Original Article

Everyday life under modernist planning: A study of an ever-transforming urban area in Hong Kong

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Abstract   The main objective of this study is to reveal the modernist production of space in relation to the everyday life of people in Hong Kong. Governments usually consider modernist urban planning to be an active force, and assume that this is the only proper means of directing the community towards the ideal of social harmony. As a result, the everyday life for citizens – ordinary people – in urban regions is embodied within the experience of a highly organised society. This article highlights the significance of this modernist ideology for urban development of Hong Kong. A case study of a district, Wan Chai, is then adopted to illustrate a tendency towards specific urban development strategies, in contrast to the diverse urban fabrics that have developed in a historical context. A comparative approach is used to examine the southern and northern parts of the district (that is, Wan Chai North and Wan Chai South). Six dimensions are used to analyse differentiations between modern urban areas and traditional living areas. The results shed light on planning issues that are relevant to everyday spaces.
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Introduction

Urban planning, as a process of guiding and controlling land use and environmental management, aims to facilitate the provision of a quality living environment. Towards this end, urban planners seek to ensure that a city's physical, social, economic and environmental developments are both favourable and sustainable. Since the end of the Second World War, Hong Kong has undergone rapid urbanisation and has seen a large increase in immigrant population. This rapid population growth has put pressure on Hong Kong's resources, particularly in terms of the demand for land and facilities. In response, government authorities have been obliged to implement an increasing number of urban planning projects (for example, land reclamation, new towns, urban renewal and *Metroplan*) to fulfil development needs. Modernist approaches and rational planning have been privileged throughout these developments, with the latter deemed to be the 'best method, or process, of doing planning' (Taylor, 1998, p. 66), and an approach that can 'transform an unwanted present by means of an imagined future' (Holston, 1998, p. 40). In other parts of the world, rational planning is being replaced by a more user-oriented planning approach, but urban planning in Hong Kong has not kept abreast of the times. Many of these criticisms are related to unsatisfactory planning policies, a shortage of public and open spaces and facilities, and urban areas as overly systematic, formal, restrictive and repetitive.

Today, as a result of functional segregation in modernist urban planning and the use of rational design alone, human factors have arguably been neglected in many major cities. Many modern

cities have become rational mechanisms that are used to routinise and programme everyday life. A number of public spaces no longer belong to the public for everyday enjoyment. Many streets have been transformed into car parks or efficient transportation hubs to meet the demands of heavy circulation. All of these changes have tended to deprive everyday life of authenticity, and continue to be characterised by alienated behaviour (Lefebvre, 1984; Kwok, 1998; Siu, 2007a). Many urban planners, researchers, and sociologists criticise modernist planning on the grounds that cities and societies have become inhuman and alienated as a result: they argue that everyday life of a modern society has become rationally organised and neatly subdivided and programmed to fit a controlled timetable (Sennett, 1970, 1990; Lefebvre, 1991; Hsia, 1994; Kwok, 1998; Siu, 2001, 2007b). These social issues have triggered a desire to rethink and reassess the modernist urban planning approach (Siu, 2005). Alternative perspectives have been presented that provide insights into the responses and reactions of users that are seldom considered by policymakers and governments.

In this article we attempt to review the urban planning of Hong Kong in a historical and social context, to determine how urban planning has been used as a method to achieve grandiose development goals. Then, we adopt an in-depth case study on the results of different stages of land reclamation, according to Hillier and Netto (2002), which has potential to shape city spaces in two distinct modes: 'the conservative mode restricts co-presence in order to conserve or reproduce cultural patterns; and the other generates the maximum co-presence in order to optimise the material conditions for everyday life' (p. 182). This study shows how, over time, the coastline of a district, Wan Chai, of the city has been repeatedly modified by reclamation, and identifies how two distinct planning regimes in one urban area have been generated by a main street in response to physical urban fabrics and grids. Furthermore, we use intensive observations within a comparative framework to reveal some issues of the modernist urban planning approach, and to reflect on the needs and preferences of city users within the current rapidly transforming urban environment. Finally, the article proposes that greater attention be paid to the user-oriented design method, which would produce an in-depth understanding of how city users interact with other users, living environments and facilities.
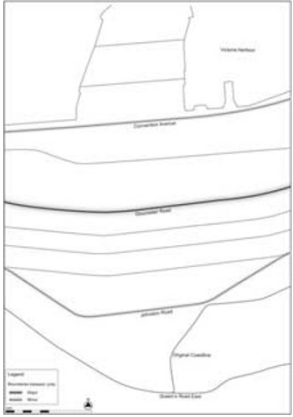
A Case Study: Wan Chai

In agreement with Merriam (1988, pp. 2, 10) a case study approach has been adopted as 'an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of social phenomena', with the understanding that it is 'impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context'. Furthermore, qualitative case study methods and tools have been chosen as being conducive to 'investigating different sites in the ambiguous urban space, such as reclamation area[s]' (Yin, 1993, 1994). Intensive fieldwork was undertaken from 2012, with a focus on the everyday practice of city users (user reception) in reclamation of the urban area of Hong Kong.

Wan Chai was selected as a case for in-depth study. This is an ever-transforming area located on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island. Tso and Ho (2006) have noted that Wan Chai exemplifies some of the typically controversial debates regarding people, space, and policy. This is a contested site for the dilemma of urban transformation, the preservation of culture and community networks, as well as spatial fragmentation related to social polarisation. Owing to its long history and traditional cultural characteristics, the many historical sites and local communities represent essential social capital. However, a recent development strategy – based on the desire for Hong Kong to become Asia's world city – has demanded more space, and this has generated a series of collisions between people, environment, and policies. The present physical configuration is the consequence of continuous reclamation over a century. Currently, a major road (Gloucester Road) divides Wan Chai North (a modern urban area) and South (a traditional living area). On the surface, urban reclamations and multimodal living spaces have constituted hybrid urbanism for this area (Figures 1(a)–1(c)).

For the present research, a historical approach has been adopted to highlight the segment-line urban area using morphological frame that is based on different stages of land (see also the concept of city composition and morphology by Conzen and Conzen, 2004; Whitehand, 2005). On the basis of a field survey of Wan Chai, Table 1 delineates urban form features of the plan units in terms of its aggregation of streets, plots, and buildings, and open spaces that distinguishes it from surrounding environments. Then, we outline a comparative model in accordance with

Figure 1: (**a**), (**b**) and (**c**). Ground plan, building types, and land and building utilisation of Wan Chai with its north–south demarcation.
(*Source*: the authors).

diverse urban fabrics for assessing modernist urban planning system in a hybrid urban area. This should allow us to identify design issues that are relevant to a modernist urban planning approach in this area.

The data of the study was mainly derived from observations of Wan Chai North and South, with descriptions and photographs. The captured images are used to make sense of the activities of city users in everyday spaces. Although the study is qualitative in nature, a more quantified *six* dimensions are used to analyse differentiations between modern urban areas and traditional living areas. The analysis presented in the later paragraphs is also based on these dimensions. The six dimensions are as follows:

1. the disparity between both buildings and facilities in the two areas;
2. the degree of difference between the management of both areas;
3. patterns of peoples' movement behaviour in the area;

Table 1: Features of streets, plots and buildings and open spaces of the plan units in Wan Chai

Plan Units in Wan Chai	Reclamation stages	Urban landscape units	Streets	Plots	Buildings and open spaces
	Since 1980	HKCEC unit	Occupation streets	Large-scale plots on insular typology	Landmark and political spaces
	1960–1972	Government administrative and commercial unit	Mainly regular through streets	Mix of large through plots and irregularly shaped plots	Modern skyscrapers and corporate spaces
	1890–1945	Mixed retail and residential unit	Through streets in planned grid	Medium-sized plots	Mixture of different types of buildings and loose street spaces
	1842–1890	Traditional living unit	Full/part-time pedestrian streets	Small-sized plots	Dilapidated housings and local banal spaces

Source: the authors.

4. how city users interact with the urban environments in Wan Chai North and South, respectively;
5. how everyday spaces are used, and who uses the spaces; and
6. whether or not both urban areas provide people with high-quality social interactions.

Through these observations, the detailed studies of everyday life provide a new perspective for rethinking and reassessing a modern/rational urban planning system, and will prompt further research design on potential planning processes and methods.

Urban development in Wan Chai

The history of Wan Chai can be traced back to 1841, when Hong Kong was a British colony. As such, it was one of the earliest metro urban areas to be established in Hong Kong. In the early years, Wan Chai was little more than a thin stretch of land inhabited by Chinese villagers and sailors. Residents lived along the coastline in proximity to Hung Shing Temple, which is now located on Queen's Road East. Until World War II, both British and Chinese were accommodated in the most fashionable residential area near the present Spring Garden Lane. Over time, a number of bars opened along Lockhart Road, characterising the area as an entertainment centre.

Initially, Wan Chai District was primarily a residential area rather than a commercial centre. Owing to population growth and limited land, the traffic jams gradually became a serious concern for sustainable development. After the construction of the *Mass Transit Railway* (MTR), Wan Chai was considered an attractive alternative for 'economic space' in association with the urban development of Hong Kong. Consequently, more land was provided for commercial uses through gradual urban renewal and land reclamation. In the 1990s, the remarkable Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center (HKCEC) was built on Gloucester Road North via this reclamation. The influx of a large number of international commercial centres and luxury office buildings converted Wan Chai to a highly mixed-use urban area. Nowadays, Wan Chai is part of the Central Business District of Hong Kong, and as such it has manifested a modernist image of reclaimed development and presented a paradigm for cosmopolitan urban areas. However, the traditional living area in the south of Gloucester Road still retains essential heritage characteristics, such as the street markets and itinerant hawkers that give the area its distinct identity.

Reclamation as urban development

Wan Chai was initially named Ha Wan (下環), which literally means 'a bottom ring' (Wordie, 2002). This refers to the geographical regions of

Wan Chai, Central, Sheung Wan and Sai Wan were locally called 'the four rings' (四環). However, the urban configuration of Wan Chai was not the consequence of systematic planning, but rather was formed through reclaimed development in a piecemeal manner.

Historically, the lives of ordinary people in Wan Chai were based around the Hung Shing Temple located on Queen's Road East. With the development of the shipping industry and with population growth, land demand became a determinant for urban development. To relieve the pressure, the first reclamation project planned to provide land outward from Queen's Road East. Johnston Road – where trams presently travel back and forth – was added to mark the shoreline in the early twentieth century. A further reclaimed project, known as *Praya East Reclamation Scheme*, had a significant effect on the urban configuration of Wan Chai. This scheme resulted in the provision of 36 hectares of land stretching to Hennessy Road and Gloucester Road for more than half a century. The land was built into small street blocks and three- to four-storey tenement buildings. In the post-World War II era, economic prosperity that resulted from globalisation created a carnival of land reclamation. In the 1980s, the government carried out a large-scale reclamation along the coastline from Gloucester Road, to supply extensive land for the first-class high-rise buildings. Meanwhile, the remarkable HKCEC was established in 1988. This development was supported by a consistent increase in commercial and office land use and characterised by a rapid decrease in residential land use. The modernist planning principle evidently guided this area. When reviewing the street network, for example, the spaces between buildings became sparse, and the street blocks more large and less well defined than in the traditional context.

Today, the urban fabric of Wan Chai exhibits a layout pattern of a 'segment-line city', wherein traditional and modernist spatial layouts were juxtaposed over the period of a century. This continuous transformation reminds us that there is a need to study the resultant urban layout, and to reassess the impact of modernist urban planning in relation to ordinary people's everyday practice.

Everyday Life under Modernist Planning

The review of the literature and field observations led to the identification of six dimensions of differences between the modern urban area and the traditional living area in Wan Chai: buildings and facilities, management, traffic and pedestrian flow, public activities, pedestrian diversity and social capital.

Buildings and facilities

This dimension involves the view, placement and usage of the built environment, as well as elements installed in the public space.

The most obvious distinguishing difference between the modern urban area and the traditional living area is the built environment. Wan Chai North, like many other modernist cities in the world, is composed of a number of free-standing single buildings, which are characterised by mono-functional as well as cubic shapes, clean lines and unembellished exteriors. Glass curtain wall design is adopted for most buildings in Wan Chai North, which makes the space aesthetically pleasing and clean looking and provides uninterrupted views of the skyline. Wan Chai South, by contrast, consists of compact urban layouts with mixed-use spaces and buildings of various scales. These mostly involve ground floor retail shops and restaurants with residences, offices and other uses for the rooms above. In many cases, some households – or even one particular household in the building – will erect advertisement signboards on external walls of buildings to help promote their own businesses. These signboards are often as high as the buildings. Overhanging signboards abound in the territory and have been identified as a characteristic of Hong Kong's cityscape for a long time. As the external walls of the buildings are communal, the size, numbers and position of signboards may be poorly maintained. As a result, some of these signboards create visual barriers and chaos in the street, potentially endangering the safety of pedestrians (Figures 2 and 3).

The public facilities in Wan Chai North are orderly arranged by a wide variety of public and private entities based on the space's function. For instance, a number of benches are scattered at various designated recreational areas including the waterfront promenade, sports ground, parks and gardens. Some of the public facilities may contain conditions of use and other restrictions. For example, people are not allowed to sleep or lay on benches. Most of the time, people comply with the instructions, orders and terms of use given them by the officers. On the other hand, public

Figure 2: Each mixed-use building and communal external wall in Wan Chai South has its own characteristics and purposes because of the variety of businesses and households. They are not only used for advertising but also serve as a site for political and cultural expression.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 3: A comparison of traditional (left) and modernist (right) buildings in Wan Chai. The glass curtain wall design of modernist building makes it feel mysterious, as the function of the building is hidden to pedestrians. By contrast, the external wall of traditional building shows pedestrians, at a glance, the exact function of the rooms.
(*Source*: the authors)

facilities in Wan Chai South are not well planned or coordinated by the government. Most of them are very old, placed in the wrong position, inadequate or non-existent. As fewer public facilities (especially recreational ones) are provided, the public fulfils their needs in their own ways. For instance, railings are designed and used to provide safety on the road, but people may also use them for sitting or leaning; because of the shortfall of public parking spaces, shop owners will put chairs on the road to 'create' a parking space outside the shop in order to facilitate loading activity. In summary, compared with Wan Chai North, people in Wan Chai South use the public facilities more arbitrarily, flexibly and freely (Figures 4(a and b), 5 (a and b)).

Management

The management dimension of an urban area refers to both the spatial order and the mechanisms used to control the public use of space. In Wan Chai North open spaces are often owned and operated by private entities and management companies. Private sectors have complete rights to manage the spaces they own. For example, they can post extensive sets of rules and hire people to filter who is able to in and out, as well as govern the appropriate use of the space. In fact, even for the open spaces that are managed by the government, various restrictions are imposed on the public on the use of the space such as limiting the opening hours, requiring authorisation or banning pets. Furthermore, vigilant security officers and enforcement officers enforce the rules stringently to keep the area clean, prevent unexpected situations arising and maintain social order and

Figure 4: (**a**) and (**b**). Wan Chai North public facilities are well planned and thoughtfully placed for various public needs. The public is encouraged to use the facilities appropriately. People in Wan Chai South are freer to decide how to use the public facilities to fulfil their needs.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 5: (**a**) and (**b**). This is a comparison of formal parking space in Wan Chai North and a parking space that has been created by a shop owner in Wan Chai South. Most of the time, the shop owners use their own objects to reserve a parking space. But in some cases, public facilities, like traffic cones, are 'borrowed' by them to occupy a temporal parking space.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 6: There are clear demarcation lines between public and private space in Wan Chai North. These contribute to a clean and orderly streetscape and spatial order. In the figure, a security controls the entering of a building.
(*Source*: the authors)

stability. Arguably, these rules unduly restrict the rights of pedestrians to access and use the space freely.

To facilitate management, the government separates urban areas into various specialised monofunctional zones, and segregates all activities in accordance with the space's function. For instance, the area between Convention Avenue and Gloucester Road is zoned for commercial and governmental use, whereas the area around the Golden Bauhinia Square functions as a focal point for tourists and venue for official events. This zoning approach contributes to a more clear-cut and orderly urban layout, and as a result the process of management becomes more refined and efficient. For example, all demonstrators are required to apply for permits and protestors have to enter in a restricted zone, such that the government can control the spatial environment and public order (Figures 6, 7(a and b)).

Most of the open spaces in Wan Chai South are not controlled by private developers, but managed by government-public partnership. Although the traditional living area is of a high density with a compact urban layout and mixed land use, the demarcation lines between public and private spaces are ambiguous (Jacobs, 1961; Mandanipour, 2003). This situation renders management more difficult. Thus, in Wan Chai South, a relatively liberal, flexible and pragmatic manner is used to enforce the legislative requirements (that is, verbal advice), and the public are allowed to manage the space by themselves. As a result, the urban spaces and streets in Wan Chai South are often complex and untidy (Figures 8(a and b)).

Traffic and pedestrian flow

This dimension refers to the situations and patterns of people-moving behaviour. In Wan Chai North, the road network is designed to facilitate fast and efficient automobile traffic movements: traffic lanes are wide and straight, at-grade pedestrian crossings are rare, and most developments are linked by footbridges. Officially, the government views separation of pedestrians from vehicles as the best measure to provide a pleasant and safe environment for pedestrian, as well as ensure an efficient and rapid traffic network.

Vehicle–pedestrian separation has been an important principle of urban planning in Hong Kong for a long time. In order to minimise the waiting time of the motorists and vehicle–pedestrian conflict, at-grade pedestrian crossings have been largely replaced by footbridges or subways.
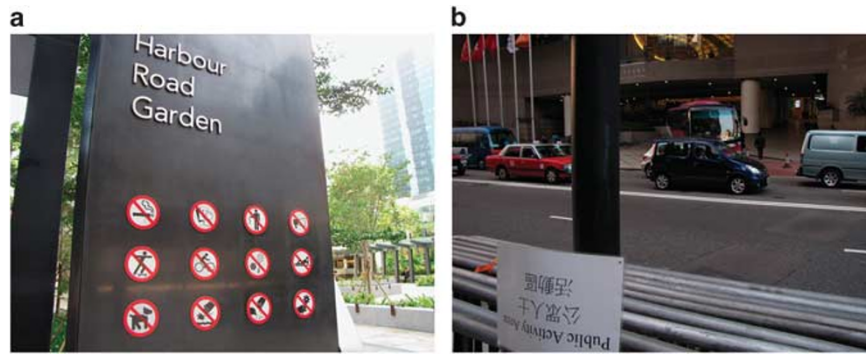
Figure 7: Some rules (a) and a public activity area (b) are set up to ensure to secure ideal social order and discipline. (*Source*: the authors)

Figure 8: (**a**) and (**b**). Because of the authorities' overly lax enforcement, many stall owners intentionally encroach upon the public space in order to expand the areas that they can use. Some people may occupy a space in the public sphere for their own use. However, those goods owners restore the street and surrounding area to its original cleanliness after they have finished their work. (*Source*: the authors)

Hence, the footbridge network in Northern Wan Chai has been well developed: from Wan Chai Ferry Pier to Southorn Garden (Wan Chai MTR station) and from Fenwick Street to Tonnochy Road, pedestrians can cross these areas without getting on the street. Because the footbridge landings are fixed, the walking route and direction of pedestrians have been formulated and restricted in a set way. In peak hours, the pedestrian traffic on footbridges moves in columns and everyone must move at the speed dictated by the pedestrian stream (Figures 9(a and b) and 10).

By contrast, Wan Chai South evidences a relatively slow traffic and pedestrian movement as the roads are shared by all users – including motorists, pedestrians and cyclists – at the same level and time. In Wan Chai South, pedestrian flow is not governed by fixed or planned routes. People cross the street freely, anywhere and anytime as if there were no vehicles on the road. Motorists and cyclists exercise patience and decrease their speed voluntarily at places where people converge. By

combining commercial, residential, retail spaces and restaurants, the mixed-use Wan Chai South area offers more choices for people to fulfil their needs within the same urban area, and this decreases their reliance on long distance travel (Figure 11).

Public activities

This dimension refers to how a public space is used, and to the activities that are available in the space.

Public activities support social, cultural and political expression, as well as bringing economic benefit to the people and society. Gehl (1987) divided activities into three categories: *necessary activities* (such as walking), *optional activities* and *social activities*.

During the observations, there were obvious differences between the activities of Wan Chai North and South. For the former, necessary
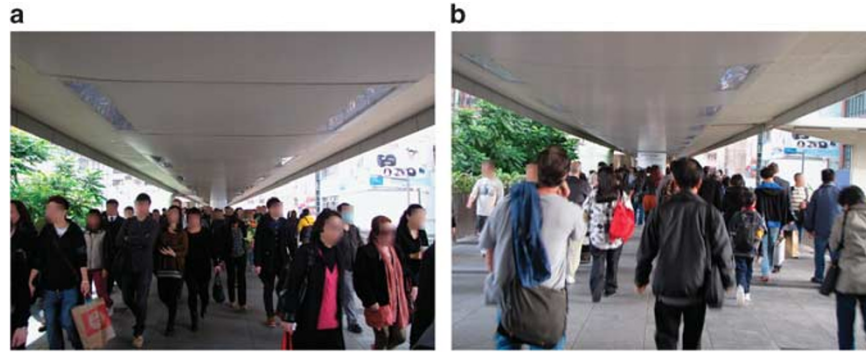
Figure 9: As the majority of Wan Chai North space is planned for office and commercial uses, people have to walk or drive long distances to fulfil their needs (such as dining or shopping). The two figures show that pedestrian flow will rapidly increase from people coming to the working places in the morning (a: from South to North) and going to retail shops and restaurants during lunch hours (b: from North to South).
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 10: Sometimes the administration or private entities use metal fences to guide and direct pedestrians.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 11: Without footbridges or subways, in Wan Chai South street space is shared by motorists, pedestrians and cyclists alike.
(*Source*: the authors)

activities were always seen on streets and foot-bridges, but few optional or social activities occurred, as such activities are restricted through various rules and management decisions. For the latter, optional and social activities would occur spontaneously in streets, parks, and other recreation spots at any time.

Wan Chai North is divided into separate areas for various activities. As a result, the types of activities were limited and tended towards a unitary mode. For instance, tourist activities have been zoned and regulated in Golden Bauhinia Square, such that photo taking and patronising licensed hawkers are the only activities that the tourists are able to do in that place.

Also, in Wan Chai North many mega events or formal events are organised by the government: especially in the areas around the Hong Kong

Convention and Exhibition Centre. The overt presence of crowd management tools (such as physical barriers) in public places gives the message that the government has the ability – and the absolute right – to manage these places to facilitate these events (Figures 12 and 13).

In traditional living areas like Wan Chai South, streets serve as public spaces. They are spaces for people to meet, interact and connect. They are owned by the community, and managed by all people. Various kinds of public activities can be found on Wan Chai South's streets, depending on the context of place and time. In the Johnston Road, near MTR station and places of work, public activities will generally be conducted for business reasons; in the traditional street market areas, such as Tai Yuen Street, public activities can be quite comprehensive such as buying and selling, chatting,

Figure 12: Tourist activities have been zoned and regulated in specific areas. Only permitted hawkers are allowed to do business there. The trading areas and types of commodities have been controlled by the administration: only painting and photographing are approved for commercial trading.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 14: Although unauthorised street hawking activities are not allowed in Wan Chai South, the administration adopts a lenient policy and flexibility in taking enforcement actions, such that the hawkers are verbally warned to disperse.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 13: The flag-raising ceremony includes a party of Hong Kong police officers, accompanied by a rifle unit all in ceremonial dress. The national anthem is played by the police band, followed by a 10-min musical performance by the police pipe band. During this special event, the government administrators temporarily convert the open space into functional venue, exerting some of the barriers for management purposes.
(*Source*: the authors)

discussing, playing chess and even sleeping. Gehl (1987) suggested that these optional and social activities occur because the absence of an explicit controls presence (Figures 14, 15(a and b)).

Pedestrian diversity

This dimension refers to the people who use the space. There is growing interest in incorporating pedestrian diversity analysis into the urban planning. This involves extending focus from the quantitative indicators (that is, pedestrian flow and walking speed) to include the qualitative indicators that can help to make a pleasing urban environment. Public activities are largely dependent on the planning approach and management of the urban space. Zoning and mixed land use not only affect how spaces are used, but also the type of people who use this space.

Owing to the segregation of land use and activity in Wan Chai North, each zone usually only attracts people with homogeneous backgrounds, classes, needs and similar behaviours. On the surface, all people have the right to access or use the space, however the functional zoning approach and overmanagement that is identified above, encourages the segregation of people of different backgrounds and exclusion of certain undesirable users (Burgess, 1994; Maantay, 2002).

Our observations for this study illustrate that Wan Chai North has a remarkably low level of pedestrian diversity. During our fieldwork we observed that people wearing shirts, suits and ties made up the majority of pedestrians in Wan Chai North: especially the footbridges along Gloucester Road and its nearby vicinity, as these areas function as the centre and rendezvous of economic activity. Likewise, over 90 per cent of visitors in Golden Bauhinia Square were tourists, as the space was designed to attract tourism (Figure 16).

In contrast, Wan Chai South is composed of a number of different types of buildings (residential, commercial, storage and service), shops and

Figure 15: (**a**) and (**b**). Activities on the street in Wan Chai South include having meals and sleeping. As demarcation of public and private space in Wan Chai South is ambiguous, workers and stall owners see the area around their workplace as available for their own use.
(*Source*: the authors)

Figure 16: Mono-functional space tends to attract same types of people, likewise public facilities and activities organised by the government also only attract certain people. In Golden Bauhinia Square, all parking spaces are labelled for coaches, and leave no room for small cars. Only tourism-related products or services (that is, painting and photographing) are approved for sale in that place. Such measures have restricted the function and publicness of space.
(*Source*: the authors)

market stores, restaurants and recreational venues. In addition to attracting various on-street activities (like street performances and hawking) Wan Chai South attracts a diverse cross-section of people, including both neighbourhood residents and visitors from outside the district. Our observation of the pedestrian diversity in Wan Chai South indicated that the elderly are more likely to stay here rather than in the new and clean recreational venues in North. The explanation is that the footbridge system is not convenient or accessible for them. Long footbridge ramps, stairs and lifts are physical and psychological barriers when entering the north, and further decrease its pedestrian diversity.

Social capital

Social capital refers to the quantity and quality of social interactions and relationships in a community. The interplay between social capital and urban planning is a comprehensive topic. Generally, social capital is a concept that describes the social contacts both between groups and within groups. A high level of social capital is associated with strong social networks and social relationships and feelings of trust and civic engagement. Social capital influences the collective action, social solidarity and inclusion of an area (Putnam, 1993; Leyden, 2003).

In this study, we found that levels of social capital tend to be significantly higher in Wan Chai South than North. This can be reflected by more spontaneous social activities and collective actions in Wan Chai South. The availability of space for social activities is important for developing social community as well as social capital in an urban area. As residents have greater opportunities to participate in different types of social and informal interactions, social networks, cohesion and solidarity are easily created among them. During the observation, planned and spontaneous meetings and casual conversations with acquaintances were often found in many places around the open-air bazaars. This shows that the community is well networked. Furthermore, the community formed concern groups such as 'Street Market Concern' (discussed below) to take action to protect collective interests and the environment (Figure 17 (a and b)).

In modernist cities, zoning not only divides the interdependent functions of a city into fragments, but also undermines the 'potential for integrated neighbourhoods and local social capital' (Barton,

Figure 17: The wide range of social and informal activities contributes to the social capital. In Wan Chai South, residents spend time in communication activities in or alongside the access roads (a). Tai Yuen Street in Wan Chai is a street market, residential area and public space, and it attracts local and foreign visitors with diverse backgrounds for wandering and chatting there (b). These help to maintain a positive and united relationship between residents and the place.
(*Source*: the authors)

2005). The separation of land into zoned mono-functional does not take the psychological and social aspects of the space into consideration. When people spend considerable time in traffic and at workplace but not in their residential community, they do not have a sense of belonging necessary to engage and to contribute to the civic society. Most people are merely sojourners in Wan Chai North that is a workplace but not a place for developing social networks. Although the planners provided spaces (parks and gardens) for people to stay in the area, no social activity occurs in these spaces. Furthermore, the lack of social activity actually leads to low social capital.

Reflections and Discussions

Figure 18 provides a visual representation of the difference between the traditional living area (long dash line) and modern urban area (solid line), with ratings for each of the dimensions outlined above. The closer the point is to the centre of the chart, the poorer it is for that dimension.

In Wan Chai North, uniform mono-functional buildings and public facilities are well located, carefully maintained, efficiently managed and functionally appropriated to meet the public needs. Most buildings are privately owned and highly managed by the government or private sector. Owing to the proactive management and maintenance practices, the space often feels organised, and looks ordered, structured and controlled. There is conspicuous demarcation between the private and public space, and various restrictions and monitoring are imposed upon the
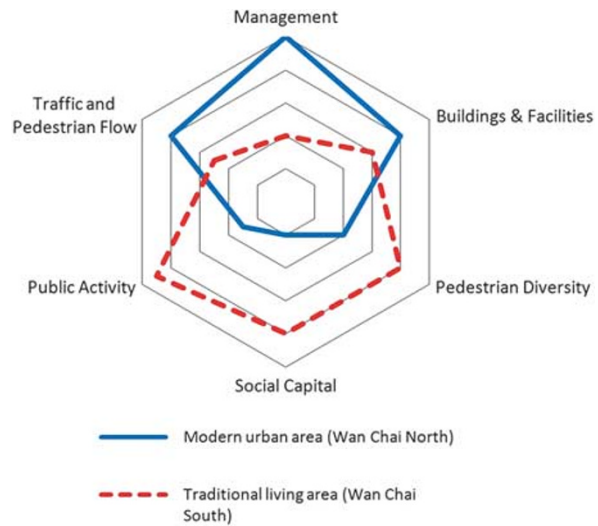

Figure 18: Comparative profile of Wan Chai North and Wan Chai South, using six dimensions.
(*Source*: the authors)

public on the use of the space. Also, strict enforcement actions are taken to manage behaviours.

A vehicle–pedestrian separation principle and footbridge system has been adopted in Wan Chai North. Pedestrian routes have been set up within the footbridges. The average speed and volume of traffic and pedestrian flow is high, especially during the peak hours of the mornings, lunch hours and evenings. Nevertheless, the level of pedestrian diversity was observed to be low, because each zone had a specific function that attracted only a single type of pedestrian user.

Activities in Wan Chai North are segregated into mono-functional zones. Hence, our observations of the streets showed a great deal of necessary activities, but rarely found optional and social activities.

On the one hand, overmanagement and zoning restricted the types of public activities that could occur, and therefore many people performed similar activities within the same venue. On the other hand, a range of governmental and formal activities were routinely organised in Wan Chai North.

The spaces in Wan Chai North – both streets and open spaces – do little to serve as public spaces for community interactions. They provide a circulation route without any social meaning, and thus, Wan Chai North cannot easily build social capital.

Wan Chai South had several varieties of mixed-use buildings. Uses included housing, commerce and services. Many types of people were observed using public facilities in non-traditional ways to fulfil their needs. In addition, the demarcation between private and public was ambiguous. The relatively liberal and generous management approaches have meant that the urban area is somewhat disorganised and cluttered.

We observed that the speed of traffic and pedestrian flow in Wan Chai South was relatively slow because roads are shared by people on foot, on bikes and in vehicles. The volume of pedestrian flow was generally stable but particularly busy in the street marketplace. Moreover, a high degree of pedestrian diversity can be observed in the urban area. We found many women, children and elderly residents on the street, participating in different activities.

Streets have long been important public spaces in Wan Chai South. They support activities that are spontaneous and simple in nature, and do not require official sanction or organisation. As there are opportunities for residents to communicate and interact, a high level of social capital was identified from the strong social networks and civic associations in the community.

Modernist planning exerts greater management control

In Wan Chai, the government tends to attain a higher level of order, both physical (spatial) and social, in the modern urban area than the traditional living area. The top-down approach focuses on state control, with the understanding that common urban problems such as street clutter, illegal parking, informal street trading and procession, can be solved by stringent management controls.

The components of stringent management control are as follows: planning and zoning public activities; outsourcing of the management work of spaces to the private developers, enterprises and management agencies; posting extensive sets of regulations to govern appropriate use; and proactive monitoring and strict enforcing of the rules. These measurements and practices, both control the users of the space, and at the same time exclude undesirable people.

Stringent management controls are also adopted by the private sector. In Wan Chai North open spaces are often owned and operated by private entities and management companies. Private sectors have complete right and freedom of management of the spaces they own. Cleanliness and ordered appearance is usually important to them, as this promotes a positive corporate image. For this reason, owners often post extensive sets of rules and hire people to govern appropriate use of the space. As a result, few spontaneous social activities occurred in privately-owned public spaces.

Stringent management control also has political implications in regard to the public order and demonstrations. The findings illustrate that the potential for demonstrations in the modernist urban area was a concern for the administration. First, all demonstrations were required to apply for permits. Second, protesters (or people who resembled protesters) and their movement were zoned, controlled and even driven out by force. For instance, on 1 October 2012, several black-shirted citizens were hauled away minutes before a National Day flag-raising ceremony at the Golden Bauhinia Square. An official spokesman stated that these official actions were based on the 'code of ceremony', and were to prevent disruption of public events. However, in fact, there was ambiguity in respect to the code of ceremony: including its legal authority and definition of 'prevention', as those black-shirted citizens did not shout out any slogans or display any unacceptable behaviour before security guards led them away.

Walking and living under effectiveness-led planning

In general, Wan Chai North has a great deal of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, but these both move quickly such that street spaces have a 'lifeless' quality. On the other hand, pedestrians in Wan Chai South are likely to move slowly and spend more time on social activities, which presents a more lively and dynamic streetscape. Gehl

(2010, p. 120) noted that 'walking is a form of transport, but it is also a potential beginning or an occasion for many other activities'. He suggested that walking tempo has a significant effect on the level of on-street activity and urban space life: if people walk slowly on the street, they have more chances to closely survey their surroundings, to meet and communicate with others, to understand the place, or to initiate or participate in any activities. The following focuses on how planning ideology influences the quantity as well as quality of walking, and the influence of this on life in urban spaces.

Naturally, the nature of street spaces is an important factor influencing people's movement behaviour. When streets are designed for traffic movement, they become less attractive and uninviting to people. Wan Chai North's road planning, like many other cities in the world, is based on automobile-oriented planning approach suggested by modernist urban planners Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. In their view, as the zoning approach divides the city into separate functional zones, to effectively connect each separate space a fast, dense and efficient transportation system is absolutely necessary. As the pedestrian networks in Wan Chai North became more complex and indirect, the crossing of roads also became more difficult and inconvenient. Pedestrians now have to use a circuitous route for crossing the roads or getting to the footbridges to reach other areas. At the same time, streets and footbridges have become specialised in their function, as conduits for traffic instead of public spaces. For the modernists, activities like busking, small trading or even staying on the streets or footbridges may be seen as an obstacle to the speedy and continuous pedestrian stream, especially during peak hours.

Indeed, the problem of the policy of segregation not only considers the physical aspects of route planning, but also the neglect of the psychological quality of pedestrian walkways (Sauter and Huettenmoser, 2008). More and more, urban planners have come to realise that the measurement of the 'perceived distance' is as important as the 'physical distance' in street planning and design. Physical distance, according to Gogel *et al* (1963), can be defined as 'the distance from the eye to the object', and perceived distance as 'the observer's perception of the distance of the object'. The street spaces in Wan Chai North are safe, wide and well-maintained, when compared with those in the older urban area of Wan Chai South; on the other hand, the streetscape is dominated by motorised

traffic, office buildings, long closed walls, and boring facades. These unattractive 'hard edges' (Gehl, 2010) make pedestrians unconsciously think the street is long, and they are encouraged to walk faster with greater step length, or inclined to use the underground tunnels or elevated footbridges, even if it is inconvenient.

To make a streetscape attractive, physical planning (such as well-designed and thoughtfully placed street furniture) is important; but more important is the stimulation of active facades, activities and people. Wan Chai South is composed of mixed-use buildings with the street level devoted to commercial uses, which means pedestrians can see different shops and activities when walking along streets. The display windows, signage, building entrances, outdoor restaurant seating, hawkers and kiosks encourage pedestrians to slow down or even stop. In some areas of Wan Chai South's area such as Cross Street and Tai Yuen Street, pedestrians, bicyclists and motor vehicles share a common street space, and they do not move fast. Shared street spaces can be seen as a public outdoor room for the use of the general public, which make an urban area liveable and vibrant (Hamilton-Baillie, 2008). Certainly, in a shared space, all road users slow their speed and pay more attention to the surrounding area as well as people rather than just keeping moving, and such 'psychological traffic calming' (Kennedy *et al*, 2005) can help to prevent serious accidents. Furthermore, free-flowing movement means pedestrians can change direction, speed up or slow down, or stay on the street for the social activities or other reasons. Street spaces in traditional living area are multifunctional and open for a wide range of activities, such that walking is only one of the moving activities. In the absence of designated walking route people can walk freely and naturally and enjoy street life (Figures 19 (a and b)).

Disappearance of community

The preceding sections have discussed issues related to behaviour. The section that follows discusses the impact of land-use zoning – the core idea of modernist urban planning – influence on the development of urban community.

The concept of community is associated with many circumstances and has many dimensions. Generally speaking, community can be defined as 'a group of people who live in a local area and who
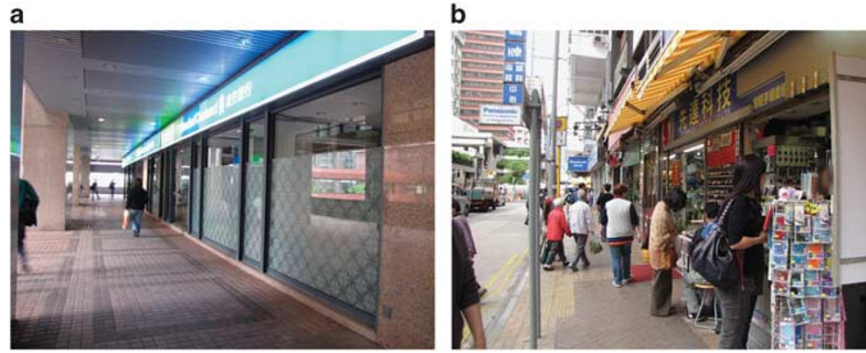
Figure 19: Perceived distance: a horizontal facade (a) makes walking distances seem longer and boring; streets with vertical facades (b) makes distances seem shorter and more fun.
(*Source*: the authors)

therefore have certain interests and problems in common' (Hunt and Colander, 1996, p. 129). In recent years, many researchers have adopted Putnam's idea of social capital as a framework for understanding and building strong communities in an urban area. Putnam (2000) defined social capital as 'grease that allows the community wheel to advance smoothly'. He embraced the notions of civic engagement, sense of belonging, trust and community cohesion.

The findings of this study show that a strong community and high degree of social capital exist in the Wan Chai South, as there are a great number of residential and commercial buildings, schools and parks, restaurants and shops and historic open-air bazaars, with plenty of opportunities to interact and become involved in social activities for people with different backgrounds. In such mixed land-use area, no one is isolated or recognised as an outsider. Therefore, it is widely believed that provision of services is essential to community cohesion (Kwok, 1998; Holdsworth and Hartman, 2009).

The community in Wan Chai South did not develop based on official plans or blueprints. Rather, it was built by the people who used the space and was expanded over many years. For example, the open-air bazaars in Wan Chai were transformed from informal street trading activities in Tai Yuen Street, Cross Street and Wan Chai road that began in the 1920s. The streets were not built for commercial purposes, but people utilised them for trading, assembling and interacting with others. In this way, a community was gradually formed, consisting of nearby residents and shop owners. Furthermore, although the space is shared by the community, the members obtain a sense of belonging and close relationship with the space

from 'the sharing of interests and activities' and also the 'shared history' (Scott Swain, cited in Collamer, 1999). Therefore, residents in the community will take collective action (such as assembly and procession) to maintain or protect their 'sharing of interests and history'. Putnam (1993) described such collective action as 'civic engagement', and noted that this requires a high level of sense of belonging, common goals, and healthy social networks. For instance, when the government put forth a plan to relocate all open-air bazaars' hawker pitches and shops into the new indoor market complex in 2006, residents, individual hawkers and others united together and formed a group called 'Street Market Concern'. They argued against the plan, saying that it would destroy local identity, history and culture, disrupt the social network of occupants and adversely affect the local economy.

Zoning is a planning approach that divides the city arbitrary into separate functional zones for the purpose of regulating land use and development, and it affects the growth and development of urban community (Kwok, 1998; Siu, 2001). This mono-functional zoning system separates home from school, shopping, work and other activities, leading to the decline in sense of community. Alexander *et al* (1977) indicated that the separation of home and workplace 'reinforces the idea that work is a toil, while only family life is living'. Great distances between different zones force people to spend substantial amounts of time travelling, and this further reduces their participation in outdoor activities, as well as their involvement in the urban community. In addition, when spaces are occupied by private developers, people have little motivation to develop social networks or a sense of community (Kwok, 1998).

Cultural and social diversity are widely understood to be important components in developing social capital. A noticeable effect of the zoning approach was the creation of spatial and social exclusion. Through physical separation of different land uses into zones, the urban areas have been reconfigured as disjointed fragments, creating a number of urban islands that were both surrounded and linked by bridges, tunnels, expressways and bypasses. With mono-functional planning, those urban islands only invite certain types of people. They limit social encounters and thus generate strong physical and social segregation (Rio, 2004).

Conclusion

This study examined the daily behaviour of city users in two areas where the environment was differently planned and managed. Our aim was to determine the difference between a modern urban area and a traditional living area. On the basis of an empirical investigation in Wan Chai, we identified six dimensions of difference between the modern urban area and the traditional living area: the built environment and facilities, management issues, traffic and pedestrian flow, public activities, pedestrian diversity and social capital. The results suggest that the rational top-down approach to planning lacked consideration of the psychological and social aspects of space. Conversely, the traditional living area – the place that we recognised as unplanned – has long been an important public space for city users, and contributes to the vitality of the city and the sense of community. It was precisely the high density living offered by the compression of population, space and human experience, which transgressed any rational response to the public living environment in time and in function so as to build the interactions between plans/designs and practices, even though crucial urban issues are identified such as density and crowding.

From this study we can identify three key points. First, the stringent management control that was widely implemented in the modernist urban area, to ensure the efficiency, functionality and order of space, made the space less public and more 'soulless'. Second, traffic planning, streets patterns and the design of the streetscape influenced pedestrian walking behaviour and experience, as well as the quality of life in urban spaces. Effectiveness-led planning segregated pedestrians. Although this focused on safety and fast movement, it neglected the psychological qualities inherent to walking, as well as the social function of walkways. Third, that modernist planning completely failed to develop urban community in the urban area. Land-use zoning created a spatially and socially segmented city, as most people had to use a great part of their time commuting to and from work, or moving to school or market every day. As a result, the opportunity for people to interact and have close contact was reduced, and no community was formed. In short, modernist planning neglects real situations and human factors. The 'ideal urban plan' formulated by one social group of experts will exclude the various desires and needs of other social groups.

From our examination of modernist planning, we can identify if the notion of modernist planning produces the best urban environment. Indeed, the modernist approach has proved resistant to change over the years, and more and more planners ask to develop new approaches to urban planning. The case study of the Wan Chai South suggests that traditional approaches are not out-dated, and contain human factors that modernist approaches have ignored. In addition, high density as a function of urban life has provided more positive benefits to extend immediate experience of place both qualitatively and quantitatively. In sum, when undertaking urban development projects, the government must look carefully at all the components including the physical, psychological and social aspects, which constitute effective urban planning.

Acknowledgements

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