

Olympic Village's revival: a reflection after the field trip

I remember Ms. DeMarco said in her guest lecture, “without mountains and harbors, Vancouver is the same as Calgary”. It is true that as historical streetcar cities, both cities have similar gridiron pattern city blocks and linear arterial streets. But benefited from our astoundingly appealing landscapes, Vancouver has shown its great effort on integrating our views of such speculator settings with architectural designs.

In terms of promoting sustainability in response to the current climate change, cities, which accommodate more than half of the world population, should be carefully designed to mitigate its negative impacts and promote positive ones. In this case, designs are called upon to function as problem solvers. But besides the need of solving environmental problems, we also have the need to maximize developers' profit, harmonize street facades, provide enough affordable housing, revive the heritage of the region, etc. Therefore, the sustainable urban design is a synthetically organized subject that strongly links to multiple fields such as real estate markets, urban policies, engineering and so on.

I was unconfident and curious about the effectiveness of those designs before and after the Olympic Village field trip: since urban sustainable designs are being counted on to solve



PIC 1

daunting challenges we face today, do they function as well as we expected? Holding the skeptical thought, I was amazed by a series of designs shown during the field trip. Buildings encompassing the Shipyard Plaza are not universal Vancouverisms (podium towers) and Vancouver specials any more. The creative design policies, which many designers from different architecture and landscape architecture firms are working in tandems but not allowed to communicate about ideas,

built up the current miscellaneous but entrancing structures. Abstractions of ship components, statures of sparrows and monumental curved lighting stands installed on the plaza all acknowledge and remind me the fact that we colonized this region for the sake of the diminishing history. [PIC 1] The planning process did not privilege more appealing Victorian streetscapes and ignore the real character, the industrial prevailing character. With such respect to history, the red wooden Salt Building was reserved and thrives now for the Craft beer market inside. Furthermore, the lifted space under the building serves as stormwater facilities, diverting water to Hinge Park and the Ontario Street Bioswale to

daunting challenges we face today, do they function as well as we expected? Holding the skeptical thought, I was amazed by a series of designs shown during the field trip. Buildings encompassing the Shipyard Plaza are not universal Vancouverisms (podium towers) and Vancouver specials any more. The creative design policies, which many designers from different architecture and landscape architecture firms are working in tandems but not allowed to communicate about ideas,



PIC 2

decrease harmful runoff. [PIC 2] This is an example of the collaboration of engineering and urban design: highly practical and delightful. I was also surprised to see the paved markers aside the building for the original shorelines. Although few people would notice and be conscious of its memorial function, it shows its gesture of respecting the past history. [PIC 3]



PIC 3

Another landscape that I was pretty impressed by is the Hinge Park. I finally knew the reason for my peculiar feeling of those trendy and organized community parks in downtown: Hinge Park's sense of wildness and



PIC 4

crude is the sense of real nature, which embraces marshy mud, jumbled twigs collected by beavers, and rusted discarded industrial metal. [PIC 4] The absence of traditional plastic play structures is implemented by natural and industrial elements. I believe children playing around could immerse themselves in exploring, getting dirty, and creating goofy stories in real nature.

Besides the effort to diversify and naturalize this place, in comparison to

downtown's homogeneous designs, I also see various ingenious architecture and landscape architecture designs to invite public interaction as well as to promote sustainability. Walter

Hardwick Avenue is influenced by the living street principles. Its curbless and sloped streets allow water to flow freely into vegetated bioswales in Hinge Park. [PIC 5] The porous pavements also allow water to penetrate into the ground, reducing impacts to streams and wetlands and improving the region's water quality. Another design, the internal courtyard reminds me of the traditional Chinese courtyard, which evolved from one dwelling unit for the whole big family in Qing Dynasty, to multiple families living in one courtyard today. [PIC 6] But different from the gated Chinese one, the internal courtyard in Olympic village is semi-public. [PIC 7] The gaps between those slender apartments invite me to explore its internal delicate settings on the interconnected yard while disguising the parking ramps aside. Canada House, the last design I want to mention, also enriches the whole



PIC 5

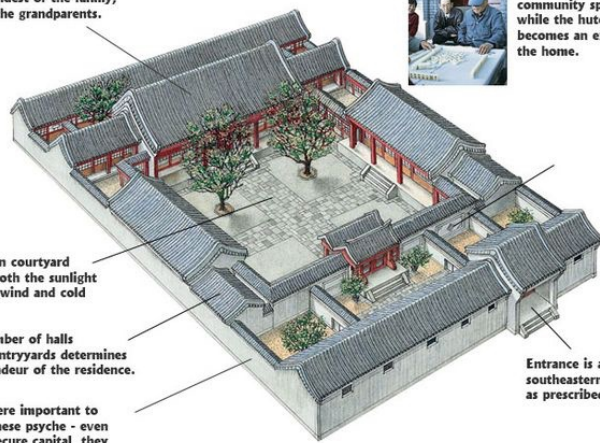


PIC 7

The main hall was the most northerly and usually reserved for the eldest of the family, such as the grandparents.



Social housing
With several families living together, a strong community spirit is fostered, while the hutong outside becomes an extension of the home.



The open courtyard lets in both the sunlight and the wind and cold

The number of halls and courtyards determines the grandeur of the residence.

Walls were important to the Chinese psyche - even in the secure capital, they felt the need to retreat behind them.

Entrance is at the southeastern corner as prescribed by feng shui.



Typical Beijing Hutong
You can take organized rickshaw tours of the hutong, sometimes with a visit to the Mansion of Prince Gong, but it can be more fun to explore them by yourself.

PIC 6

neighbourhood's sense of completion. It is true that its design and construction are fueled by market demand and developer's interest, rather than historical revivals and sustainable urbanism like the other development in the region. But as I passed by, the acoustic fountain noise, the high-end slender buildings, and the visually enticing garden in the middle all contribute to the integration of the magnificent seawall. Everything affirms the public ownership of the Vancouver waterfront.

Designs are never easy. I can see various designs of Olympic village strive to translate historical memories, the city's endorsement of high-density mid-rises and the conservation of natural habitats into meaningful contemporary forms. Those designs effectively help us resist and subvert our all-too-programmed consumer culture: they create the key of "the neighbourhood tone" based on the neighbourhood's historical character. But how would the tune be played in this framework depends on the new community itself. In spite of all the structure designed and installed, the real reason for people to stay in this neighbourhood is the sense of place and belonging, which is not available from any exquisite designed buildings and courtyards and could only be fulfilled by residents themselves. As the Olympic village is still young, I cannot feel and identify the evolution of "pride of place" and the environment. But with such a great foundation of livability, I believe Olympic village would become one of the best exemplars of complete communities over generations.