

Community Space in High Density Residential Areas

Hong Kong as an example

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1. Introduction

In the past few decades, world population has increased rapidly. Increasing of population is the rapid urbanization. Hong Kong, like many other cities in Asia, was rapid urbanized in the past 50 years. Hong Kong has huge population but little land supply (7,241,700 people in 1,105.6 m² land)¹, and has always been facing high housing demand. At the same time, Hong Kong reserves a large number of natural sites to get good ecological conservation. Thus, high-rise residential buildings are a significant character of Hong Kong. High density in Hong Kong has resulted in extremely small living space. Sometimes when people have tea in their own living room, they can watch TV from the opposite building. Meanwhile, the lack of community space in high-density residential area has become a serious problem. For the government, besides providing shelter to every citizen, the most important target is to create more

¹ Human Development Report 2014 (<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf>)

community space in high-density residential area, especially for low incoming groups, to improve people's living condition and space quality.

This paper discussed talk about the importance of community space and how to address it in high density buildings.



Fig. 1.1 A common residential building area in Hong Kong

Source: Michael Wolf 2014

2. Importance of community space

What is community space? Community space is a common and social that is generally open and accessible to people and provide activities in the community, such as library, sport club playground and so on.

UN-Habitat describes that while planning 'Cities for Life,' one has to rethink "the city from the perspective of the specific needs of people, their life cycles and rhythms, their conceptions of 'good living', identity and diversity, plurality and unity, imaginations and dreams, beauty and aesthetic" (UN-Habitat 2014:6). People's living environments have a strong influence to their quality of life. Creating high quality community

space to achieve a high quality life is the main purpose of community space.

A comfortable community space around the house will greatly bring people happiness. People will also be pleased if their houses are surrounded by green and water. The elder have space to chat with each other, and children have the place to play games. Different types of community space provide different functional space such as outdoor activities space, reading space, and commercial space and so on. Community space is not just a common space, but also supports the connection between people and their neighborhood. A successful community space can benefit the whole community in a long term perspective.

Sense of belonging

“There is a basic need to belong, which includes the need for frequent personal contacts and for bonds with others that provide stability and emotional concern” (Bruhn 2005:13). Sense of belonging means that people could feel they are a part of the community. People want to have strong sense of belonging in their lives. Nowadays, especially in large cities, people live in a quick pace life style. People are busy at their work and they have little free time to stay at home with their family. The elders have to stay home alone during the most time of the day and children have no space for outdoor activities after school. They need a common space to communicate with others to relieve the sense of loneliness. To create different type of community space such as common garden, sports club, library, etc, the elders can chat with each other, children can play together.

Social activities

Community space can also provide many social activities for people, such as library, sport club and so on. Social activities are an important part of people's daily life, but the lack of community space impedes the development of social activities.

Take Hong Kong as an example, many people almost have never been to the library since leaving university. The main reason is the few amounts of library and the far distance. Currently, there are 67 public libraries in Hong Kong which means one library for every 100 thousand people². It is really a low reachability for people to go to the library. If the governor can build enough community space like library for social activities which could be easy to find near the residential area, so people the can reach the nearest library by walking and have stronger will to go to the library.

Shortening the distance between settlements and community space, can not only increase the efficiency of the whole society, but also reduces the demand for transport. By this way, providing more community space for people to have social activities will stimulate the whole residential area to be active.

Sense of security

Another advantage of community space is that it contributes to the sense of security to people. Sense of security is stressed to be important for enabling every person a full worthy citizenship, being able to move freely in the city and thereby being able to evolve themselves and their life quality (Björkemarmen, 2009).

People will feel safer when they stay in community space rather than in a single house because they are not alone. Although some people stay at

² Xi Xuexiao, (How to live in high density city 2013)

home alone, they know that many neighbors are active in the community space nearby and they would not need to worry about their security.

Community space usually has developed security system such as security guards, CCTV camera. By the same way, the criminal is usually happen in the lonely area but not public space.

3 Developing Community space in high density city

In high density urban areas, the lack of community space is a common problem, because most of the available land is developed as commercial, traffic and residential. Land is seldom provided for community space in residential areas. How to develop community space for people to achieve high quality life style while using less land?

Community space in high rise buildings

In high density areas such Hong Kong, most urban space is used for commercial, office, and residential. Therefore, some community space is not developed on the ground floor as usual. Thus, developing the community space in vertical level seems to be an efficient method for high rise residential buildings.



Fig3.1 Sunken Playground Source: GuoDi

First is the sunken space. Some indoor activities with low requirement of light could happen in a sunken playground. A sunken swimming pool or gym could be a nice choice for people. And sunken community space is peaceful and far from the noisy and crowd city.

Have open space in each floor, it would improve the atmosphere on both light and ventilation. In a traditional residential building, units are lined along the both sides of the corridor. The corridor is the only public space for people to share. If take some of the units on each floor, and use this space to create a common space, the living condition will be improved a lot. There would be plenty of sunlight and good ventilation in the corridor.

Use the roof space of the building. For most of the buildings, roof is just a cover of the building to prevent the rain, light and wind. However, actually it is also a space, why don't we use it? It is very open space; it doesn't have problem with light and ventilation. We can also build some pavilions and structures on the roof to provide some shading for people. If there is plenty budget, we can build a roof garden, covering the roof with green and flowers, people can walk around the roof garden or sit down somewhere under the shading (*figure 3.2*). Roof garden will not only create a beautiful environment, but also relax people in high pressure a lot.



Fig3.2 People sitting in the garden on the roof of the building Source: GuoDi

Community space in different scales

High density areas have huge population and always been facing high housing demand. Some of the community space is hard to define because it is quite a large space and everything could happen there. Therefore, these spaces are not used in the right way. Some space is designed for community activity from the beginning; however, they may be used as parking space in the end. A small scale community space could be on the platform or elevation area among the buildings. Sometime it could be a semi-outdoor space. People can feel the existing of the community space and use it in the right way. By dividing large scale community space into different small community spaces, different purposes for community activities could be suggested. Another advantage is that small community space in comparison to large scale community space, small size common space is more private and peaceful, which will enhance the sense of security for people.

Outdoor common space in residential building block

Outdoor space is an important part of community space in residential building blocks, here I will discuss how to develop the outdoor common space in residential blocks.

SLAB BLOCK

This block is made by the building in long bar shape. Corridor is in the middle and the units are located in the both side of the corridor. Buildings are parallel to each other. This kind of plan could have flexible combination to create community space between the buildings. It also

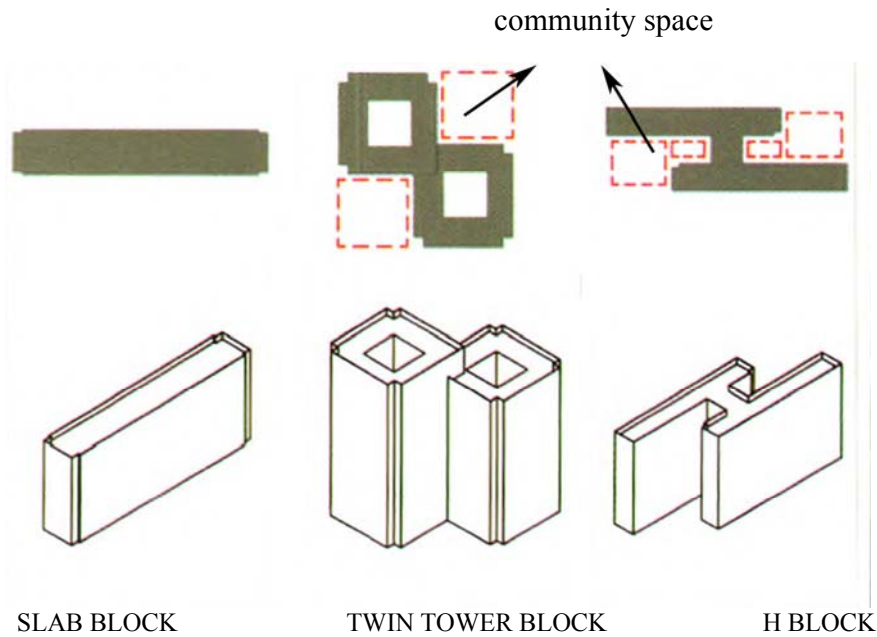


Fig3.3 outdoor common space in 3 types of blocks Source: Daqing Gu

could rotate the building to “L” shape, “C” shape and “H” shape and create semi-open space between the buildings. And on the ground floor is elevation space for social activities or entertainment (*illustrate in figure 3.3*). People could find restaurant and stores along the sidewalk on the ground floor. The sidewalk connects all of the infrastructure and community space and creates the boundary between the public and the private. And there is large space in the elevation on the ground floor, so people can have there community activities there.



Fig3.3 People play cards in elevation space in ground floor Source: GuoDi

TWIN TOWER BLOCK

This block is made by two high-rise towers. These towers are in different height and located in the opponent corner of a square. There is a courtyard inside the tower. And there are two public open spaces in each corner of the building. It also has elevation space in ground floor. Sometimes the elevation space could be on the second floor as well. The ground floor could be like a big open space for the public service, and the community space could be located on the courtyard in the second floor. So such community space could be more private and peaceful.

H BLOCK

This block is made by two long buildings in parallel and connected by a structure in the middle. The structure between the buildings could be bridges or a box with elevation in the ground floor. Different from the slab block, in the H block, the units are only located in one side of the corridor to achieve a higher number of units in the building. Community space could be developed between the buildings (illustrate in figure 3.2). Because of the structure between the buildings, it provides shape for people in the community space. This block also can transform in different combination.

4. The Role of Architects

An architect is not only responsible for designing a building, but also for thinking what kind of life would happen in the built environment in the future. Architects should work with the residents and learn about people's needs and feelings. Both interviews and observations are important for a designer.

Architects should work with the people to create some regulations for

the community to follow. Residents were all very involved in the maintenance of their community space. When people are required to work for something instead of just being handed it they tend to appreciate and take care of it. Architects can suggest organizing community association to manage the community activities such as sport games or zumba classes, and festival celebrations. According to the interview during the field study in Philippines, we could easily find that community space can completely change the feeling in high density residential area. Several of the families who were interviewed in the Philippines absolutely loved when their community offered social activities and they always looked forward to them. Many people were happy to join the association or being a volunteer, because they saw the benefits of having a cohesive community.

As a conclusion, designing housing units is just one of the works for architects. More importantly, architects should focus on how to create a life style for people in the community. To reach this goal, architects need to learn about people's needs and their feelings in their daily life instead of keeping drawing in the studio.

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