

A case of trans-community: Jin-street in Beijing

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Abstract

Trans-community Jin street model is a study on the sustainable development of Beijing's old city neighbourhood community. This project does not address to the famous Hutong area in Beijing, but to the public housing neighbourhood built in the 1960s and 1970s (era of the planned economy), which very few people concerned. This kind of neighbourhood also fell into decay as the Hutong district, but very few people cares. Jin street is such a neighbourhood (street has been renamed according to the practice), revitalised because of the street fact-lift programme for Olympic Games. Therefore, after field research and in-depth analysis, a development model for old city districts is proposed; it starts from government public investment; it is based on self-organisation; it uses free business development as a means; the Government, the public and the business achieve a win-win situation, and finally make the old city district back to the track of sustainable development at the beginning of its decline. At the end, a new idea of sustainable development for Jin Street high-rise residence is proposed, based on this model-high-rise market, turning single housing units into a mixture of open shops and living places, achieving a certain degree of self-economy.

Key words: trans-community, Jin Street Model, regeneration, neighbourhood, decline, social space.

1. Background

The Beijing municipal government officially approved and declared the CBD Eastward Expansion Plan in 25 May 2009. The Beijing CBD core area will be expanded eastward for about 3 km². In the coming ten years, Chaoyang district will invest 7,000,000,000 CNY for infrastructure construction in the expansion area.

Headquarter economy, international finance and high-end business and so on will be top priorities for development in the future CBD eastward expansion area. Later, Beijing invited seven architecture and urban plan companies for the programme design of the CBD: SOM from America, CAUPD from China, SPACE SYNTAX LIMITED from Britain, KPF from America, GZPI from Guangzhou, Foster+Parters from Britain, THUPDI from Beijing and ADPi from France. Eventually, Beijing declared that the design of SOM from America won the first prize in 16 October 2009.

Three parks, two avenues, and three minor areas are included in the design: a cultural park area, a canal business area and Tonghui canal gateway area. The concept of the design is to make the future CBD a multi-functional area including offices, apartments, hotels, retail, culture, education, entertainment, exhibition, and so on. Like the other seven plans, SOM's plan is also to treat the city space within the eastward expansion area as a hollow land on which tens of thousands of residents living there will be removed from their homes.

The seven design companies make the future plan on the blueprint without a careful investigation into the planning area. Shocking and beautiful city images arise on the clean and erased papers and blend into the ambition for city development. As the erased part, however, the buildings there and the residents to be removed from their houses in the old area, like the eraser residues, are forgotten, or swept by the intended. Forgotten and erased with them are memories and history of the cities in China and the dynamic urban quarters. While people in Beijing are worrying about the CBD's and other business districts' bleakness in the evening and the traffic jam during the rush hours, Beijing is enlarging the area of such districts instead of relieving the worries. Old city areas are cleaned and communities are removed. Disintegrating cities are replaced by the functional construction of area division. Non-adapted city communities are disintegrated into social Monad and separated into residential units.

In 13 November 2009, Tang Fuzhen, a resident in Jinniu district of Chengdu, poured petrol all over her body and burned herself on the roof of the building in an attempt to stop the related authorities pulling down the house. Consequently, some of her family members were hospitalised as a result of injuries or held in criminal detention and local authority determined it violent resistance against law. Tang

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Fuzhen died in 29 November as a result of the injuries despite the treatment. The incident triggered great reactions among the public in China, and the criticism to the local authorities' and the real estate developer's combined violent demolition forced the central government to be involved in the investigation. The fact that the urban residents resort to the most extreme ways, namely using violence against themselves to protest the demolition, to fight against the demolition troops, drives people to reflect on the balance between the huge profit of the real estate industry and the rights of the civil society, and the urban development plan that over-relies on the demolition of the old cities to develop new ones.



Figure 1. The photo of existing community, 2008



Figure 2. Investigation for street façade status

2. The story of preparation for the Olympics

The Jin Street project is derived from a research by Che Fei and his architecture office CU OFFICE during the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games on the typical public housing neighbourhood from the planned economy era in the Beijing CBD Eastward Expansion area. This neighbourhood has been showing significant decline before the Olympic Games, with a large number of people moving out to other newly developed areas; community disrepair, increasing number of low-income residence, losing the middle class, and increased crime rate, being typical signs that an inner city area is falling into decay.

The Beijing Olympic Games bring the opportunity there. Streets reconstruction project for the Olympics which has been spread all over the city also extended to Jin Street. The original two-way four lanes have been changed to two-way six lanes now. In order to widen the roads, the walls of the original residential buildings had to be torn down. The original buildings that hide in a quiet residential area are now fully exposed to the busy roads. Tranquillity and security of the residents is threatened. However, initial voice of dissatisfaction is quickly overwhelmed by rental operators' knocks at the door knock. As it is one step away from the CBD (now is going to the CBD, as the CBD Eastward Expansion area), soon almost all the first floor rooms facing streets are rented out. Furthermore the rent for street facing houses is more than the rent for the entire public housing before.

Before the Beijing Olympic Games, the Beijing City Face-lifting Movement for Welcoming the Olympics, which has been criticised much, also re-painted the external walls of buildings for free, or even fitted external of all the first floor rooms with marble for free, and replaced the original with unified commercial plaques. Miraculously, the street became full of vigour, once again bursting with youthful energy. As the street-facing houses became shops, blazing with lights at night, public security has improved and street robbery is gone. At the same time, middle class, who gradually lost before, began to return. Since transport is convenient there, even some foreign white-collar workers began to rent houses there, such a declining public housing community seized its opportunity in the Beijing City Face-lifting Movement, becoming an open and diversified commercial and residential neighbourhood successfully.

3. The Jin Street Model of trans-community

Jin street in the Beijing CBD eastward expansion area, after the public activity of ‘preparation for the Olympics’, has been transformed from a declining workers’ residential area into an open and dynamic commercial community. The research has found out that the success of the pattern lies in implanting public fund and the private capital of the market business into an effective and open cooperation platform, thus balancing public and private interests in the local social structure and fixing limited goal and feasible realisation, and finally re-activating the commercial vigour of the urban streets and their open space to make it serve the renewal and recovery of the whole community. The function of the neighbourhood committee residents’ autonomy organisation has been transformed from management to service with the entry of commercial and outside capital, and made the whole closed residential community open. The investment and consumption brought by the opening of the space improve the economic condition of the community rapidly; housing and renting market replaces the single economy policy of government input for community maintenance, making the community retrieve the function of self-generating and renovating.



Figure 3. The Jin street commercial status investigation

The successful mode of Jin street mainly lies in low-rise residential buildings facing the streets, and the high-rise residential buildings behind the streets benefit indirectly from the event, like the increase of the occupancy rate; a question, however, arises whether or not can they be changed more substantially like the streets. The CBD eastward expansion plan includes the whole area of Jintai road; is the development mode found by the research institute capable of changing the old mode of community demolition and re-developing concentrating commercial buildings. The demolition of a vibrant open community does not only clear the buildings and economic basis but also eliminate the social structure for the local stability and development. Therefore, the appropriate preservation of old healthy street organisation and prudent implementation of the new developing factors is the purpose of this programme. Thus, an eighteen-storey old residential building at the end of Jintai road is chosen for transformation and the Jin-street developing mode (Olympics development mode of Jin street) is brought in as its transformation strategy; it will make high-rise building part of the sustainable development of open community.

The specific plans are as follows: the first step is to transform the closed private space of the high-rise building into an open and more public space. Public capital will be brought in to design and build swimming pool and other facilities on the roof of the building, and separate escalators will be used to connect it to the streets for eliminating the altitude difference between the ground and roof-top, thus making the square and swimming pool on the roof to be componential parts of the urban public space. The building's management committee is transformed into the building's industry asset development office to invest and manage the public asset of the building. The horizontal corridors are transformed into open streets and each house can be freely put into commercial, residential or renting purpose. The public facilities on the roof bring the vigour of the people and city inside the building, service industry, retail business, dining and accommodation industries will form in the building in proportion to those of Jin street, and they will all blend into the entire commercial and neighbourhood social structure of Jintai road. A new mode of high-rise compound buildings for commercial and residential use will realise self-management, upgrading and transformation. It breaks the CBD destructive

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developing logic of demolition – construction – re-demolition – re-construction.

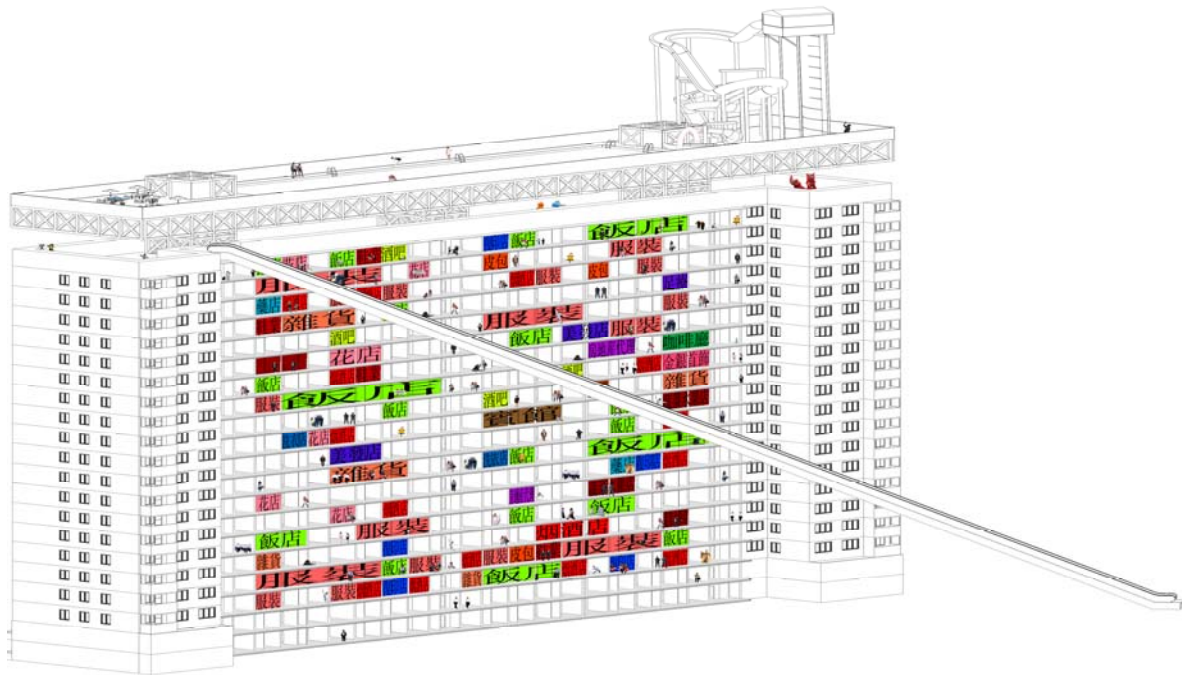


Figure 4. The conceptual design of trans-community and its commercial usage



Figure 5. The conceptual design of trans-community and its roof-top

Contrary to the CBD development plan submitted by SOM and other companies, Fei Che and CU OFFICE's 'Jin-street mode' proposes an opposite developing strategy that preserves the local culture and community, develops urban quarters sustainable through the cooperation of public capital, market business and local society. Through the research into the successful 'Social Street' developing

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mode and applying it in the urban development as 'transplanting strategy', localised 'trans-community' development will be realised eventually. At last, it is also called on to establish a national community development funding programme, in order to implement similar city projects, facilitating sustainable developments of cities and communities in China.

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