

"A PERSPECTIVE ON CHINA"
Text by Urbanus Architecture & Design

A

China's high-speed urbanization always gives an illusion. Especially to the Western participants who are really enthusiastic about Chinese projects. When involved in the construction today, we are building the future of tomorrow. What kind of future can we, as architects, envision for a population that grows faster than its cities?

"Future fast forward" not only indicates the daunting speed of construction for tomorrow, but also implies the rapid emergence of unpredictable problems resulting from speed. When the world is excited and encouraged by China's speed, the insiders only become more and more concerned. Whether it will be nicer to turn the button from "fast" into "slow", and change "forward" into "backward", once we are all targeting for a better future? And if so, what kind of architectural strategy is feasible for a realistic practice that everyday needs to work in a condition that can be circumscribed as a dirty reality?

The joint presentation between Urbanus, a local firm with native designers, and Dynamic City Foundation, a "local" firm with foreign designers, will provide insiders' views on the issue of "density", which is an inevitable topic for the future of China.

Under the leadership of partners Xiaodu Liu, Yan Meng and Hui Wang, Urbanus purposefully targets on projects that can restore humanistic urbanity within a climate of rapid and vast profit-driven development. Within a short history of 6 years, Urbanus has completed and been working on over 160 projects, and a great number of these projects are what we called "urban infill", a notion to add density to the existing urban environment.

For this sort of density, it is not necessary to be physical, and it can also be the density for ephemeral entities such as events and activities. The density we expect is not the square footage that can directly generate market value, but the density necessary to foster a vivid urban life, and to bond together urban residents who are unfamiliar with each other. These projects can fall into two categories:

One is the new urban parks that are designed to turn the chaotic urban open spaces into living rooms in a dense urban setting. Projects

such as Jade Bamboo Garden, Nanyou Shopping and Tangshang Museum Park will illustrate this approach.

The other one is the strategy of breaking a big program into small pieces in order to weave a network of urban life. This approach is illustrated by projects such as the “village amidst the city”, the renovation of OCT factory area into a mixed-use neighborhood, Tianjin Old Town Rehabilitation, and Tu-Lou Plan.

Although there is no way for an architect to slow down the speed of the crazy development, the objectives of these designs still can be achieved through introducing the slow space in the whole urban system. This is to enjoy the beauty of metropolitan density. By the means of de-congestion, “slow down” is not opposite to “fast forward”, but is to make this “forward” more humane and joyful.

B

The joint presentation between Urbanus and DCF, moderated by Bert de Munnck, will incorporate as more background information of generic China and its urbanization as possible. Thus a format of dual projection is suggested: image of one project will be paired simultaneously by another image in order to give the audience a broader understanding of the social background. Due to the time limitation, when one party is presenting, the other one’s general works may also be shown on the smaller and less distractive screen, so as to prolong the presentation period on the one hand, and on the other hand to offer an opportunity of comparison between diverse practices in China.