

## **REFLECTION& DISCUSSION**

### **1 Relevance of the project**

#### **Social relevance**

While addressing the common issues prevalent in most Chinese cities, this project also considers the urgency of Guangzhou's unique challenges as a typical city with specific problems. During China's rapid infrastructure development, the quality of urban life was often neglected due to the technological conditions and development concepts at that time. In future urban redevelopment processes, these areas will need to be renovated or redeveloped to meet higher livability standards.

The renovation project of the Renmin Road Viaduct in Guangzhou holds significant social value. It not only focuses on enhancing traffic efficiency but, more importantly, on improving the quality of life for local residents. Through the re-planning and redevelopment of the viaduct and its surrounding areas, this project aims to restore and enhance the vibrancy of the neighborhood, improve the quality of public spaces, promote commercial prosperity, and protect and promote historical and cultural heritage. The outcomes of this project are expected to facilitate changes in urban neighborhoods on multiple scales, bringing street life back to the community and creating a more vibrant and livable urban environment. This will have a positive impact on society as a whole, providing a successful model for balancing traffic needs with quality of life. It is hoped that this project will offer valuable insights and references for other cities facing similar challenges.

#### **Scientific relevance**

The powerful integration of elevated transportation infrastructure into urban spaces, with its spatial, permanent, and fixed characteristics, makes it an unavoidable part of the urban environment, influencing and transforming human living conditions. Roads should not be seen merely as functional spaces for urban traffic but also as important urban public spaces. This paper attempts to establish a new perspective on urban elevated transportation spaces, focusing on the issues that the "negative spaces" of these elevated structures bring to urban morphology and vitality. It objectively analyzes and evaluates the potential for utilization and the limiting factors of such special spaces. Based on a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the current state of utilization and reuse, and combined with successful reuse examples from both domestic and international contexts, the paper proposes specific strategies for the reuse of these spaces.

#### **Ethical considerations**

This project is centered on the perspective of urban residents, aiming to meet the demands of urban transportation while improving environmental quality. It aligns with government policies focused on improving street conditions and demolishing viaducts, but it also challenges the immediate economic interests of investors and real estate developers. However, the project's implementation will consider commercial economy and cultural tourism development as part of long-term benefits. It will demonstrate that the livable spaces desired by residents and the commercial value sought by investors can coexist harmoniously.

within this community.

## **2 Limitations of the chosen methodology**

In my project, I used a number of site analysis methods, literature research methods, and design methods in the research and design aspects respectively. In the process of site analysis, my way of working is more of an observation and interpretation of the site as an urban designer, coupled with various site data. I think what is more lacking in this process is the communication with the people in the site, to understand more deeply the ideas of the people living here, after all, the design has a target group. Therefore, I conducted a field work after the theoretical research stage of P2, trying to understand the needs of the crowd through questionnaire distribution and random interviews. However, the shortcoming is that due to the difference in dialect and the limitation of student status, I was able to get less effective suggestions. Due to the complexity of urban design and the large number of stakeholders involved, urban design is often more suitable for teamwork and multiple people to obtain information and organize it, and my ability alone is still limited. In addition, in terms of literature research, I could have studied the localization of the design methodology, and thought about how the European design methodology could be more perfectly practiced in a site like Guangzhou, but I didn't discuss it more due to the limitation of time. Overall my work is more of an experimental research with some reference value.

## **3 Transferability of project results**

Whether modern cities must rely solely on elevated structures to meet transportation needs is a controversial question. Many cities and regions with the necessary conditions are already exploring alternative solutions to traffic problems to restore urban fabric.

In a sense, the notion that viaducts are transitional products has been validated by the practices of pioneering developed cities. Historically, the construction of viaducts began in earnest with Japan building numerous viaducts for the 1964 Olympics, setting a precedent for cities worldwide. Following Japan, the United States and Europe also embarked on extensive viaduct construction. In China, Guangzhou led the way in the 1980s, and the 1990s saw a nationwide surge in viaduct construction. However, during this period, cities like Boston and Chicago in the United States began demolishing urban viaducts, shifting towards underground transportation solutions. Other economically developed countries have taken similar actions. Notable examples include Boston's "The Big Dig," the Cheonggyecheon restoration in South Korea, and the ongoing demolition of the Yan'an Road viaduct in Shanghai, China.

My project is highly localized, addressing issues that are particularly characteristic of Guangzhou, such as the abundance of cultural and historical buildings, viaducts emblematic of rapid urbanization, and unique urban villages. Consequently, my project might serve as a more relevant reference specifically for Guangzhou or other regions within Guangdong. Nevertheless, the balance between mobility and livability has emerged as a pressing global issue in recent years, resonating across both Europe and Asia.

My project places a strong emphasis on improving functionality and the inherent quality of the space. As a result, many of the design strategies are relatively fundamental and adaptable. Given the complexity of this specific site, my design strategies encompass four major areas: cultural, economic, greening, and public space. This broad coverage enhances the project's overall relevance and applicability. These four components of urban space are crucial in any city. Therefore, the theoretical insights and practical applications developed through my project could contribute meaningfully to broader discussions on urban design and planning. This relevance extends beyond local boundaries, offering potential applications and lessons for similar urban contexts worldwide.

#### **4 Personal Motivation**

Although I have previously outlined various reasons for undertaking this project—ranging from news, policies, and public opinions about the need for viaduct demolition—I still want to emphasize my personal motivation for this research as an urban designer.

During my two years studying urbanism at Delft, I gradually realized my passion for meso-to-micro-scale urban design and my interest in the relatively complex urban issues in Chinese cities. I excel at observing current situations and identifying the original urban design problems behind certain urban phenomena. Mid-to-small-scale urban design often best captures the interactions between people and the environment. It is on the streets where urban designers can directly perceive whether the spatial scale is pleasant, how people use the space, and whether changes in space can impact their lives. As an urban designer, my human-centered philosophy is always at the core of my design approach, and I believe that all design initiatives should consider the local residents.

In June 2023, when I returned to Guangzhou and walked under the Renmin Road Viaduct, I couldn't help but notice the bustling laborers moving goods, residents climbing over the viaduct barriers rather than waiting for the traffic lights, the small shops with no customers, and the residential buildings overshadowed by the viaduct, deprived of sunlight. These chaotic scenes starkly contrasted with the orderly, quiet, and comfortable streets near viaducts in the Netherlands, sparking my interest in researching the Renmin Road Viaduct. From an intuitive, small-scale perspective, studying the living conditions of residents under the viaduct and attempting to improve their lives through urban space reconstruction is highly meaningful to me.

Moreover, researching urban issues in China has always been my focus. Reflecting on the past hundred years of modern China's construction history, rapid development amidst social upheaval and large-scale urban construction has driven China's swift urbanization. Behind this rapid economic development, certain compromises and sacrifices are inevitable. As with the initial construction of the Renmin Road Viaduct, experts predicted it would eventually harm the urban environment, but the urgent task was to solve the traffic problem. Urban issues in China are often deeply intertwined, complex, and contradictory, whether between government policies and the overlooked needs of residents or between the construction of

non-profitable public spaces and investors seeking higher returns.

Guangzhou is a prime example of a megacity that epitomizes the positive aspects of rapid economic development while retaining numerous livelihood issues. Researching urban issues in such a typical megacity allows me to gain a deeper understanding of China and my hometown. Academically, the complexity of Chinese urban problems also challenges my professional abilities. As someone born and raised here, observing the city's development and wanting to participate is a natural inclination. As an urban designer, I prefer to see myself not just as a creator but as a mediator of existing urban conflicts, responding to the compromises and sacrifices made by urban designers over the past decades and continuously improving urban development.