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Critiques on China's Modernization and Urban Design Lesson from Walt Disney with Practice

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Critiques on China’s modernization and Urban Design
lesson from Walt Disney with practice

by

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Abstract

The world sincerely admires for the achievements of China's modernization construction and speak highly of the outstanding contribution of China to globalization and development. However, two major problems of urbanization in China are that cities lack of unique characters and are not able to provide high quality of life for the residents. The aim of this thesis is to expose and critique those stains found in Chinese cities today. Significantly, a viable future of a city should respect her heritage and focus on the people. One way to achieve this goal is through urban design. This thesis studies the urban design principles behind Disney's success. Its urban design principles are implemented in Disney Theme Park practice to build human-scale and livable communities. Many aspects of Disney Theme Parks' design can be taken as good examples by urban designers in building cities. In the end, the thesis provides a showcase design practice based on Disney design principles in Shijingshan amusement park, Beijing, China.
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Chapter 1

Issues in China’s Modernization

China is undergoing rapid modernization since it’s economic reform in 1980s’. Beijing as the capital of the Nation received more impact, both positive and negative, than many other cities. Although residents get a better physical life environment, it is not perfect. During this process, many traditional cultural is facing extinction, more and more people left their home in Beijing due to many reasons. The Government has realized this issue, and initiated several urban renewal projects, for example historical preservation guiding tourist community. The goal was to preserve local Beijing cultural, and evoke more attention to local culture. However, as this thesis will discuss, they are failed. To so extent, these tourist communities accelerates the speed of losing cultural. A lot of unique culture can only be found in Beijing are forever gone. Meanwhile, local residents are suffering from negative impacts followed by modernization. It is time to stop to examine us and reroute towards future road.

Author has been studying urban planning in United States for 3 years, and really impressed by Disney theme parks around world, especially Disney land and Walt Disney World. In addition, new Shanghai Disney is open to public and brings its magic world to China. Some scholars believe this is cultural invasion, but I consider it as good opportunity for us to learn from Disney. We can learn
not only the way Disney design its tourist communities (Theme Parks), but also able to learn it way to identify and present American culture.

This thesis will examine China’s Modernization and evaluate current living status by compare/contrast traditional courtyard with modern high-rise in chapter 1. Chapter 2 will focus on study of Disney’s theme park including Disney Land and Walt Disney World. Disney’s Urban Design guiding theories are the essential key that contribute to it success. Consequently, chapter 3 will analysis and summery urban design principles taken from Disney’s urban design theory including: Transportation, streetscape, culture, land scape, and management. The final chapter will use these urban design principles to redesign Shijingshan Amusement in Beijing to present a showcase of future Beijing. Please refer to appendix to check thesis structure.

Lack of Unique Culture

Many tourist communities in China failed due to various reasons. Broadly speaking, economic competitiveness determines that a site with many visitors survives and the one with few visitors will fade and eventfully “die”.

China is a Country with more than 5,000 years history. However, most tourist communities in China do not pay enough attention to fostering cultural environment. Too many mixed-topic commercial shops and portable food carts occupy the streets, which totally destroys the circumstance and results in nothing but chaos. For example, it is not a surprise to find a hair salon in a
historic preservation district. Worse still, pale cultural identity makes communities lose their charming characters. In other words, it makes them less attractive. Sometimes, it is difficult to tell the difference among tourist communities simply judging by surroundings---they look all the same.

“Commercialize or die” appears to be the maxim afflicting many tourist communities that have jumped on the historic preservation bandwagon. Let us take a look at the Nanluoguxiang (Chinese: 南锣鼓巷), which is a well-preserved ancient part of the town in Beijing with traditional architecture, located near to the center Beijing. It is approximately 800m long, running from East Gulu Street to Di’anmen East Street. However, it is questionable if we should use the term “well-preserved” when it comes to historic preservation.
The original intention of such a tourist community was to showcase traditional local culture and experience of lifestyle. Yet the derogatory ‘Disney Hutong’ tag that many locals now ascribe to Nanluoguxiang speaks of a perceived space whose social productions no longer adhere to historical type. (Jewell, 2005) In order to create historic circumstance, streetscape and buildings along the street have been rebuilt and maintained as traditional architectural styles. Nowadays, however, while the shop fronts at Nanluoguxiang are less noticeably crammed with the foreign commercial activities, and assorted bling that are redolent of the shopping mall’s branded hegemony, they are also a long way from the artisanal circuit of domesticity, production and societal interaction that designers wanted it to be.

Changes in domestic spending patterns and livelihoods are clearly visible, as the idea of foreign-style alternative travel is attracting large numbers of visitors and investment. (Schreurs, 2014) However, we have to ask what the truth behind this trend is. As a matter of fact, commercial booming in urban neighborhoods results in increased property values and the displacement of local lower-income families and family businesses. This phenomenon in turn points back to a common and controversial topic in modern urban planning----Gentrification. As a result, local residents have no choice but to move out to look for cheaper accommodation that they can afford. Outlanders who have stronger commercial sense gradually occupy the area, and take over the business. Consequently, tourist spending has increased, leading to a further construction boom along the
Hutong. Gentrification deteriorates in a short time, as low income households are unable to afford these products, and old-fashioned neighborhood shops are lost in the process.

As mentioned earlier, presenting traditional local cultural and experience of life style is the intention of many tourist communities in Beijing. Although commercial activity took place in people’s life, which is seen as an important component of culture, it is far away from representing the whole. It is only a corner of the iceberg. Life style is far more important than commerce. Actually, the way local Beijing people live is largely different from that of other places in China. That is the essence truly belongs to the origins. It is pure and raw. Unfortunately, many tourist communities fail to bring it on the table. Worse still, Nanluoguxiang destroyed existing local life style by commercialization and gentrification.
Tourist agency provides life style experience service in local. They will take guest into a traditional family courtyard home. The “family” will greet you, serve tea and show visitors through their home. The host will explain the cultural and historic significance of various aspects, like the layout of the building complex and used residents. But it is all cards they have in hand. If people really want to have some local experience, they will probably be disappointed. Courtyard serves as a cultural symbol of Beijing and a window into its old ways of life. In ancient times, a spacious courtyard would be occupied by a large family, signifying wealth and prosperity. It works like a small community system. However, new owners today prefer to divide a courtyard into several single units that isolated by walls in order to sell/rent them easily. The core value of courtyards is sharing and communication, but this is not the case. Visitors tend
to figure out today's courtyards run like motels. On the other hand, outside environment is not what they expect. Except an overwhelming variety of commercials, hardly to find something stand for local. For example, a Starbucks located in the heart of Nanluoguxiang draws critics that the store is inappropriate American symbol in the midst of one of Beijing’s greatest historical sites. Honestly, there are many better place to go outside if visitors want to experience American culture instead of local Beijing. An American friend has been to China a few times, but he didn’t have a chance to visit Beijing. Finally, he got a chance, and I throw a question on him after we spent a whole day at Nanluoguxiang: “what do you think about here?” He told me that he liked it, but he confessed that “It looks familiar as if I have been here before.” How can it be? Later, he hit on the fact that he visited Tianzifang in Shanghai few years ago. That makes everything just fine. Tianzifang (Chinese: 田子坊) is an arts and crafts enclave that has developed from a renovated residential area in the French Concession area of Shanghai, China. (Pitts, 2013) It is a tourist community and home to boutique shops, bars and restaurants. Both of Nanluoguxiang and Tianzifang are historic preservation districts turned into tourist community; both of them are over commercialized; both of them face gentrification process; and both of them occupied by outlanders. It is hard to say if this is the only development pattern or fate to those historic themed tourist communities. But, as far as I concern, it is a failure if one loses its unique culture. It feels like turning a Five Star Michelin restaurant into Macdonald.
Over commercialization and cultural loss not only lead to failed tourist communities but also destroyed local resident’s life style within it, which has been existing for hundred years. Gentrification results in immigration toward suburb for cheaper accommodation. But the big push comes from modernization.

Since the mid-20th century, following the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, many of the old hutongs of Beijing disappeared, replaced by wide boulevards and high rises. Development has become the orienting principle of modern times. Local government takes it as the No.1 priority, while ignoring many other aspects. Of course, modernization provides better life quality than old times. Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves: is that speed of growing the faster the better? Wait a second, what’s wrong with high-speed development? The answer is NOTHING, as long as it’s sustainable. My point is, society has been growing at a high speed for quite a long time, and it is time to stop and look back.

In ancient time, everything was built at human scale, and people are the masters of society. However, during the modernization process, China’s construction scale follows the U.S. footsteps. Automobile dependent planning dominates Beijing’s development in last few decades. According to Beijing’s traffic police bureau, the number of cars registered in the Chinese capital passed 5 million in February, 2012.¹ So traffic congestion is widespread. Unfortunately, government and planning commission went to the wrong direction---build more roads. It is absolutely wrong, congestion cannot be addressed simply by building

¹ Beijing Traffic Police Bureau.
² “Beijing Car Ownership Exceeds 5 Mln.” - Xinhua.
³ Merriam Webster
more road. On the contrary, people will buy more cars. As a result, the layout of China’s capital is becoming more like a vortex, with six rings radiating outwards - and now a seventh is planned with a length of 940 km.² The wide streets have become unsafe to cross. Small streets are threatened and indeed supplanted by the requirements of increasingly rapid and mounting vehicular traffic. In newer communities, especially, pedestrian street activity is restricted to pedestrian precincts and paths and to shopping plazas and malls.(Melosi) Finally, there is a folklore saying that you reap what you sow. Occurred few days in recent winters, with an air quality index (AQI) of over 250, more than twenty times the level recommended by the World Health Organization, Beijing was shrouded in thick sepia-toned air. Suddenly, people awakened and some have questioned the automobile depend developing pattern. Indeed, even American, our planning role model, has abandoned automobile dominated planning. The era of designing cities as if car access alone is sufficient appears to have ended. In fact, virtually every city plan today attempts to create options that reduce traffic and the need for cars. (Newman, 2015) Nowadays, terms like “sustainable”, “walkable”, “green city”, “public space”, etc., become more and more popular. Ironically, as a matter of fact, those fresh ideas are not fresh at all; they have existed in Beijing’s local communities for hundreds of years.

² "Beijing Car Ownership Exceeds 5 Mln." - Xinhua.
Chart 1: Negative loop of China’s Modernization. Over commercialization increased housing price leads to gentrification. As a result, local residents move out towards affordable housing, replaced by new dwellers, who brings outside living habits. It accelerated modernization process in local area and irritating needs, which further pushed commercial development. And the final result would be losing local culture.

**Fail to provide high quality life**

People chose to leave for reasons, and they always do, either in China or other countries. The main motivation is seeking a better life quality. For example, Americans move to the suburbs since they were built for people to raise families in. There's a family-friendly infrastructure there that simply doesn’t exist downtown. Suburbs have many advantages, including, but not limited to: much
less property crime; better grocery stores; cheaper gas; more friendly environment, and; greater sense of neighborliness. However, recently more people realize that suburb is not perfect. Most planners agree that more suburban sprawl is a bad thing, increasing traffic being the biggest problem. But more negatives follow the spreading sprawl worth noticing.

Most suburbs consist of only one ethnicity (whites), one economic class (middle) and few choices of local evening or weekend activities. (Matje, 2015) On the other hand, lack of cultural makes suburb life pale and less characteristic. Thus, people start to look back into cities, especially young generations. Cities generally have more cultural diversity, museums, festive events and more restaurants to choose from. And people are encouraged to walk instead of driving. In addition, the most important thing is cities provide a stage for communication with others. Wealth or physical well-being is not the key to success. Real happiness depends on our connecting with people, especially through love and kindness. Recently, many suburban residents have move back to cities. City of Cleveland serves a good example. Suburbanization changed the city in the late 1960s and 1970s, when financial difficulties and a notorious 1969 fire on the Cuyahoga River challenged the city. People moved to suburb and left an empty city. Thus, Cleveland was often derided as "The Mistake on the Lake". (Keating, 2007) But this is not the case today. In the 21st century, the city has improved infrastructure, is more diversified, and has invested in the arts.
Consequently, residents move to the city, and economic is booming. Cleveland has been hailed by local media as the "Comeback City". (Paynter, 2001)

Ironically, history has proved that human’s attitude toward city and suburb is capricious. Millions years ago, first comes the family, then an association of families in a tribe, then a further association in a village, and finally create a polis or a city. Last decades, people have been going the opposite way, which is suburbanization. However, cities are more promising today. After all, the subject of civilization was, is and always will be people. And cities strengthen communication among people.

China did not undergo massive suburbanization process, but still has similar issues---lack of communications. Going to suburbs is not the common option in Beijing, instead, people move to high-rise from courtyards for better life quality.

Fig. 3. Beijing’s High-rise dwellings. Beijing's skyline is seen from a high-rise building as China warned residents across a large part of northern China to prepare for a wave of choking smog arriving over the weekend, in Beijing, China, December 18, 2015. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-Hoon
Indeed, there was many issues within courtyard life in ancient time. For example, residents in Hutong do not have private restrooms so that they have to share a public one located outside their houses. Short of such clean facilities made neighborhood equal to Dark Age in Europe. In addition, large scale of sharing lead to very little privacy. And it was hard to access to Internet in Hutong, which is impossible as modern people largely depend on social media and Internet. No doubt high-rises have their advantages, but courtyards and Hutong are volumes of the city’s history, written in brick and beams. More importantly, traditional life style has privilege that cannot be replaced by high-rise today, nor in the future---communication.

**People vs. People**

Communication excels between people and people in traditional life style. A typical Courtyard (siheyuan) is able to host a large and extended family. The four buildings of a courtyard are normally positioned along the north-south and east-west axis. One or two family member will share one room, while the building positioned to the north and facing the south is considered the main house used by the parents. The most shining place must be the courtyard in the middle, which were built according to the traditional concepts of the five elements that were believed to compose the universe, and the eight diagrams of divination. It is the place where all family members gathered to have a variety of activities. Elderly can read in the shed beneath large tree canopy; adults may
chat with others while having a couple of tea; children are able to play games
without any safety concern, and; whole family will sit together to share a
mooncake while worship lunar by watching the moon in Mid-Autumn Festival.
Unfortunately, all above are impossible in high-rise condos, since they don’t
provide such a place.

Traditional life style brings not only well relationship in families, but also
encourages interaction between neighbors as well. It is very common to invite
neighbors to visit one’s courtyard and have a delicious homemade meal cooked
by hostess, while chewing the fat. By and by, the guest would invite this family to
join his home as a return, back and forth. The relationship among neighbors are
so good that guest treated just like kin. In a well-organized community, people
don’t even lock doors before going to work, since neighbors will watch for them.
And the community appears like a whole party. In addition, there are many
activities held in a community, including dancing, sports, card games, exhibitions,
you name it. If wedding occurs, the community switch into a festive mood;
everyone celebrate on the street and give their best wishes to the new couple.
The wedding ceremony in the courtyard lasts for days, and everybody is invited.

All in all, a community has a nice atmosphere for communication and residents
get along with others. However, this is not going to happen among modern
high-rise residents. My former apartment is a 26th stories high-rise condo, and
the only place neighbors gathered is, believe or not, in elevators. Even so, many
don’t talk and playing their smart phone instead. Nowadays, although people are
living squashed in apartments, they don’t even know who his or her neighbor is at all, no need to mention invite them to visit one’s home.

Before massive modernization happened, commerce stayed at community level. Instead of driving far for Costco or Walmart, people can find everyday needs around the corner. Usually, shops owners know everybody in the neighborhood, and maintain a very close relationship with neighbors. Besides visiting a local shop, there are other ways to shop. Dozens commercial carts travel the narrow alleyway every day, and they provide a variety of goods, range from the smallest candy to the largest television. Technicians provide service like repair or maintenance as well. Those mobile commercial lingers along the alley, and yelling all the way. For example, when night falls, the whole community turns into a bustling one with food stalls and hawkers selling all kinds of food. It is likely people heard a loudly long-lasting sell call: “Peeeeelee-Geeoooooo”, which means cold beer is approaching, and all they need is opening the courtyard’s gate and tell the beer merchant that they want it. For the record, in old times, there was no refrigerator to keep beer cold until late 20th. In addition, they can book a customized service, such as daily delivery. However, these kind of convenient services become very rare since high-rise condo hardly receive any voice from the ground.
People vs. Nature

Nature, in the broadest sense, is the natural, physical, or material world or universe. The Book of Changes (易经), as a precious book on wisdom, elucidated the significance of life through the natural environment thousand years ago. For thousand years span, the book has been presenting the inspiration that it provides a dynamic and comprehensive investigation to man and nature as a whole, in which nature is to be seen an organic part on the stage of Chinese civilization. Indeed, unlike many other developing Countries, China has a very natural environment in general, and people take it in a serious way. Feng shui, a Chinese geomantic practice in which a structure or site is chosen or configured so as to harmonize with the spiritual forces that inhabit it has been employed in the designs of high-rises, banks, even zoo exhibits, and has been popularized by countless coffee table books and TV shows.3 A better way to describe feng shui might be to say it is about aligning one’s surroundings in order to enhance natural energy flow. Some people in the countryside would even fight for a place with good ‘feng shui’. This also explains the basic layout of a traditional courtyard. According to the feng shui principle, the rectangular courtyard houses are oriented strictly along a north/south axis

3 Merriam Webster
with the main entrance located in the south. On the other hand, the most key point of this thought to urban development is that human living space should be combined with its surroundings and environment as a whole body.

In old times, small-scale landscape is very common. Almost each courtyard has a giant tree to provide shade in summer, and prevent snowfalls in winter. If it’s climate is appropriate, planting deciduous trees such as maple, date, or pine will provide shade in the summer to save on AC, while being leafless in the winter to not block the sun. People like to sit under the canopy and enjoy their life, which is a typical scene stand for local Beijing style. In addition, people simply take flower cultivation as a pleasure in life. It feels delighted as long as flowers bloom regardless of the size and preciousness of the blossoms. One extremely popular plant is date, people would like to climb on the roof to pick sweet dates and share them with neighbors in autumn.

Besides raising plants in courtyard, people enjoy street landscape and public parks. Small scale open space like community parks play a very important role in communities. A park provides a staging area for many outdoor community events, including Beijing locals’ favorite game-Chess. It also provides a place to enjoy the cool in summer as many wish to take a walk after having food, which recently has been proven good for health. However, unfortunately, during the course of modernization, many parks and green spaces have been taken away for real estate development and left very little as if environment is no longer important to resident’s life. Between 1949 and 1976 Mao Zedong enjoyed
political power, and applied what he called Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought to the environment and people of China. One of his most potent slogans was "Man must conquer Nature", and over the length and breadth of the land and to different degrees a kind of conquest took place.\footnote{Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China, by Judith Shapiro. Cambridge University Press 2001} Chairman Mao is a great leader, but he is not perfect, at least, in this case, he was wrong. But to officials whose claim to legitimacy rests on growth and stability, the costs of this battle have become clear enough to force a change of direction.

Conclusion

The future of Beijing should be a walkable, livable, hi-tech, green city that has a very strong sense of community. The era of automobile based planning is obsolete, and will be replaced by multiple transit system. Meanwhile, pedestrian ought to be at the top of the pyramid with the NO.1 priority. Advanced technology changes the daily life, and it is also the foundation of modernization in the future. In addition, along with the economic and social development and human progress "people-oriented" living environment is coming into life. Beijing should understand its strength and weakness and make the most of the former and minimize the latter. In other words, we will keep positive things that shinning in the past, while improves negative aspects upon Beijing at the present.
It is never too late if we can identify goals and take steps. Although reform the future Beijing is a relative long process and tough, a showcase will ignite the light and it can arouse people to rethink about the living situation and the life attitude, as hope kindles hope, millions more will find it.

Lack of unique characters and not able to provide high quality of life for the residents are two of the biggest problems today. However, these problems can be addressed now when we prepare for the future. In order to achieve this goal, we need to enhance advantage and avoid disadvantage. More importantly, we need a showcase to declare the brightness of future Beijing.

Disney Parks serve as a good example. Either Main Street U.S.A., or E.P.C.O.T. can be considered extremely successful in terms of presenting Identifying and preserving the heritage elements and meeting the needs of people, while showing the blueprint of future.
Chapter 2:

Disney’s Urban Design Guiding Theories

Introduction:

When we discuss anything about Disney Park, we must start from its founder, Walt Disney. Walter Elias "Walt" Disney was an American entrepreneur, animator, voice actor, and film producer. He was a prominent figure within the American animation industry and throughout the world, and is regarded as a cultural icon, known for his influence and contributions to entertainment during the 20th century. And as a Hollywood business mogul, he and his brother Roy O. Disney co-founded The Walt Disney Company. (Bryan, 2002) His idea is the core spirit behind any Disney land on this planet, even after his death in 1966. According to Plantizen, Disney had an interest in urban planning and transportation in particular. The Alweg Monorail that debuted in Disneyland in 1959 was the first daily operating monorail in the Western Hemisphere, and Disney experimented with other innovative transportation concepts such as the PeopleMover. In the year 1965, he presented his last film EPCOT (1965), which has fully expressed his unique thought on urban design philosophy, especially on the creation of "fake" environments through design elements.

After Disney, many planners and other professionals have evaluated the success of Disney land from many aspects. For example, Richard V. Francaviglia,
a professor of history and geography and director of the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography at the University of Texas in Arlington, has published an article “Main Street U.S.A.: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World,” which is concerned with the architecture and design of Main Street U.S.A. as it preserves, controls, modifies and perpetuates a central collective image. He described Main Street U.S.A. as “one of the most successfully designed streetscapes in human history.” (Francaviglia, 2004) James Rouse, developer of the new town of Columbia, Maryland, says, “The greatest piece of urban design in the US today is Disney land,” he seems to be adducing it as a practical planning paradigm for today. Another planner, Robert Hart, described the park as “probably the best example of an urban environment where people are treated in a humane way (Hart, 1976)

Indeed, Disney land is far ahead of other theme parks. In other words, it is not only an incredibly successful theme park, but has also become a beacon of American urban design philosophy. There are two major lessons that urban planners can learn from Disney: Identifying and preserving the heritage elements in the design and design to meet the needs of the people who live there. In order to achieve this goal, firstly, we need to figure out the theory behind Disney’s success.


**Fantasy**

Identifying and preserving the heritage elements in design do not necessarily mean preserving everything from the past, nor stopping development. Instead, Disney theme parks, the most successful case, are using fantasy to achieve this goal. While there are a number of possible explanations for the incredible success of Disneyland and Disney World one can make a strong argument that the major reason relates to the symbolism of place. As historian William Thompson notes in his *At The Edge of History*, "Disneyland itself is a kind of television set, for one flips from medieval castles to submarines and rockets." (Thompson, 1971)

Fantasy is a genre of fiction that uses magic or other supernatural elements as a main plot element, theme, or setting. When you visit Walt Disney World (WDW), the most word you will hear is “Imagination”. Disney did an excellent job to bring his imaginary ideas into WDW, the most well-known is, of course, forever, Mickey the Mouse.

Nothing can beat WDW when it comes to create Fantasy atmosphere. Disney is more than a theme park. It has become a culture, a fashion, a concept, and people soaked themselves in at the moment they step on the land. Everything in WDW relates to Disney's theme, range from a dustbin to a large castle. All the building, all the facilities, and all the activities in WDW are keep saying only one thing: THIS IS DISNEY.
Hermes Trismegistus describes symbol in his Wisdomsdoor & Reality Creator Books in this way: **The power of the symbol is beyond many people’s imagination. Symbols design can be very useful tools to create fantasy space.**

Naturally, the use of a symbol on an object for a particular task does not in itself bring about these conditions; consciousness must do that. However, using a symbol geared toward a certain thing can help consciousness to release and hone-in on the energy pattern necessary to bring about the desired manifestation. (Trismegistus, 2015) He also further explains that Energy, like a roadway, can twist and bend and connect two things together that normally would be difficult to reach, under current circumstances. These energy paths are effective because of years of use and from the inner construction of the Universe. Indeed, the basic function of a symbol is to evoke people’s consciousness when they perceive certain symbol, then connect reality with imaginations in their mind. However, symbols exist in many forms, not necessarily be a picture. In other words, it can be a piece of melody, a scene, or even a sense of feeling.

Be more specific, for example, one of Disney's icons, Cinderella Castle serves a good example of symbol in terms of creating fantasy. Cinderella Castle is the fairy tale castle at the center of two Disney theme parks: the Magic Kingdom at the Walt Disney World Resort, and Tokyo Disneyland at the Tokyo Disney Resort.
Both serve as worldwide recognized icons and the flagship attraction for their respective theme parks. Once people see the castle, they will revoke their memory about one of Disney’s most popular film---Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper, Which is a folk tale embodying a myth-element of unjust oppression/triumphant reward. (Zipes, 2001) And more importantly, people will cheer the fact that they are in the middle of Disney Theme Park. Everyone has his or her own fantasy, but it all comes from the castle. Disney Co chose Cinderella castle with an arcing line overhead in 1995. According to Disney Co, this logo was meant to evoke a sense of fantasy and imagination. They believe the castle conjures up dreams of excitement and romance and is an irresistible draw to children all over the world. And it does!

Obviously, a single castle cannot stand for Disney at all. But one should understand, Disney Park is really good at create fantasy though symbolism. The book Symbolism of Place: The Hidden Context of Communication, Jhone Fraim concludes that:

"In this sense Fantasy Land is symbolic of fantasy and fairy tales and stories within this genre such as Peter Pan, Alice in Wonderland, Snow White and those of Jules Verne about undersea exploration such as Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea. Frontier Land symbolizes the early American mythology and legends of Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone and Tom Sawyer. There is Tom Sawyer’s Island which is approached by a raft ride over the Rivers of America. The Gold Rush days of America are represented by the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride offering a roller-coaster ride through the days of the gold rush. It is the time of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and a place of forts and Indians and wilderness before the settlement of the continent. Adventure Land offers symbolism of the great
adventure stories of the H. Ryder Haggard type which were popular in the late part of the nineteenth century. Included within its attractions are the Swiss Family Robinson's tree house and the jungle cruise which has a strong connection to the jungle stories of Rudyard Kipling which focus around a later period in American mythology and history and on the pirate stories of Robert Louis Stevenson represented in the ride The Pirates of the Caribbean. Tomorrow Land is centered on the science fiction genre and stories about space exploration. All of these lands are entered through Main Street which represents America at the turn of the century.” (Fraim, 2001)

Mean While, EPCOT as a compact version, consists of seven national showcases each of which attempts to offer symbolism of the countries of Mexico, Japan, Germany, China, Morocco, France, Great Britain, Canada and America. The idea is really resample the idea of World's Fair: Exhibitions vary in character and are held in varying parts of the world.

Not only Disney using symbolisms to create fantasy, but also many cities take advantage of symbolism. Lewis Mumford notes that the city first took form "as the home of a god: a place where eternal values were represented and divine possibilities revealed." He comments that the first germ of the city is in the "ceremonial meeting place that serves as the goal for pilgrimage." The city concentrates "certain 'spiritual' or supernatural powers." But despite the religious symbolism of cities their main purpose is in the creation of culture. Mumford writes that the "chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological
reproduction into social creativity."(Mumford, 1938) One more good example is Las Vegas.

For those who have been to Las Vegas should fully understand the power of symbolism in terms of creating fantasy. “This architecture of styles signs is anti-spatial” was written by a group of MIT researchers in the famous book *Learning from Las Vegas: The forgotten symbolism of Architectural Form*. If one has been to Las Vegas, then he must had such experience. “I don't know where I am if I go inside a hotel, but I can clearly tell where to go and where I come from if I go outside.” Somehow, people feel time was twist, and space was distort. It's true. It is the power of space making and fantasy. People gambling inside a hotel

Fig. 6. Las Vegas Strip. The Las Vegas Strip, a 4.5-mile stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard, is home to some of the world's largest hotels and Casinos. Resource: National Geography. Photograph by Bob Krist/Corbis
will profit hotel owner. Therefore, hotel's design goal cannot be simpler, that is keeping their guest as long as possible. That's why most hotel don't have windows, and make interior design extremely fantasy and comfortable. In this case, hotel guests easily lost themselves while gambling on the table without noticing outside. To some extent, they are temporarily separated from reality. On the contrary, once hotel guest leave casino for some reason, hotel wants to make sure their guest can easily find their way back, or simply to attract more to come. That's why casinos invested so much money on hotel exterior in order to make them outstanding and to some extent, exaggerate. This is also the case in theme parks that visitors tend to soak into the circumstance what Disney built.

**Nostalgia**

An important part of Identifying and preserving the heritage elements is Nostalgia. Meanwhile, Nostalgia plays an important role in urban design that meets people's need. In general, nostalgia is sentimentality for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. In fact, nostalgia is part of fantasy, but has stronger connectivity to reality. As John Fraim notes that "*It draws things together from different times, different parts of the world, and different domains of reality and thereby juxtaposes reality and fantasy, past and future, and distant places and near ones.*" As far as design is concerned, the success of Disney parks cannot be taken away from the fact that Disney chose to display for their visitors the basic places and times of the American myth and
story genres. Fraim also claims “the promise of Disney World is to release us from our own contexts and place us at the center of other contexts.” We can be astronauts journeying to Mars, physicists living in a satellite community near the moon, children drifting along the Mississippi River on Tom Sawyer’s barge, or forty-niners in the gold rush.” Essentially, it provides us with an opportunity to find our roots, to return “home” on Main Street USA.”

When it comes to Nostalgia, nothing is more convincible than the Main Street U.S.A. “The Street represents an ideal American town. Although such a town never really existed, many have served as the inspiration for it. Chances are Walt Disney got the idea from Marceline, Missouri, the tiny rural twon that was his boyhood home”---Birnbaum's Walt Disney World. Indeed, it is Main Street USA
that makes Disney parks beyond its territory and finally became the most successful urban design in some extent. Richard Francaviglia fully described how Disney evoke nostalgia by comparing and contrasting the original Disney Land with the Florida version a design generation later.

Although Walt Disney never admitted it officially, Francaviglia and many other scholars believe Walt Disney sought to create the atmosphere in a small town of the Missouri where he grew up. It seems that Walt Disney wants every guest share his nostalgia memory about such a typical American town square and it’s culture behind. Therefore, all visitors have to enter Disney land through Main Street U.S.A., so do visitors of Walt Disney World. In other words, it is the first theme land visitors come across once they enter the park. The Main Street U.S.A contains several features of the turn of the 20th American town squares which represent typical early American lifestyle, the railroad station, bank, city hall, fire station, and emporium. Francaviglia states that the small town atmosphere is enhanced by the time frame chosen; the halcyon days of the small town, which is also known as the “McKinley Era”. It is this period, a rather lengthy but misty time frame suspended between the Civil War and World War I, that Disney recreated. (Francaviglia, 2004) Meanwhile, Lucius Beebe stated that this period “will probably come to be seen not only as the most typical extension of the American personality, but as the happiest decades the American people were ever to know.” (Beebe, 1936) Walt Disney really took urban design seriously when he brought his idea to Disneyland, especially Main Street U.S.A.
As he carefully chose the building styles, color schema and scale, and even landscape. In other words, it is all matter of building styles. The scale of compact plus ornately detailed Italianate store façade successfully provide “small town” graphic to visitors.

In turns the “small town” idea is synonymous with “old time”. Francaviglia depicted that the sensation of Disneyland’s Main Street is that one is experiencing a very familiar milieu---something akin to a memory yet hauntingly like a movie or film set. (Francaviglia, 2004) In other words, the nostalgia for the past and attempt to regain this past have given Disney the direction of searches or pilgrimages throughout design.

Comfort

One more design philology planners can learn from Disney is never stop pursuing comfortable space design. It is comfort that makes Main Street U.S.A different from its original rudiment of the American small town in the turn of the 20th. On the other hand, comfort is the basic requirement of the Goal that Design to meet the people's need. Intellectuals frequently scorn Disney's world, but there is much to be learned about American perceptions in the most contrived---and hence “Most Human”---of all environments. (Salter and Lloyd. 1977)

Comfort, or being comfortable, is a sense of physical or psychological ease, often characterized as a lack of hardship. Comfortable is the foundation of
Fantasy and Nostalgia. This is exactly what makes the difference between WDW and early 20th century small downtowns. Ideally, a main street of a small town was beautiful Victorian style. Like Main Street U.S.A., a main street should be fantasy, nostalgia, romantic, and, to some extent, cozy. It might sound like the ideal place for people to live, but, actually, it's not. Therefore, the question is---what was the small town American Main Street of the past really like? To answer this question, Francaviglia compare “ideal” with “real” by stepping back into the small town as it really existed at the turn of the century. It turned out that, “Main street was never pretty nor, probably, even very prosperous,” he concluded that “The small town Main street at the turn of the century possessed an incipient if underdeveloped urban quality. Its urban character remained incomplete, or unrealized.” This thesis is not going to further discuss about old American small town, but it is clearly that it was far away from a livable place like what Disney built today. Moreover, if Walt Disney really brought his hometown to Disney land without making any adjustment, it should have already lost it’s charming. Fig. 8. Shows what the real American small town was looks like. It can be argue that Main Street U.S.A is not American small town, but more of people’s imagination, and Disney brought it to reality.
Main Street USA provides many amenities for guests. Hungry guests will find many choices along Main Street. Children will purchase imaginative souvenir in shops like The Chapeau Crystal Arts, Main Street Gallery, Kodak Camera Center, Newsstand, Uptown Jewelers, Main Street Cinema, Disney Clothiers, Main Street Athletic Club and the Emporium. Moreover, Main Street USA is also the natural stage of street activities. Traveling along Main Street in a Disney horse drawn trolley, fire engine, omnibus, jitney or horseless carriage not only gives “lazy” people an alternative, but also increases the sense of Fantasy. Last but not the least, Main Street USA is even better at night. Thousands of neon illuminates the

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*Disney official website.*
street as bright as daytime. Visitors will gather on the street waiting for the final firework show. Gaze in amazement as thrilling showcases of shimmering light illuminate the night at Disneyland Park, complete with spectacular fireworks bursting high above Sleeping Beauty Castle—set to the tune of timeless music and starring some classic Disney characters.7

Disney's TRIDENT

The trident of Poseidon and his Roman equivalent, Neptune, has been their traditional divine attribute featured in many ancient depictions. In Hesiod's account, Poseidon's trident was crafted by the three Cyclopes. Neptune's trident symbolizes the three properties of water: liquidity, fecundity and

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7 Firework at Disney, Disney official website.
drinkability. When it comes to urban design area, Fantasy, Nostalgia, and Comfort forged into Disney’s trident. It is so powerful that helped Disney contoured visitors around world.

However, there are sophistic internal relationships between those three elements. As far as Disney is concerned, fantasy is the most important one sitting on the top. Essentially, everything about Disney is based on fantasy, including its films and by products, so are the theme parks. It is fantasy that makes Disney theme parks different from others entertainment facilities. Meanwhile, fantasy can be divided into three parts by time order: past, present, and future. We are sitting on the present, and Disney guiding us to experience the future, like EPCOT, the best show case of future world. Like wonderland, Disney shows us the territory of Magic, even if it is pure imagination. But who can deny the fact that imagination drives people’s fantasy. Regarding to past, there is no need to argue that Disney's success strongly linked to nostalgia. Nostalgia is not only part of the Disney’s fantasy, but also support Disney to present fantasy.

On the other hand, Comfort is the foundation of both fantasy and nostalgia. Without comfort, fantasy is nothing but mirage, all gone with wind. Without comfort, nostalgia is a piece of junk, go with waste. Without comfort, Disney park is nothing different from a bunch of prop from the set of cartoon movie.

Fantasy, nostalgia, comfort, twisted together into a strong climbing-rope, help Disney scale the summits of theme park design. In other words, this is why
Disney is so successful, and it is also the urban design lesson that Disney can teach every planner how to really creating a tourist community.
Chapter 3:

Disney’s Urban Design Components

In Chapter 2 I discussed Disney’s Urban Design theories that contribute to its success. Fantasy, nostalgia, and comfort are the key, but it is never easy to bring them to reality. Although there are many ways to do place making, detail changes, and results are different. Thus, it is impossible to find a formula necessarily lead to success. However, we can find some pattern shared by all most Disney theme parks around world. This chapter will point out several common urban design principles including: Transportation, Streetscape, culture, Landscape, and Management.

Transportation Analysis

Walt Disney considered himself as an imaginer or dream maker. As a matter of fact, behind those fancy titles, indeed, he is a planner. His planning ideas have been fully expressed through his latest movie “E.P.C.O.T” (1966), which stand for Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow. According to Walt Disney, EPCOT would have been a living, breathing city of 20,000 residents, served by revolutionary transportation methods, which is also the highlight of the entire EPCOT. The movie was filmed less than two months before his death, therefore his sickly demeanor throughout his appearance and narration, but it is hard to conceive of an audience who wouldn't find his brilliant and foreseeability.
No city of today will serve as the guide for the city of tomorrow. E.P.C.O.T will be a planned environment demonstrating to the world what American communities can accomplish through proper control of planning and design......E.P.C.O.T begins with an idea new among cities built since the birth of the automobile. We call it the radial plan. Picture a wheel: like the spokes of a wheel, the city fans out along a series of radials from a bustling hub at the center of E.P.C.O.T (Disney, 1965)

He pictured EPCOT was, is, and always will be a showcase to the world of the ingenuity and imagination of our cities. The core value of existence of EPCOT being presented by stimulating American industry to develop new solutions that will meet the needs of people expressed right here in this experimental community. Moreover, Walt Disney did not allow his ideas siting on the paper forever, he made it reality. In the movie he provided his vision of transportation:

A network of transportation systems radiate from the central hub carrying people to and from the heart of the city. These transportation systems circulate to and through four primary spheres of activity surrounding the central core. First, the area of business and commerce......next, the high-density apartment housing......then the broad greenbelt and recreation lands... and finally the low-density, neighborhood residential streets...... Here the pedestrian will be king, free to walk and browse without fear of motorized vehicles. Only electric powered vehicles will travel above the streets of E.P.C.O.T’s central city......Two separate but interconnecting transit systems will move people into and out of E.P.C.O.T in speed, safety, and comfort through the central terminal. Both are electrically powered: the high-speed monorail for rapid transit over longer distances, and a concept new to the American City for shorter travel distances, the WEDWAY People Mover...... Automobiles and trucks will not be barred from E.P.C.O.T.(Disney, 1965)

When we look at Walt Disney’s transportation design philosophy, which he came up with half century ago, still cutting edge to most transportation planning today.

For example, he encouraged transportation segregation that completely isolate pedestrian from vehicles. Pedestrian stay at the highest level off all as “the King of the road.” It is not strange to use the term “walkable Street” today among
planners. Yet, it was not the case back to 1960s. After WWII, American took cars seriously in their life. In addition, people began to move out toward suburb from urban looking for higher quality life, which was the beginning of suburbanization. Therefore, the 1960's the Big Three: (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler) and foreign companies not only dominated the domestic market with the sales of the 1960s cars, but the American’s life style as well. Under such a circumstance, it was by no means an easy way to convince drivers give their road right to pedestrian. However, Walt Disney did foresee it.

Speaking of electric vehicles, it was mission impossible back to 1960s. During the last few decades, environmental impact of the petroleum-based transportation infrastructure, along with the peak oil, has led to a new level interest in an electric transportation infrastructure. (Eberle, 2010) Electric vehicles release no tail pipe air pollutants at the place where they are operated. They also typically generate less noise pollution than an internal combustion engine vehicle, whether at rest or in motion.\(^8\) Due to this character, they are perfectly fit in any tourist community.

Admittedly, some of Walt Disney's idea is too far ahead that it is hard to realize. As Walt Disney claimed that EPCOT always will be a showcase to present cutting edge product and technology, it does adopt many conceptual idea. Walt Disney World Monorail System, for example, opened in 1971 connecting Magic Kingdom and other resort. It was one of earliest operating monorails in United

States, and was promoted as futuristic technology. It seems that monorail takes an important position in Disney Planner’s mind. After 45 years, they still speak highly of the monorail system. For example, Zootopia, a recent animation film released by Walt Disney is very popular this year. In the movie, Zootopia depict a “modern, civilized world that is entirely animal”, meaning it is a world where humans are nonexistent, and anthropomorphic animals thrive in their place. In other words, Zootopia is the animal version of Human’s Utopia. However, monorail still plays an important role in Zootopia, which presenting the future city that imaged by people today. Therefore, people may ask a question--what makes monorail so popular?

Monorails have such advantage: Firstly, Monorails are often elevated, sometimes leading to confusion with other elevated systems. Like other advanced rapid transit systems, monorails can be driven by linear induction motors; like conventional railways, vehicle bodies can be connected to the beam via bogies, allowing curves to be negotiated. Secondly, elevated monorails are always separated from other traffic and pedestrians. In this case, it maximizes the safety of pedestrian and has the least negative impact on ground activities. In addition, monorail beam way casts a very narrow shadow. (Dorin, 2009) Thirdly, as with other grade-separated transit systems, monorails avoid red lights, intersection turns, and traffic jams, and it is almost impossible occurs any traffic accident. With such advantage, Disney Parks have been adopting monorail for decades. If you are not convinced, let me put it in this way, the system is one of
the most heavily used monorail systems in the world with over 150,000 daily riders, with around 50 million Disney guests traveling on the monorail each year. And by far, one driver get killed in a collision on July 5 2009, and it was the first, and only, fatal accident in the monorail’s history.

If you think monorail is the only option to get around, then you are totally wrong. Disney's transportation based on a multi-mode transition system. There are many ways to go around inside and outside the community, including monorail, People Mover (invited by Walt Disney as automated public transport),

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9 "Walt Disney World”. Modern Marvels. History Channel.
steam train, overland cable skyway, canoes, rafts, paddle steamer, sailing-ship, you name it. According to Disney’s website, people can take whatever they want except automobile:

- Three different Ferryboats run from Transportation and Ticket Center to Magic Kingdom and back;
- Motor Launches provide transportation between the Magic Kingdom and several resorts;
- Motor Cruisers run from the Magic Kingdom on the Seven Seas Lagoon through the water bridge channel to Bay Lake and Fort Wilderness Campground and the Wilderness Lodge.
- Friendships run Crescent Lake between Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios, with stops at the Board Walk, Yacht & Beach Club and the Swan and Dolphin Resorts.
- The Walt Disney World Railroad circles the perimeter of the Magic Kingdom and makes two stops: Main Street at the entrance of the park, and Frontier land next to Splash Mountain.
- Trams pick visitors up at the end of parking row and take them to the park entrance.
- For visitors who do not have automobile, buses connect most resorts to the theme parks, water parks and Downtown Disney.¹¹

¹¹ "Walt Disney World Transportation Vehicles." Disney World Transportation Vehicles.
Transportation principles

According to the TEA 2015 report, the average number of visits to the top 10 worldwide amusement parks reached 392.0 million in 2014, and the attendance continue growing.12 Among those theme parks, Walt Disney World is the most visited park in the world, where the visit account was unbelievable as much as 134 million high. Taking Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, Florida, as an example, the average visit per day was 52,964, which is as much as daily passengers of Grand Central Terminal, New York. It is a real challenge when a theme park hosts such a lot visitors. Thus, efficient and convenient transportation plays the most important role of successful tourist communities.

Exterior transportation and interior transportation have different functions and should be treated in a different way. Exterior transportation sticks on connections between community and outside, such as hotels, business district, and other communities. On the opposite way, interior transportation focuses on circulation and network system. Interior transportation system works just as blood flows from organ to organ in the body. In other words, exterior transportation requires efficiency, while interior transportation needs accuracy and order.

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12 2014 Theme Index, 2015 global attraction report, TEA
a. Exterior transportation

1. Large parking lots far away from entrance

Most amusement communities located in the rural/country area due to their size, which require people to take transit or drive to parks, especially in North America. However, personal vehicles must park far away from the entrance to avoid congestion and prevent threaten the safety of pedestrians. Either garage or surface parking should be able to walk to the tourist community entrance. No street parking is allowed unless used by disable. Absolutely no barrier sits in fire emergency routes under any circumstance.

2. Isolation

Tourist communities need different routes to separate parking and pick up/drop off vehicles. It is important to set up waiting areas which are close to the exit and no interfere to traffic. Lack of waiting area design can lead to many severe issues. For example, pick-up drivers would rather park cars on the emergency lane near the exit rather than pay for the parking fee. This phenomenon is very common in many cities without relevant laws. The traffic accident tragic happened near to Shenzhen Airport terminal 3 when a losing control car plowed the waiting vehicles resulted in 9 dead and 22 injured on Mar 1st, 2015. In addition, both taxi and bus may have dedicated isolated channels.

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3. Linkage between parking and park

Short distance shuttles should be provided to help visitor reach entrance. Disney World in particular, is very good at this. They have multiple ways to carry visitors from parking lots to the main entrance, including monorail, steamboat, tram and others. Besides, Disney also helps with the transportation between nearby hotels and theme parks.

b. Interior circulations

1. Absolutely no vehicle

Personal vehicle are not allowed. Commuting vehicle such as shuttle bus inside park must be separated from pedestrian. Some tourist community likes to offer recreational personal movers, such as Bike rental, Segway, Four-wheel cruiser, and so on. It is encouraging to set isolated channels for those commuting tools. In addition, basic training and limited areas are necessary.

2. Accessibility and alternatives

Walkability is the most important characteristic to a tourist community, yet, nothing can make people more frustrate than having to walk a long way to places, especially when they have to rush to catch a soon start show. Visitors do need a faster and easier way sometime. In addition, disable visitors largely depend on it. Although shuttles are one option, it is less interesting/fancy than trains and boats.
In Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney there is a train circling the whole park. According to Disney, the Walt Disney World Railroad is a handy way to get around quickly and easily. And the trains are scheduled to arrive at each station every 4 to 10 minutes at most times, connects main entrance and lot attractions.

Disney provides water transportation. In Epcot with ferryboats, often visitors can benefit from the quicker water transit service so that they don’t have to walk around the lake, which is usually 20mins longer.

In general, interior transportation can be fatal to a tourist community and much more complex than exterior. However, an effective interior transit system largely contributes to the success of a tourist community. Interior transportation system varies when it comes to different park. It depends on geologic conditions and relates to theme topics.

### 3. Blend in

Interior transportation should coordinate to related themes. Either railroad or boats should be decorated properly. And it is possible to merge transportation function with recreation. For example, in the latest Harry Potter World at Universal Studio, Florida, visitors who have a Park-to-Park admission ticket, can pass through Platform 9 ¾™ and board the Hogwarts™ Express from King’s Cross Station in London, located inside Universal Studios Florida theme park, and travel to Hogsmeade™ Station, located inside Universal’s Islands of
Adventure theme park. In other word, the railroad is both a transportation method and an attraction.

**Streetscape**

**Analysis:**

If anybody wants to study streetscape of Disney Park, there is nothing a better example than the Main Street USA. The first “themed land” inside all Disney Parks is Main Street USA, except for the Shanghai Disneyland. More so than any other castle park that has been built since the original Disneyland, this park is unique. From the design foregoing a Main Street USA to lands that deviate from the castle park norm to attractions that do not exist elsewhere.

Main Street USA plays the most important role in Disney Parks. For example, all visitors to Disneyland and Walt Disney World must enter the “magic kingdoms” by way of Main Street, U.S.A. (Francaviglia, 1981)

Walt Disney summarized Main Street U.S.A as follow:

*Main Street, U.S.A. is America at the turn of the [20th] century – the crossroads of an era, the gas lamps and the electric lamp – the horse-drawn car and the auto car. Main Street is everyone’s hometown . . . the heart line of America.* (Walt Disney, 1965)

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14 Universal Studio Website.
Fig. 10. Streetscape on Main Street U.S.A. Disney built streetscape more than comfort but a piece of art, along with fantasy and romantic nostalgia. Photo taken by Di Meng, Nov 2015.
There is no doubt that Main Street USA provides visitors a wonderful walking experience. Personally speaking, I would consider Main Street USA as the essence of Disney Sprit. It is the projection of the whole Disney Park. Engineers use variety ways to make it comfortable. Nice pavement make sure visitors have a comfortable feel, even after all day travel. Cleaners working on the street never let go a single piece of junk. They work all the time to provide a clean and tidy environment. Trees and followers are shaped in beauty, and well maintained. The most important is that Main Street USA creates a sense of nostalgia by resembling the 20th-century small-town America from about the years 1890–1910. We will discuss about nostalgia in next chapter.

Walking at Disney World is beyond a single movement from one point to another, but rather a process of enjoyment. The walking distance around the perimeter of the Magic kingdom is 2.17 Miles / 3.49 Kilometers. How do people spend time while walking? The answer is activities. Buildings are decorated into Victorian’s style, looks like walking into a fantasy world. Disney's architecture excels at details. For instance, windows above the shops include the names of Disney executives, contributing artists and family members. In creating excellent walking experience, Disney's designer constructed every single building with specific functions. For example, Guests entering the Magic Kingdom emerge from the tunnel under the Walt Disney World Railroad and step into the turn of the century American Main Street U.S.A. Visitors will first enter

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15 Walking Distance at the Magic Kingdom, Magic Kingdom, Walt Disney World, Nov 13, 2015
the Town Square complete with a City Hall (Guest Services) and Fire Station, where guests can take part in an interactive game called "Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom." Next to the Fire Station located the Barber Shop. Moving father, visitors will come across the Theater, where they can meet the Mickey Mouse.

**Streetscape principles**

1. **Wonderful walking experience starting from beginning**

   What is the most important factor that contributes to the success of tourist communities? It must be walkability. No matter what the topic is, the entity has never changed, that is people having a wonderful experience. In order to achieve this goal, tourist community planners must understand it is the human we do care, not cars. Therefore, having a wonderful walking experience was, is, and will be the ultimate planning principle.

   Walking starts from the moment that visitors getting off their vehicle from parking lots. Since then, tourist community must provide all visitors a safe, comfortable, delightful waking experience.

   As mentioned before, in Walt Disney land, visitors can choose their favorite ways to the main entrance, including tram, steamboat, monorail and so on. However, walking from parking to the entrance is never a bad choice. Actually it is quite delightful. Sidewalk is separated from other road, like bus lane; pavement prevents slippery in raining days; clear sign shows the direction; beautiful landscape pleased everybody.
2. Must have a main street

Each community must have a main street, and it should be located right after the entrance. Planners are supposed to design main street and main gate simultaneously and take them as an integrative design. As a matter of fact, tourist community should spend most money and effort on the main street. Main street is very important not only because visitors come across it in the first place, which can give them the overall feeling of the community, but also because it contains many actual functions including shopping, dining, relaxing, photographing, exhibiting, and so on. Taking a look at Disney’s main street may offer illumination and helps planners to understand the importance.

There is a Main Street in each Disney land named “Main Street USA”, which is designed to resemble the center of a turn-of-the-20th-century American town. Taking its inspiration from New England to Missouri, this design is most noticeable in the four corners in the middle of Main Street, where each of the four corner buildings represents a different architectural style. Main Street, U.S.A. is the first "themed land" inside the main entrance of the many ’Disneyland'-style parks run by The Walt Disney around the world.

Souvenir store, bakery, showcase, candy shop located within the buildings on each side. Buildings are extremely well decorated and excel in details. Building facade, landscape, sculptures, pavement, street furniture,

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streetlight, and many other elements cohesively present a scene an early 20th century town square. At the end of the Main Street USA sitting the Cinderella’s Castle, opposite to the main entrance. The very first thing often to do of visitors after they enter the park is taking a picture with the Castle.

Main Street USA is the only way to go in and out a Walt Disney park. Since people always want to spend more time when they arrive and leave, there usually are more visitors on Main Street USA than other theme land inside the park. On the other hand, it holds a lot of street activities such as Festival of Fantasy Parade and Paint The Night Parade. In addition, Main Street USA is the natural auditorium to watch the Castle show and fireworks. All above make the Main Street USA an extremely thriving street, especially at night. Professionals are highly speaking of the inspiration of Main Street USA.

3. Walkable structure

The Magic Kingdom, which has a size of 142 acres, is approximately 107 times larger than a standard football field. It is a big challenge to turn such an area into walkable theme parks. However, the brilliant planners and engineers have solved this problem perfectly.

They divided the Magic Kingdom into seven small theme lands, including Adventure land, Frontier land, Liberty Square, Fantasyland, Mickey’s Toontown Fair, Tomorrow land, and Main Street USA. The Magic Kingdom’s structure is designed to resemble the petals of a marigold, with the different theme lands
spread in a fan from the core towards outsides. The core is the Cinderella’s Castle, which is exactly at the end of the Main Street USA. Each theme land connects to the adjacent two by nice paved walkway. However, the Cinderella’s Castle in the core connects all theme lands in the geometric center. And a railroad connects all theme lands from the outside. By doing this, victors can simply visit everywhere clockwise or reversed starting from Main Street USA without missing a single attraction. Meanwhile, they are able to access to selected theme lands by crossing the Cinderella’s Castle, or take a train.

4. Plan ahead for Street Activities

As mentioned before, the entity of a tourist community is always people and their visiting experience. Thus, besides all physical aspects, being able to hold all kinds of activities is very important. For example, people upgrade computers to gain a better user experience. When computers have a stronger hardware, they can run software faster. A street activity is to the tourist community what software is to a computer. In other words, street activities are always among planners’ top priority list.

In Walt Disney World, street hosts a variety of street activities. Visitors take pictures on the street; children chase each other; vendor sale souvenir; people sit on the ground, and you name it. It is worth noticing that the Magic Kingdom even holds a few parade shows per day on the street both day and
night. And it is not surprise to find children playing with popular Disney celebrities on the road, for example, Mickey the Mouse.

In this case, the success of the street activities cannot be separated from street designs. Thanks to being planned ahead, Disney can hold street shows while allowing people walk through. Nice pavement is so delicate that visitor can even comfortably sit on the ground. Bright but no fierce illumination guarantee night activities. And there are staffs patrol around to help with the order. And there are many details on that all contribute to create condition for street activities. After all, details always matters.

Culture

Analysis

Speaking of Disney, the first picture come to mind is most likely Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Donald or other Disney characters. Indeed, there is nothing else can be more representative than Disney in terms of cultural communication. That tiny mouse has brought itself and the American culture behind it to every place on the earth. So it is no surprise that you'll likely see lots of the cartoon elements in a Disney Park. Yes, one thing Disney does best is presenting it culture to the visitor. Therefore, this thesis focuses on how Disney conveys its culture by analyzing the way Disney presents it. The goal is to figure out how a real tourist community presents it culture to create its unique cultural environment and further to establish a sense of belonging.
Cultural principles

1. Unique cultural enhancement

Culture varies based on the community. Tourist community must enhance their own cultural circumstance. Let along copyright, none of a tourist community succeeds by imitating others. Walt Disney World provides imagination of fancy magic and its animation culture has been praising for decades. Universal Studio is famous for hero and restoring movie scenes. Six Flag concentrates on thrill roller coasters. They may have common in physical structure and designs, however, nothing similar in terms cultural cultivation.

2. Reduce commercial interfere

One thing Walt Disney and other top tourist communities do very well is controlling commercial activities. Acknowledged, commercial activities are critical to not only tourist community, but also important to almost everywhere. However, there is a balance between commercial development and administration. Namely, irrelevant commercial activities should not exist with any exception. For example, it is a bad idea to sale underwear in a fantasy topic dominating theme lands. Tourist community should control vendors. They are very convenient as long as they occur in the right place and sell their product in a proper way. Otherwise, they may be very annoying and bothering. Ideally, tourist community trains vendors and manage them systemically, which is exactly what Disney did.
Landscape

Analysis

This article categories landscape into two types, interior and exterior. The first one is the landscape inside Disney land, such as ponds, stream, trees, bushes and so on. The second one is the landscape outside Disney land, like surrounding forest, river, and farmlands. Both of them play an important role in Disney Park. In addition, each of them has its function.

The interior landscape usually is small size and establishes a sense of beauty. It is part of the Disney land artificial works. Meanwhile, the exterior surrounding landscape is able to protect the Disney land from the outside intrusion. For example, in Florida, Disney owns more than 43 sq. miles land, but only a small part of it became parks. The rest remains original environment. As a matter of fact, this was on purpose, and has nothing about money. Walt Disney disliked the out of controlled commercial activities around the first Disney land in California. As a result, he left enough space to the new site in Florida to have a buffer zone between parks and outside. Some people criticized that this makes the Disney land isolated. I stand for Walt Disney. Later in this thesis I will further discuss this landscape pattern.
Landscape principles

a. Interior Principles

1. Leave buffer zone

Disney owns more than 43 sq. miles land in Florida, which is as large as the city of San Francisco. Only a relative small area has been developed. For the rest, Disney keeps it as raw land. Walt Disney and his team did an excellent job at buying land from the local. It is still a very classic case study taught in many business schools and no need to be discussed here. However, Walt Disney World benefits large from this achievement.

Walt Disney thinks that out controlled commercial activities squeeze the space of street activities and largely ruins the circumstance that Disney World tries to establish. (Foglesong, 2011) He paid his cost. As a result, nearby forest, streams, ponds, flora and wild life are protected as Disney’s private property in the new site in Florida. Meanwhile, they create an isolated enclose space, which is perfect for fantasy topic theme park, and makes people feel safe within the park.
2. Take advantage of the natural asset

When there are natural assets in a tourist community, planners should take advantage of that. Florida has large amount of swamps, ponds, lakes, and many other wetlands. Lakes inside the Walt Disney World play an important role on both esthetic and natural perspectives. One lake in the EPCOT at Walt Disney World is a center stage for breathtaking fireworks, colors and lights set to a musical score. In addition, well-connected rivers turned into transportation channel that links each themes parks and hotels. Visitor can take a steamboat or water taxis to go wherever they want while enjoy the scenic environment.
Water also helps to create attractions. Natural wetland has been turned to base of many water activities inside Walt Disney World. For example, there is a theme land named Adventure land that allow visitors to sit in a boat to experience jungle exploring resembled Amazon Forest. Moreover, Walt Disney even asked his engineer to dye a pond into blue to increasing sense of mystery.

**b. Interior landscape**

1. **Enable functions to interior landscape**

   Although the main purpose of interior landscape is decorating, it can be more than that. It may have some actual functions. For example, a green belt in the middle road provides a place to relax as long as it is designed in a proper way and planners set up few benches. Moreover, in a two-direction path, short bushes are natural fence to present boundary. It could separate flows without human interfere. Naturally, visitor toward front will go through by right, while the opposite visitors goes the other way.

   The key principle of interior landscape is to enable landscape with some functions. In addition, it is important to maintain vegetation in a good status (shape, size, color, fragrant). After all, nobody likes places where grass is overgrown. Although landscape gardening requires a lot work, it is rewarding and worth the effort in a long term.
**Advanced management**

Advanced technology contributes to the success of Disney parks without any question. As a matter of fact, in a Disney Park, all things together is a marvel of technology applied to mass psychology, one of the most intelligently conceived piece of architecture in America. It is impossible to be such a successful theme park without advanced technology support. Everything in Disney Park, range from the smallest ticket booth to the largest roller coaster contains numerous technology supports. Among them, some are the most advanced technology at the time, the magic band, for example, carrying electromagnetic induction for park entrance and attraction reservation. In addition, advanced technology creates a sense of fantasy among the Disney Park.

According to Disney official, Disney World, Florida, is the most visited theme park in the world averaging almost 53,000 guests per day. Having so many people in a theme park is an incredible achievement, however, managing them is another story. There is no doubt that Disney does very well on it. People at the park need to eat, rest, and go restroom, etc. None of the effort to meet these needs is a piece of cake. Making sure the regular circulation working is a huge effort, don’t need to mention what happens when some emergency issue occurs, fire or extremely weather, for instance.

As far as I am concerned, there is a cohesive management system, including circulation, risk control, security and so on, to guarantee everything works well in the park. Applying advanced technology could be a key to success. And the
well-trained staff that can be easily accessed and are always ready to help may be another factor.

Advanced management is necessary to maintain a park or a community fully functional after open to public. However, this thesis article will not further discuss management since it goes beyond the focus of urban design.
Chapter 4

A Practice—Beijing Shijingshan Amusement Park reconstruction and
Tourist Community Design

Design Goal

In this thesis I have identified two major problems of China’s Urbanization: lack of unique culture and fail to provide high quality life. In order to address these problems, I compiled a set of design methods taken from the world's most successful tourist community---Disney. Based on Disney’s design philosophy, I am providing a real design practice in this chapter, which focuses on how to create a human scale community in Beijing as a showcase. The main purpose of this showcase is to provide people an idea what the future Beijing could be. Visitors will be attracted to experience the real local Beijing Style.

In the beginning of this thesis, I discussed what has happened and is happening to the Chinese urbanization process: lack of unique culture and fail to provide high quality life. I intend to address the two issues with design. The design questions are: 1) what does the future Beijing community look like? And 2) How do we achieve this? The later question is easier to answer: The new urban design fully takes advantage of the existing site, which will be introduced later in this chapter. New urban design principles taken from Disney will be applied into this design process. In other words, I use Disney’s urban design methods to create a showcase community in Shijingshan Amusement park to present future Beijing. However, this thesis focuses on urban design methods instead of a
detailed design project. Thus, it will only discuss the design of a human scale community, which is one of many characters of future Beijing. Acknowledged, there are many aspects to be done, like Clean Energy Beijing, for example, but they can be achieved by following the Human Scale Community’s footprint, and will not be discussed in here.

To answer the first question, we need to take a closer look into our community. In Chapter One I have criticized current development pattern of China’s modernization and pros and cons of living in traditional courtyard vs. modern high-rises. In addition, more importantly, we know what we want from the past and what we dislike about today. Thus, the challenge will be how to bring old life style into future with advantage urban design methods. Below are some features we want from a human scale community:

1) **Courtyard**: low-rise dwelling with a courtyard in the middle. Each Courtyard is measured as a unit. It can be referred to traditional Beijing Siheyuan, not necessarily stick to the Architecture style. As long as it meets people’s need no matter transitional old-fashion style courtyard with red door and gray wall, or contemporary modern design of new style with advanced materials it will be acceptable. However, the layout should stick to low-rise and has a courtyard in the middle. Meanwhile, traditoal local Beijing element are highly recommend, for example a pair of Stone Lions siting next to yard gate. Must have functions and facilities corresponding to modern lifestyle. For example, Wi-Fi connectivity.
2) **Human-scale Street**: Street is not for automobile unless under emergency circumstance. Pedestrian and slow traffic are the key on the street. Which means automobile will park outside or underneath of community, or replaced by high accessible transit system. There should be a hierarchy of transit, the closer to the center, the more walkable the street is. Meanwhile, street also provides space for outdoor activities. Landscape are necessary to the street, especially landscape that representing traditional Beijing local culture. A variety kind of street furniture's will make the street more complete, but they requires frequent maintained. Enough illumination in the night is a must.
3) **Public Space**: Public space plays a very important role in a community. It must be able to host all kinds of community level activities, and exists as the center where residents can gather for socialization.
4) **Cultural:** Identifying and preserving the heritage elements. Protection and inheritance are the main goal regarding traditional culture. However, the process should be selective, not necessarily to continue what has been identified as obsolete or unpopular tradition. Preservation should never build on the ruins of the lives of ordinary people, we should not sacrifice people’s right to have a high quality life to achieve preservation.

5) **Community structure:** There must be a main street in a community no matter what the form is. In other words, as long as it plays the key role in terms of commercial and community’s spirit, it can be a linear main street, or a cross main street, etc.

![Fig. 15. Linear main street and crossing dual main street.](image)

6) **Harmony with nature:** Community should respect harmony between human and nature. On the other hands, community must meet people’s basic needs to live there.
The target site is Beijing Shijingshan Amusement Park (Chinese: 北京石景山游乐园), which is a theme park located in the Shijingshan District of Beijing, China. It is approximately 500m (1,640 feet) wide, and 1600m (5,249 feet) long, with an area of 197 acres. The park, first opened on September 28, 1986, is currently owned and operated by the Shijingshan District government.
Beijing Shijingshan Amusement Park is one of the earliest tourist communities in Beijing. However, experiencing the impact of capital market, it has to face the declining of visitors, especially when other new amusement parks opened to public in the last few years. Happy Valley Beijing (Chinese: 北京欢乐谷) is an amusement park in Beijing opened in July 2006, located in Chaoyang district in eastern Beijing. Compared to Shijingshan Amusement park, this new park is bigger and more attractive. In total there are more than 40 rides, 10 of which are extreme rides, an IMAX theater with seven screens as well as a shopping complex.\(^{17}\) Further, after 13 years of negotiations and planning, Universal Parks & Resorts will open a $3.3-billion, 300-acre theme park in Beijing. The company and its Chinese partners have not yet set an opening date, but state-run media said the complex will debut in 2019.\(^{18}\) In conclusion, the aging Shijingshan Amusement park is facing huge competitive pressure, and expected to continue losing its visitors in the upcoming years. Earlier this year, the park official announced to retire its Ferris wheel after 29 year service due to lack of maintains.

Competitive pressure comes not only externally, but also internally. According to CNN, in May 2007, the park was exposed by international media for having made unauthorized use of Japanese and American cartoon characters. (McDonald, 2007) A report originally broadcast on Fuji TV’s FNN News, the park features a castle that resembles Disney’s trademark Cinderella’s Castle and

\(^{17}\) Happy Valley Beijing, official website.
a structure that looks like Epcot's Spaceship Earth. The park also features a host of costumed characters that look remarkably similar to not only Disney's trademark characters, but also Shrek, Hello Kitty, Doraemon, Bugs Bunny and a number of other trademarked characters. The original purpose of this attempt was attracting visitors by imitating Disney Land. However, leaving apart that the infringement act is illegal and leads to lawsuit and indemnity paid, it is impossible to success by “copying and pasting” Disney's characters. There is a sophisticate system supporting the success of the Disney Land, and the Mickey the Mouse could be the tip of the iceberg. Instead, it could be a successful story if learning the Disney's principles and approaches to serve a local purpose, for example, to showcase the future of Beijing.

Although Shinjingshan Amusement Park is facing economic dilemma and obsolete, it is a very good site as a tourist community. The site is located in Shijingshan district, which has become one of the most important residential area according to the Beijing Twelfth Five-Year Master Plan. Besides, the park is accessible via the Line 1 of the Beijing Subway, and only 9 miles from downtown Beijing.
China has a famous urban planning guide that helps planners with city structure for thousand years---The Ritual of Zhou (周礼考工记). It serves as the handbook of ancient city building and largely shape many cities including Beijing. The guidance set in The Artificer’s Record, and says: “In building a city, artisans and craftsmen must make sure that the city shall be a square with each side nine li (equivalent to 415.8 meters) in length and three gates on each side of the wall.
that surrounds it. The city shall have nine south-north roads crossing with nine east-west roads. The altar dedicated to the ancestors shall be located in the left of the city and the altar dedicated to the land and Grain, in the right. The south part of the city shall be reserved for the royal palace and the north part, for market places.” (Lincoln, 2012) It has a strong influence on many Chinese cities, and was considered as the standard of city building in a long time period. However, if we look upon Walt Disney’s original site plan of Disney Land, there are many similarities. For example, both of them have a boundary (ancient city wall and Disney Land’s monorail); both of them have strong connecting road system; both of them have clear functional zoning code; both of them have a main street, and; both of them have a landmark in the middle. It can be argued that there is a pattern of urban design language, although they are from completely different Countries and eras. Apparently they share the same creed of human-scale planning.

Fig. 19. Walt Disney’s site plan of Disney Land
Once we squeeze Disney Land’s structure, what we will get is a conceptualized structure diagram as shown in Fig. 20. It has a boundary enclosing the entire community with a circulating transit linking each main gate. In the middle is the landmark surrounding by open space, which serves as the center of the community. A main street connects main entrance and community center. Residential area adjacent to main street with easy excess, however, is isolated by vegetation buffer. Recreational and other land uses are separated from residential but have a strong connection with community’s center. Public space are evenly distributed to provide high quality life. The entire community is based on pedestrian and slow traffic. Automobile and public transit hub located outside or underground in order to minimum the impact on community. In the end, the community will be managed by advantage technology and highly automated, for example robot delivery. The idea evolved from Disney Land combined with The Ritual of Zhou can be implemented in either a unified or modular manner. Let us take a look at what happens if we apply this model into a practice on Shijingshan Amusement Park.

The purpose is to design a showcase of future Beijing. Visitors can experience Beijing life style and enjoy local culture. With this specific purpose, the redesign of
the target site, Shijingshan Amusement Park, follows the modular pattern and guided by the urban design principles learned from Disney.

A multi-story garage on the south of the Chan’An Street hosts automobiles and plays an important role as a transit hub. It is the transfer junction of Taxi, Municipal Bus, and Subway. A skywalk connects transit hub and main entrance, where a large open space is placed for activities. (Shown in Fig. 25)

Main Street is the most important element of the community, connecting main entrance and community center. Along the main street, there are local commercial businesses. The main street should be elaborately designed to exhibit local Beijing culture, abundant in local symbols. Visitors will find things that stand for local culture. Meanwhile, it should be very comfortable to walk for people of all ages. Main Street and the public space surrounding the landmark are also the place to host holiday events, for example New Year parade. (Shown in Fig. 24)
Residential areas are located on both sides of the Main Street. This is the most important part of the park, because it shows the human-scale community of Beijing. Housing units are low-rise courtyards. High density makes sure there is a strong sense of community. Streets are formed by courtyards on both sides, and provide space for a variety of activities. They are absolutely safe that children can play on street without worrying about traffic. People simply walk or ride a bike to go further. Long distance transit is located outside of the community but can be easily reached within 30 minutes from home by taking monorail. Meanwhile, trees and other landscape are well maintained. Renewable energy will help residents to protect their living environment. Comfort and safety benefit from advanced management and high-tech application. And most importantly, people live in a Beijing Local Style.
Fig. 23. Human-scale community in future Beijing. Gray tile, red wall are the symbolism of Beijing. Although it shows a future blueprint, it is still telling people: This is Beijing Style.

Fig. 24. Main Street of Beijing local Community. It is the heart of the community and stand for its sprit. It also host activities during holidays.

Fig. 25. Transition hub with parking garage. Besides automobile parking, the transition hub is the transition stop for many other transportations including: taxi, metro bus, and subway.
Conclusion

This thesis identifies two major problems of China's Urbanization: 1) lack of unique culture, and 2) fail to provide high quality life. In order to address these problems, I adopted design theories and methods taken from the world's most successful tourist community---Disney. In addition, based on Disney's design philosophy, this thesis provides a real design practice, which focuses on how to create a human-scale community of Beijing as a showcase. In Chapter 2, I have discussed 3 major urban design theories that contribute Disney's success. Fantasy release visitors' imagination and leading them to the Magic world; Nostalgia as part of fantasy evokes people's hidden memory in heart and draw attention to heritage preservation, and; Comfort makes fantasy and nostalgia possible while meet people's need. It is the foundation of fantasy and nostalgia. With these three specific theories, I examined Disney theme parks including Disney Land and Walt Disney World and found some urban design pattern they shared to further withdraw a set of urban design principles that can be applied to other tourist communities including transportation, landscape, culture, landscape, and management.

In order to test these urban design theories, this thesis offers a design practice based on those principles. Beijing Shijingshan Amusement Park, a obsolete recreational park facing economic dilemma but siting on the best location can be turned into an excellent tourist community to present Beijing local culture. It also provides a prototype community as a showcase for people to
experience the human-scale community in the future.

During the design process, all urban design principles were applied, and basically achieved the intension of creating a human-scale community. Although there were some adjustments according to Chinese tradition, the design result reached below goals: 1) efficient exterior transportation system connects surrounding; 2) a massive transit hub with a garage away from entrance; 3) walkable community with excellent streetscape; 4) a main street as the center of the community; 5) reasonable structure with appropriate land use; 6) strong sense of community, and; 7) excellent open space and landscape. It proves that urban design principles taken from Disney theme parks can be duplicated and applies to any future site designs. Hopefully, urban planners and designers can continue optimizing it in the future.

Regarding to the prototype community as a showcase, it is hard to evaluate due to the fact that it requires many future study. However, the human-scale community of Beijing will be the right answer to cultural heritage and high quality of life. In the end, Beijing is a historical city hosts millions of people facing critical cultural loss. How to preserve Beijing life style needs attention from more people and further studies.
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A viable future of a city should respect its heritage and focus on the people to people and people to nature interactions.