and height difference without slope will damage their walkability. One-side parking is an issue that impacts the safety of basic walking behavior.

Design strategies: Widening pedestrian zone by designing multi-functional buffer zone, eliminating height difference and changing paving.

Best practices: In the Street Design Guidelines of New Delhi (2010), multi-functional zones on a street should be a minimum of 1.8m wide, and may locate multiple functions. In the Shanghai Street Design Guideline (2016) proposes the combination of green buffer and street facilities with 1.5~2m wide. Multi-functional zone is a useful tool to maximize the space of pedestrian by overlapping green buffer and street facilities. Learn for the street renewal practice in Gevelsberg, Germany, the space of pavement can be defined by paving. Mittelstraße is Gevelsberg’s main street, the pedestrian way is defined by striped

paving which gives structure in a simple clear pattern. This slows traffic and creates even more opportunity for public activities.

Design proposals in the XingDu street: Enough room for pedestrian is a significant supportive point for street activities. As Jacobs (1993) mentioned a minimum of 35 % of street width must be dedicated to non-motorized transport. To widen the pedestrian zone, learning from Street Design Guidelines of New Delhi and Shanghai Street Design Guideline (2016), multi-functional buffer zone can be implemented in the XingDu street. A fully use of the buffer area between carriageway and pavement is a wise way to accommodate various functions consisting of tree planting, parking, street facility and furniture. Learning for the case of Mittelstraße Street in Germany, the different function of space can be defined by the paving material. Then, a shared space can be achieved by eliminating height difference between the sidewalk and bike path. Figuire 5 shows the before and after section in the XingDu street. Figure 6 shows the before and after perpectives in the XingDu street.

Figuire 5. Section of XingDu street before (left) and after (right) (Author 2017)

Figure 6. Perpectives of XingDu street before (left) and after (right) (Author 2017)

3.3.2 DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Existing Problem: Current street environment cannot support optional activities such as sitting on the roadside or standing under trees. Most people said the street view is boring and they do not want stay alone. The poor quality of optional activities in XingDu street is closely associated with monotonous landscape (poor maintenance and useless shrub) and absence of visual attraction (fenced edge of communities).

Design strategies: Creating attractive street landscape by transforming fences of community into active edge.

Best practices: The strategy of active edge can learn from the new road project in Brighton. A new street decoration – a finely crafted, long wooden bench is placed along the edge of the street. The new paving and seating have invited people into the space, made interaction possible, and changed the dynamic of the street. Local citizens have been quick to embrace the change, generating a new urban culture in what has become one of the most popular places to spend time in the city.

Design proposals in the XingDu street: Current landscape in the XingDu street is featured with barren façade, fence and poor maintained shrub. Learning from the literature and New Road project in Brighton, the edge of communities can integrate street furniture or creative planting. By this design, a sense of joy of walking can be achieved. Using this design people on the street might be slow down and have an observation. The edge of community can integrate with the long bench. This design decoration offers

passersby a place to sit and relax while watching life on the street which is much-needed from people's opinion. Figure 7 shows the reference images of the active edge strategy in the XinDu street.

Figure 7. Design proposal of active edge

3.3.3 DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR FLEETING ACTIVITIES

Existing Problem: Apart from providing opportunities to greet with acquaintances, livable street provides opportunity for fleeting sociability between strangers. In XingDu street, fleeting communication merely happened occasionally and limited to in greeting with neighbors. Absence of commercial and recreational function decreases fleeting sociability in XingDu street.

Design strategies: Encouraging street events and temporary activities on the street.

Design proposals in the XingDu street: From the questionnaire and interviews, street events and temporary activities are desirable in the XingDu street. To stimulate fleeting social interaction, weekend market, outdoor sales, street musicians performing, movable and temporary stall supposed to organized as showed in figure 8. Triangulation communications can be produced by these special street events. These activities can also foster a feeling of liveliness and engagement that contribute to the passive sociability.

Figure 8. Design proposal of various temporary street events

3.3.4 DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR ENDURING ACTIVITIES

Existing Problem: From the observation and interviews, people in the XingDu street intend to stay outside and communicate with peers. However, current street furniture and facilities are insufficient, especially the lack of places for sitting, no pavement café and no shelter for bad weather. To support enduring social communication, a place must provide suitable physical conditions for meeting and chatting.

Design strategies: Adding street furniture, play facilities and art installation on the street.

Best practices: Parklet project was created in San Francisco in 2005. Converting parking spaces to a tiny public park is an efficient measure to create space for street activities. The designers put grass, turf, bench and potted tree in a parking space. The design of a Parklet is a platform that extends the sidewalk and provides amenities like seats, tables, bike racks, and landscaping. The parklet offers passersby a place to sit and relax while watching life on the street.

Design proposals in the XingDu street: To allow people to stay longer in the street and stimulate enduring social communication. Art installation and playing equipment play a main role since they sometimes attract people's attention. Learning from the good practices, the form of street furniture and playing equipment and art installation can be integrated with each other as showed in figure 9. Additionally, learning form the case in San Francisco, sidewalk can be extended by converting parking spaces to a tiny public park.

Figure 9. Design proposal of adding street furniture, play facilities and art installation

4 DISSCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To achieve a vibrant street life, a range of activities need to take place on the streets including optional individual activities and fleeting, enduring social communication and necessary activities. In SIP, the current condition of residential streets meets people's basic requirement for necessary activities, but does not easily accommodate optional individual activities and social activities. The quality of optional activities is negatively impacted by the monotonous landscape, the absence of visual attraction and the lack of street furniture.

There are no interesting or unusual activities get people to stop, look, listen and engage in fleeting sociability. Apart from greeting with acquaintances, few opportunities have been provided for fleeting sociability, especially occasional communication between unacquainted people. Ambling with peers is the only type of long time social communication. Although people have an expectation of meeting and chatting in the outdoors, the current street cannot provide suitable physical conditions.

To address the problems mentioned above, design proposals and strategies are generated for the studied residential streets. Firstly, ample space for pedestrians is the precondition of all street activities. To widen the pedestrian zone, sidewalks can be integrated with the cycling lanes. A shared street space can be achieved by eliminating height difference between sidewalks and lanes, together with a change of paving materials. In addition, multi-functional buffer zones (integrating green buffers and functional buffers) can be used. The second solution is to design the edge of communities in a creative way as a strategy to improve the quality of the street landscape. The edge could be integrated with street furniture or planting. Meanwhile, street furniture and facilities should be placed after widening the space of the pavement. Seats, play and exercise equipment, public art installations and shelter should be emphasized. The last design strategy is to encourage abundant temporary activities on the street. Diversity of temporary activities ought to be encouraged such as weekend markets, street performances, outdoor cafés and other events.

Current regulations of residential street design in SIP force a separation of pedestrian and vehicles by different height or by green buffers. To maximize the pedestrian zone and achieve a shared street space, this regulation should be altered. Furthermore, current regulations for street design in SIP require a separation of green buffers and functional buffers. To maximize the pedestrian zone, a multi-functional buffer zone ought to be encouraged. Meanwhile, in terms of functional buffers, the function of the cycling lane or pavement ought to be given priority instead of one-side parking. In addition, the rigid regulation of fence designs in residential areas should be altered. To create an attractive landscape, the edge of communities ought to change. The integration of a community's edge with street furniture or planting should be addressed. Lastly, commercial and retail activities are banned in the residential street. Regulation for temporary activities ought to loosen and encourage street commerce, outdoor cafés, temporary stalls and other street events.

Although the design strategies proposed here are based on extensive prior theoretical and empirical research in the case of SIP, the evaluation of design proposals have limitations. For example, even though users of public spaces were asked to share their opinions about current problems of street activities, the

choice of design strategies reflect certain values of the author. The public should judge the use of their own urban spaces. To verify the rationality of the design proposal, a second-round questionnaire and interviews should be conducted in the next step. By doing that, the design proposal could be further optimized with the help of the residents' feedback. In addition, although there is a feasibility analysis of the design proposal in terms of planning regulation and policy, the implementation of the design project must be considered through further research. Perhaps a public-private partnership can be used. For example, the cost of the project might be shared between the local government, the neighborhood committee, the property developer as well as other commercial sponsors.

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ID 1448 | PUBLIC SPACES AS A PLANNING DIMENSION: MILAN CASE STUDIES AND POTENTIALITIES

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1 INTRODUCTION

After a long apathy phase, a combination of increased real estate pressures and international initiatives like Expo or the latest Triennale revival, heavily activated in Milan the realization of new public spaces and revital¬ization of old ones. Which include, among others, starchitects new inner city neighborhoods and landmark build¬ings, new design and fashion urban network spaces, car limitation policies to extended urban pedestrian areas. However, Milan urban renewal path is concretizing through heterogeneous results as they were the proceedings which inspired these transformations. Indeed, each of these modified areas has been individually conceived, being absent any meaningful high scale planning indication outlining an overall transformative vision of the city. This is clearly reflected in the Milan increasingly fragmented geography (Secchi, 2013), where the collective urban dimen¬sion has been often degraded to the rank of a public spaces collection to be consumed, rather than an urban struc¬turing spatiality seeking connections. Such an attitude drives to the weakening of the heterogeneous but highly intertwined urban complex which has always characterized this city. The overlap of historical compact frames and contemporary fragmentations, as well as different densities, gave rise to the actual Milan spatial condition, where emerge considerable public spaces potentials that could lead to fertile experimentations. But if public spaces are trivialized, they end up becoming self-referential entities, missing the task to condense differences and relations of the city.

This paper will deepen some of these potentials from the consideration of public spaces as active de¬vices within which to develop connective systems responding to contemporary urban complexity inputs (Mada¬nipour, et al. 2014). Milan chosen case studies will be then investigated from a critical point of view, but also as an opportunity to activate vibrant and pervasive urban backgrounds able to react effectively to the incessant changes of the city. This required to go beyond mere voids furnishing design actions, which is the prevalent approach to the theme adopted in Milan since recent time. The proposed investigations, had adopted instead a structuralizing approach to intercept topics emerging from the many and different environments urban frameworks involved in the new or revitalized public spaces analysed and in some cases re-designed. The paper will thus draw on specific design and exploration experiences evolved at the Urban and Territorial Planning Lab and the Urban Studies Course of the Polytechnic of Milan which we’ve held, and in partnership with various stakeholders and scholars, to highlight interpretations, hypothesis and glances for a new approach to public spaces as a key theme within with to re-design Milan’s contemporaneity. ‘InFractures’ is a design research in which are systemized and reconnected sets of empty in-between spaces at various scales innervating, through different intensities, areas from the city core to the eastern suburbs. Through ‘TimeLapseCity’ are investigated and interpreted new or deeply changed inner city public spaces, analysing their unexpected urban characterization in the light of everyday life uses, behaviours, prac¬tices, effects on the surrounding context. ‘RipCity’ deals with a globalizing real estate insertion in a crucial envi¬ronment between compact core and urbanized Milan region, deepening public space design hypothesis with the task to reconnect clashing contexts. ‘AgorUP’ tests a public spaces network utilizing flat rooftop surfaces, so as to consider alternative urban landscape inputs in the collective dimension and fruition of the city. Selected key steps of these researches will try to advance new perspectives on the public space delicate role in the definition of the contemporary city, providing cues for its interpretation and design.