

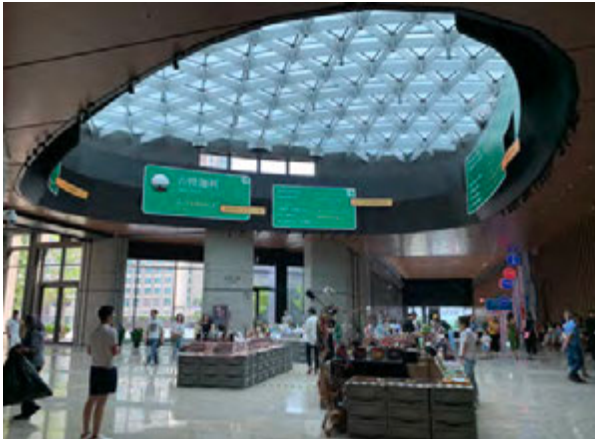
New Signs for Urban Renewal

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Eslite Bookstore Spectrum Gallery, Suzhou (Source:Author)



Eslite -Suzhou-Atrium pop-up stores (Source:Author)

Through the cases of Malaysia, Nanjing, Suzhou , and Hong Kong, the author argues that their occurrence could not be coincidental but instead they bear same witness for a paradigm shift in how architecture and urban design strives to serve society and people better by way of flexible, sharing, proactive, and engaging programs and space usage. The idea of space sharing, free-space and community space have overtaken the preoccupation with a distinction of what is private versus what is public (space). However, as shown in these cases, blurred definitions, hybridized activities and user experience in the era of the new generation does not



UABBHK-2017-Arts Centre Installation render (Source:Author)



Multi-use hall, Rex Theatre, Kuala Lumpur (Source: Author)
seemed to bother neither the building owner nor the designer.

In essence, and in a revealing way, each of the cited examples exemplify an alternative route for architects and urban designers in response to a dynamic, changing world shaped by often, self-centered propaganda, resulted in nothing but uncertainty, challenge, distrust, and even frustration, all of which led to the victimizing of societies at large, and individual at heart. More and more one sees the call.

The first attempt comes from Kuala Lumpur, site of the REX-KL Project - a 1,300 seats cinema

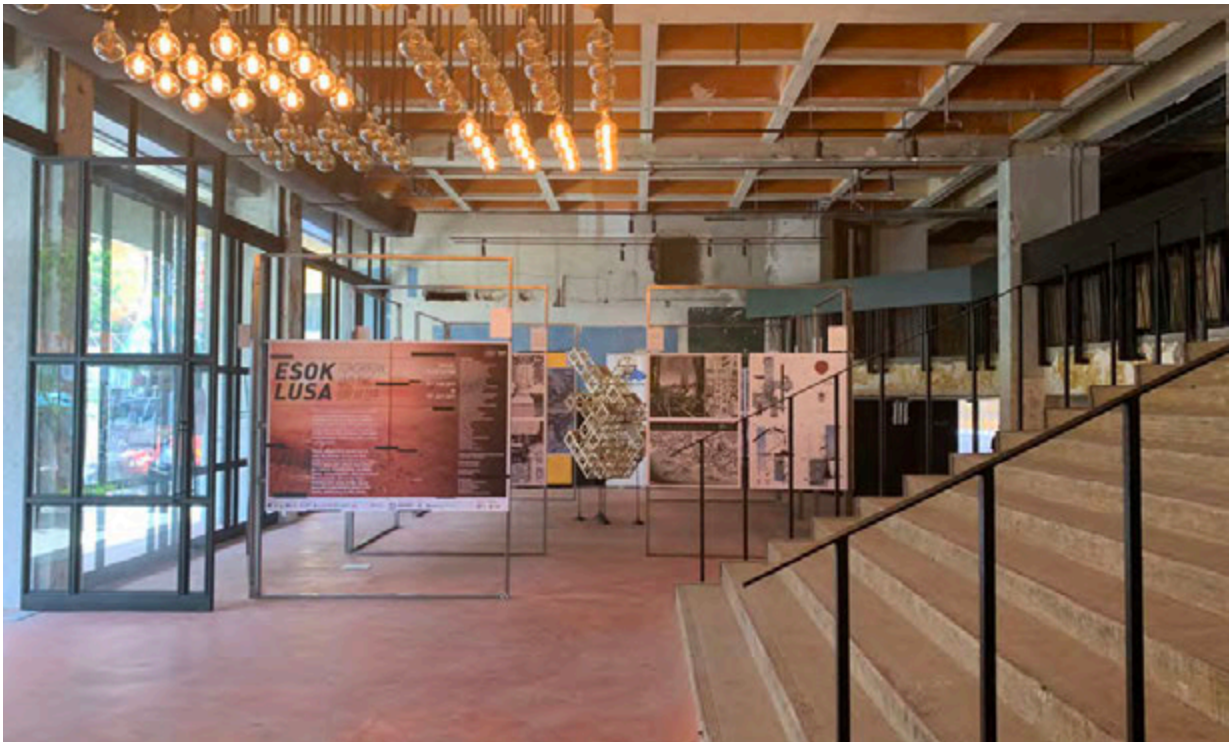
originally built to serve those migrant workers and their folks at the heart of China Town, was burnt down by a fire in the Nineties Twenties. Over the next decades, the REX-KL was rebuilt and reapportioned for different uses and activities. Yet none of the programs could restore REX-KL's glory. Until recently, the owner finally realized that the missing link has been its social mission – to serve and unite the otherwise fragile, migrant community. Thus they come a long way to revamp and convert the abandoned cinema into a newly designed urban facility for social gatherings and related, designated activities. The re-planning involves the reconfiguration of the cinematic setting into a newly



Multi-use hall,Rex Theatre,Kuala Lumpur (Source:Author)

organized, flexible, spatial entities in order to facilitate seminar, exhibition, workshop, class, assembly for community at large, including that of a co-working, shared space for start-ups businesses. As it turns out, the new REX-KL has in no time captured the hearts of the old as well as the young members of community, and restore its fame and aim. The project has proven a win-win arrangement for both owner and users.

In the second example, the author is being touched by the revolution, if not a self-transformative conversion of the bookstore industry



Multi-use hall,Rex Theatre,Kuala Lumpur (Source:Author)



Librairie Avant Garde, Nanjing (Source:Author)



Librairie Avant Garde, Nanjing (Source:Author)

amid threats of extinction due to the popularity of knowledge on-line in lieu of books as physical entity. This example has been construed by two real life events, one being the Xinfeng Bookstore Nanjing and the other being the Es-lite Bookstore Suzhou. Despite a remarkable distinction because of scale, size, resource, operational mode and experience, they tell of a similar rebirth of bookstore which exhibit a

familiar feature or belief. Both have taken on a new interpretation of the concept of bookstore to cope with the demand of new society, i.e., in parallel with a business motive, these bookstores taken on a diversified, multifunctional role as far as social function and spatial ethos are concerned. The original identity of bookstore which is rather passive, has been completely replaced and reinterpreted by their owners and designers to be a major social gathering place geared for all ages. The new bookstore is no longer the same bookstore of yesterday but have evolved into a multi-functional programmed social venue, targeting mass public. As far as the program is concerned, these new bookstores have become a catalyst and promoter of art, culture, knowledge, by the hosting of multiple and flexible spaces for archives, book sale, library, exhibition, forum, art saloon, tea house, mini performance space, etc., aimed to enhance the cultural and intellectual pursuits of all ages, in an interactive manner.



Librairie Avant Garde, Nanjing (Source:Author)

Although the third event tells of a transient event happened in 2017 in Hong Kong, it nevertheless marks the unfolding of the city's open arm towards participatory art for the people, in this case as a response to a regional campaign – the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture (HK). The Biennale is hosted by the cities (municipality) of Shenzhen and Hong Kong SAR. For the author, the 2017 event was a turning point for Hong Kong as it approved a bold mission to engage the people and the city at large, in order for everyone to engage with arts. The organizer and the curatorial team have been successful to gain supports from both the public and private stakeholders for the 2-6 months event. In this case, various government agencies as well as private agencies (for example, professional societies and institutes, private real estate developers, and building owners) have unconditionally bought into the curatorial team's proposal to engage the public on a daily basis by the conversion of a number of private spaces

and public spaces as venues for the exhibits of arts. In the case of the Hong Kong Arts Center at Wan Chai, the author was particularly excited to work with the Art Center and the government agencies, Hong Kong Country Parks and Ocean Park, both of whom have consented the deployment of the street area immediately connected with the Arts Center. The reapportioned use was to transform the otherwise pedestrian street into a socially engaging place by the deployment of a modularized/ reconfigurable cubic of smart furniture. This furniture has been designed to interact with passer-by (the area in mind was site to a number of high to low end hotels, an existing arts center, and the nearby convention and exhibition center). Undoubtedly, the Project has turned out to be a public event space for both adult and children.

Reflection:

A quick glimpse of these projects reflects on the fundamental purpose for the profession of design, whether it is architecture, urban design and or others. In what way and for whom should the professional make cities better and liveable, in order to create a distinctive character at a local and national level, and how should this be carried out? Alas, the so called new trend summarizes for us a change of heart on the side of the service provider, whoever and whatever they represent, in other words, a sense of caring, and most of all a willingness to engage, share, not forgetting the general good that city and society needs more than any other things.

Sunnie S.Y. Lau Biography:

Ms. Sunnie S.Y. Lau, born and raised in Hong Kong, graduated with a B.A in Architecture from University of California, Berkeley; and later on obtained her M. Arch , and Certificate in Urban Design from M.I.T. Her international experiences begun with renowned architectural practices prior to postgraduate study at the M.I.T.; she worked with Morphosis Architects L.A., MVRDV , Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA Asia) – HK and Farrells. Her focuses on urban design, urban mobility and smart infrastructure, creative and innovative sustainable design strategies. She believes firmly in bridging professional and academia by active teaching engagements. In 2017, She was invited to be the Co-Curator & Exhibitor of the Hong Kong Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale Of Urbanism\Architecture (Hong Kong). Her current research-oriented practice - SOSArchitecture Urban Design Studio Ltd. covers a wide range of works; which includes but not limited to smart urban furniture (Infrastructures), interior design, urban place-making, masterplanning. Sunnie is excited to join the MIT HK Innovation Node as the Director of Smart City Research and Industry Collaboration in mid of 2019.
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