The Role of Expert Committee or Chief Designer for Promoting Urban Design

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Abstract

This talk focuses on institutional arrangement for promoting urban design in the rapid new area development and urban regeneration context of the Greater Bay Area. As most of the urban design works in this context are hosted and approved by local public development authorities, an efficient mechanism for balancing design creativity for individual market driven development projects and the guidance of larger scale urban design is important for achieving high quality urban spaces. Cases for appointing an Expert Committee or Chief Designer in GBA cities will be compared to illustrate how they play the roles for bridging urban design with project design. This is followed by discussions for formalizing such mechanisms.

The importance of urban design and awareness is increasing in Mainland China. At the 2015 Central Policy Conference on Cities, urban design, urban rehabilitation and strengthened openness of detailed planning were emphasised. Also cities 3D spatial coordination, landscape holisticity, and cultural continuity were greatly emphasised. The central government also calls for "retaining the genes", such as the city's unique geo-spatial environment, cultural characteristics and other architectural styles to be retained.

As required by the Ministry of Housing and Urban - Rural Development, urban design is divided into two layers: the overall urban design; and the key areas of urban design. For the key areas of urban design, which are very popular in Mainland cities in China, the areas of concentrated embodiment, shaping of the city culture, and also style characteristic or other special value, must be preserved and put into detailed urban design. Urban design in key areas is usually incorporated into statutory planning as a requirement for land development and construction. However, in practice, the channel is still not so smooth in conducting urban design requirements into construction projects and public space construction.

Firstly, since there are no mandatory standards for the implementation of key areas, urban design does not yet cover all development and construction areas or the key areas mentioned above. Secondly, urban design is commissioned by the government planning and administration departments for preparation by some urban design consultant teams. But when urban design is prepared, the actual development and construction intention and what projects are to be

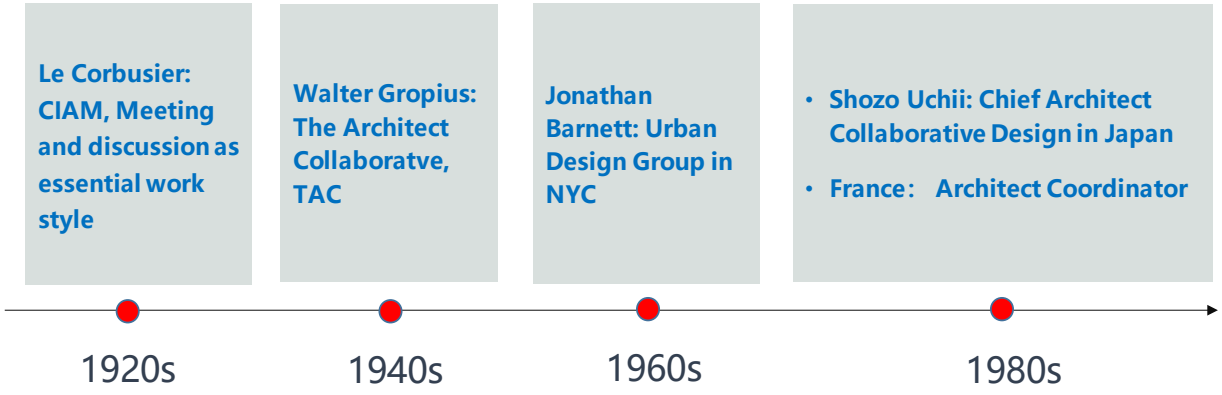

Figure 1.Evolution in the 20th Century

built are still not clear.

Finally, aside from the government departments, urban design teams and development construction owners also lack mechanisms for how to meet the requirements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG's) in leaving no one behind. There is still a lack of channels to listen to the general public's opinions; institutional arrangement is maybe just for bridging the design and site delivery.

We know that these problems have been encountered in other developing countries in the last century such as in the 1920s, when Le Corbusier in the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), called for meeting and discussion as essential work styles. And more recently in the 1980s, in Japan, the Chief Architect collaborative design mechanism in Japan is very popular. Also in France, the Architect Coordinator has also been implemented. This also includes some of the US cities, such as San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, where there is Design Review with guidance on walkability, landscape, public space, etc. Also we find that it's quite common in the planning permission and application process in the UK.

Now I'll introduce some of the pilot experiments in China. There are mainly two kinds of related practices. The first one is the 'Expert Board' which is a team of experts appointed by the city government. They provide comprehensive long-term tracking services and review the implementation of each project. The second is the 'Chief Urban Planner' or 'Chief Urban Designer' which are directly appointed or appointed through a bidding process to service a special period. They are led by one or more urban designers with a high reputation, such as Professor Sun and Professor Wu this morning, and they represent the public interest for the provision of technical services to planning management as consultants to the local authorities.

We can see quite a lot of such pilot experiments in China. In Shanghai we have an 'Expert Advisory Team' in historic areas and 'Chief Urban Planners' of the 2010 EXPO Site with one Chief Planner and two Deputy Chief Planners. In Beijing there is a 'Collaborative Planning Management' mechanism in the Zhongguancun Science City. Long-term checking of the planning and implementation dynamics in the areas to assist in refined management. Also in Tianjin, in the Cultural Centre area, there is also a 'Collaborative Work Platform' and in the Binhai Economic Zone, there is the General Planner Responsibility System. Each special area has 2 chief planners, they systematically conduct planning and management, architectural design management, architectural design review, and also architectural design schedule management. In Shenzhen, we are quite familiar, there is the 'Planning-Architecture Double Chief Engineer' system, which is now being implemented in the International Conference Exhibition Centre near the airport. And a Chief Planner and a Chief Architect work very closely together to provide technical coordination and professional consultation works. Also regionally, a 'Regional Chief Designer' also serves in the Bay Area Super Headquarters Base and provides similar, familiar services.

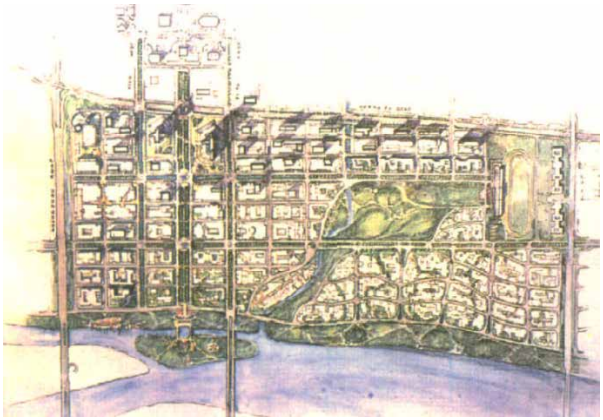

Figure 2.Design of Pearl River New City Centre

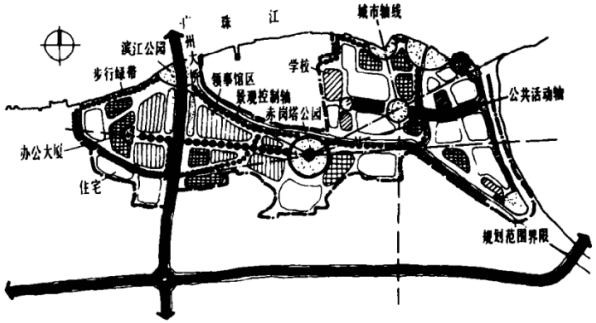

Figure 3.Design of Chigang Area

Now I will also give you some more details on on-going exploration in Guangzhou. Actually Guangzhou, back in the 1980s, already formed a Committee of 'Urban Built Environment Arts', serving similar functions as the experiments mentioned above. The 34 architects, planners, and urban management officials, formed a committee to give advice on a variety of urban construction and design issues, such as for each area which is larger than ten hectares they will give opinions on the design. From figure 2 you can see that was the initial design scheme of our CBD, the Pearl River City area, which incorporated many of the opinions from this committee into the work of the final design, and also the area where the Canton Tower now is laid, also had a lot of consultant opinions from this committee.

There is a very successful practice in the Guangzhou Financial District in which academician He Jingtang led the consultancy team as 'Chief Urban Designer' in this area. They gave advice on architectural design proposals and improvements to achieve the harmonised outcome of the overall design intention. Although it is a very modernised central business district, focusing on financial services, Professor He was of the opinion that there's a 方城曲苑; a fusion of the ancient and modern. After the design delivery, 36 blocks were attained through auction by financial, commercial, banking, and insurance companies. Although all the design drawings are included in the form of land auction contracts, the requirement of urban design and public space interface are facing challenges of the actual land owners. They put forward many practical optimisation requirements that have not been considered in the urban design stage.

The working mechanism is the fixed-term, meeting discussion as well as written opinion circulation by the team led by Professor He. The coordination and inspection for district detail planning was also given, and they are also in charge of the design qualities of each development project. Professor He occasionally gave very detailed advice on each of the buildings

Figure 4.Consultancy Chief Urban Designer of GZ Financial District

being constructed.

This morning, Professor Sun also introduced his consultant team of the Cyber Economy Zones, and also the very famous designer Benjamin Wood played an important role in the historic area revitalisation, such as Yongqing Fang and Beijing Lu, giving advice on all the on-going detail construction.

We just started last year with the GZUPA, Guangzhou Urban Planning Association also providing design review services. For projects of landscape sensitive areas, it's possible to choose to either organise a review process through the developer or to use our service. The service is funded by the city government and free of charge for developers. Top tier experts are organised to attend meetings and give comments on each construction project. They also vote on whether they are satisfied with a project or if the project needs more advice and further modification.

You can see some of the outcomes and results. The projects are made before our consultation

Working mechanism and contents

- Fixed turn meeting discussion as well as written opinion circulation
- Coordination and inspection for the district detail planning
- In charge of design quality of development projects

Figure 5.Working mechanism and contents

Prof. SUN Yimin lead Urban Design Consultant team of Cyber Economy Zones

Benjamin Wood played important roles in historic area revitalization: Yongqing Fang, Beijing Lu

Figure 6.Consultancy Chief Urban Designer: linking history to future

and after our consultation. Finally I think that the construction and development of a city is an organic life cycle. The missions of a city designer go far from buildings or vision footprint for the city. In order to create healthier and more human livable spaces, city designers can play a better role throughout the lifecycle of the development. The Committee of Experts or the team of Chief Planners are very important platforms for the city designers to develop their roles.