

Reflection

An Attempt to Regain Paradise - Urban regeneration of the largest residential community, Paradise Gateway in Beijing, from the urbanism perspective
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Looking back to the whole process of my graduation project, it was filled by up and downs. The subject of research and design was settled at the very beginning, which is the mega-community of Paradise Gateway in Beijing. It is the largest community in the world, containing 700,000 residents. This community is widely reviled for its overcrowding, poor mobility condition, lack of service and public space, and illegal housing. However, no matter how people complain about it, the population of the community grows larger and larger. Although it is a modernism community that puts quantity over quality, but such serious problems cannot be caused only by issues within itself. It involves the complicated context of the city of Beijing, where intense urbanization is in process. That is the reason why I joined the studio of complex cities.

During this year, I have tried various approaches to the subject problems. For instance, the construction density gap between the suburban mega-community and historical inner city; the faultage between physical and behavior issues that contributes to the appearance of the mega-community. These are all crucial conflicts. However, as a planning-oriented project, the project's goal is solving problems by interventions. During this process, academic research helps to better understand the subject and reveal possible solutions, and design thinking helps to reason relevant findings and determine final interventions. Although the problem field is focusing on the community level, the metropolitan structure has significant influence on the community. The vision of regional structure runs in the opposite direction than the community development reality. It is crucial to look into both levels, and then locate the faultages between them.

The final approach is to combine the metropolitan scale and community scale, in order to come up with a series of interventions aiming at solving the problems fundamentally. According to urban land market theory (1964), as in a monocentric city structure, the economical efficiency residence zone locates within a certain distance from the city center because of the Distance Decay Relationship between land rent and distance. I found this fascinating as the theory explains the reason why mega-communities existed in Beijing. Moreover, ring-radial mobility structure of Beijing lowers transportation efficiency and creates tidal effects. On the other hand, polycentric development has its advantages of balanced urban network and spatial cohesion. Thus, my main method is to explore how a polycentric metropolitan structure influences the mega-community and how the community can improve its quality by adapting to the larger intermediate scale. In this approach, metropolitan scale and local scale are similar to the two sides of a Mobius Strip, which are both highly related to the urban regeneration project. By jumping between scales, crucial reasons behind problems can be explored and resultful interventions can be carried out.

Paradise Gateway is only one of the mega-communities along the 5th ring in Beijing. The zone along 5th ring road is the area of highest affordable residence zone, because of its mediate

distance from the center. Moreover, huge amount of migrants arrived at the city in the past decade during urbanization process. The proportion of migrants in Paradise Gateway has shockedly reached 90%. Migrants in Beijing are called Drifters, whose dreams are owning an apartment and leading a life here. However, the overcrowded 5th ring, including Paradise Gateway, is wildly reviled especially by migrants. This phenomenon involves social equity between the arrival and the local.

The project has come up with a convincing metropolitan strategy. By promoting polycentric development, the role of Paradise Gateway will be shifted from the compelled choice of housing at the fringe into an alternative housing in the middle of network. The strategy highly accords with Beijing's master plan, and fits the city's future vision. However, the urban design adapting to the intermedia structure is still experimental. For the next period, I would like to improve the urban design that provides public space, service and activity with quality, and suits better with the local reality and intermedia relationship.