

# Mn'M

Measuring the non-Measurable

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# Alternating Boundaries: Planning the Unplanned

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## Abstract

Urban areas are complex, no less than the individual who makes up the urbanity. This article proposes the ways in which the future urban areas of the developing countries can be dealt with based on the UN forecast of the approximated 5 billions population living in urban areas of the developing countries (Guardian, 2011). With limited land resources, should the boundary defining the public and the private space be reexamined through the concept of shared space and temporary use of public space to accommodate the acceleration of the density of buildings and the intensity of living?

The examples presented here are compiled from Bangkok, a city of a developing countries. These examples, anecdotal they may seem, are the attempts to try to present the already existed alternating boundaries between the public and the private space, i.e., domesticity vs urbanity. It is hope that these will give some clues to the future urban living, which will benefit from the knowledge of the future urban intensity of the alternating boundaries.

Keywords: Public space, Private space, Domesticity, Urbanity, Bangkok

## Introduction

Urban areas are complex, no less than the individual who makes up the urbanity. According to the UN, the World population in 2050 will be more than 9 billion. Of these, the situations are different between the developed and developing countries. The former will have a slightly increase population and then decline. The latter will have the exorbitant increase of population, from 5.6 billions in 2009 to 7.9 billions in 2050 (UN, 2009). Of all these population, almost three-quarter will live in urban areas (Guardian, 2011).

For the developing country, the scenario will be both of horizontal and vertical increases of urban areas. Either one, the density of the buildings and the intensity of the living will escalate. The push and pull for the public and private spaces with acceptable environment and life quality outcomes will be the central debate, as it has always been, but more intensified. However, this escalation will create a much sharper juxtaposition between the public and the private space. A reinvestigation on the boundary between them is unavoidable. Might the boundary between them be even more difficult to define than the existing situation? Or, might there not be a boundary at all that is domesticity and urbanity are intertwined or overlapped, to some certain extent? If so, what should be the ways in which domesticity extended to the urbanity, and vice versa? Could the concept of sharing space and temporary use of physical public space be reexamined to give some indication that the domesticity and urbanity may be able to coexist with less conflict? If so, what might be the extent to which the personification of the domesticity allowed and retracted within the public space, and vice versa?

## Background

In trying to form a critical view through some existing examples which might answer the questions posed above, a background for the proposed framework is given here. It consists of two concepts which have, to some extent, a similar approach to spatial usage. One is the shared spaces. Another is the contemporary uses of public space. Both have been discussed for some time now and gained recognition for urban strategy in the past few years.

'Shared space' can be divided into a building and an urban scale. For the building scale, the open plan of vernacular architecture or low cost housing, and the hot desks system of offices are two of the existing examples. For the open plan, it is quite common to find that bedding, living and dinning take place in the same area. The space is fixed as well as the users who usually are of the same group. However, the uses or activities are not fixed; they change through times although the timetable as a whole can be seen as another fixed element. The creation for this type of shared space can be of self

sufficiency due to limited resources or labour as in the case of vernacular architecture or of economics pressure as in the case of low cost housing, i.e., unaffordability for bigger area or segregated spaces.

To a lesser degree, the hot desks system has fixed desks, but alternated users and time. Officers workers alternate the use of the desks through the time. It is viewed as a suitable system for a more flexible office or organisation, i.e., flexible working hours and working places. Co-working and co-location are the extension of this system to cover independent workers, i.e., freelancers, or more than one organisation to share working space (Center for Social Innovation, 2010). For this system, the time table as a whole are less fixed than that of the domestic arrangement; everyday can be different from the other days. Therefore, certain elements of spatial and time management have to be put in place to guarantee a smooth operation.

For the urban scale, 'shared space' had been proposed in fields of urban design, traffic engineering and road safety for 30 years already (Clark, 2006; Hamilton-Bailie, 2008; Barter, 2009). The key idea is to put context into the centre where everyone who uses the same physical public spaces, i.e., streets and sidewalk, has to be attentive and engage with the surrounding environment. By taking out the tools for motor movement advantage, such as lighting, some types of signage, curb side, etc., from the streets and intersections motorists, cyclists and pedestrians have to renegotiate their uses of the same physical space with more care. Arguments are made for the applicability of this approach on street types and automobile speed, i.e., not for arterial road and within speed limit of 30 km/h (Methrost et al. 2007). Nevertheless, the philosophy of shared space in urban scale suggests that by taking away the ownership of the public spaces from the users, the focuses of the public space uses are on the integration and negotiation instead of the segregation; everyone has to be aware of everyone and one's use of public spaces.

'Temporary use of public space' is a movement with a record of its emergence from the European and North American contexts in the past decade (Haydn and Temel, 2006). The theoretical view behind the movement is to oppose the mono-functional plan of the 20th century which separated uses and spaces as it is unpractical, neither for the 21st century cities, nor having been for the 19th century ones (Kohoutek and Kamleithner, 2006). It takes the cue from the Situationist towards the modernist city by opposing the master plan in an attempt to rearrange the 'politics of privileged space' by encouraging people to constructed their own social topography (Ronneberger, 2006). There exists a spatial disparity within the city; spatial usage of the upper classes is permanent, while that of the lower class is temporary. Providing that social uses and activities need space not over the long term, i.e., making them temporary, and as a result society does not provide space for them, to propose the programmatic concept of temporary uses for whatever available space, i.e., vacant building or lot, will eliminate the spatial disparity for some period. Utilisation cycles of available spaces for temporary uses are encouraged. As such, 'the social relationship in the triangle of property, possession and right of use is redefined' (Kohoutek and Kamleithner, 2006).

By far, temporary uses are of art and cultural events, but everyday urbanism, i.e., legal or illegal uses and activities, should be more considered. It should be aware that available space and location may restrict the scope of uses and activities. The tactic for temporary uses is an appropriation of available space for some period. To do so, a community, real or imagine, is working behind the process through negotiation. The space and its boundaries will have to be redefined, categorised or subdivided for public uses. Partial public space for interpersonal interaction can be established within the public space of the appropriation. Planning an interchangeable programming is a challenge for temporary uses. Nevertheless, disregarding the scale and size, temporary uses can be an effective tool for empowering the entire neighbourhood and contribute to bottom-up planning instruments (Haydn and Temel, 2006).

To summarise, the interior 'shared-space' concept provides information on how management can minimise the extent of space provision. Limited spaces can be shared among the similar group of people, professions and organisations. The fixed space is liberated by the alternated time, and a new type of community can be constructed. The urban 'shared-space' concept, meanwhile, eliminates the segregation of public spaces and takes away the ownership of public spaces. By doing so, it increases the awareness of, puts the risk into and creates the negotiations with the context for all the possible uses. The concept of 'temporary use of public space' suggests that multi-function is the nature of urbanity even if it occurs temporarily, particularly the social uses and activities. To propose

the social temporary uses, boundaries of the public and private spaces, the ownership and the right of uses of the appropriated buildings, lots or public spaces themselves have to be redefined and renegotiated. Within the process, powerful impacts on entire neighbourhood can occur, and itself contributes to be a planning instrument.

### The Framework

The framework is set from two issues: the context of the developing country, and particularly Bangkok as the site for the investigation; and, the background ideas from the concept of 'shared space' and 'temporary use of public space.'

For the future urban of the cities in the developing countries, the situation are: urban density is high; urban areas are overcrowded from buildings and from people leading to living intensity in the negative way; and, urban space is limited. Vacancy for buildings or lots might be rare, though possible. In the case of Bangkok, the city's master plan is still intact and difficult to alter. However, mixed- or multi-uses are recognised and accepted. Some intensive uses at particular locations are initiated, i.e., gaining FAR by being developed near the infrastructure lines — mass transits. Building codes and regulations seem to be the available tool to encourage temporary uses.

The extent to which the concept of 'shared space' and 'temporary use of public space' is applied here are followed:

- Initiating the temporary uses is encouraged. However, the priority for uses and users should be drawn as of the interior 'shared space' of living or co-working indicates. Participants should be from the nearby neighbourhoods, if possible, for management purposes.
- Programme of the temporary uses should emerge from the negotiation in relation to the context. Everyone must be aware of the environment and manages risk individually, particularly those who use the space temporarily.
- The most critical aspect is that the initiative has to be based from the 'design point of view' with the assistance from the planning: 'planning the unplanned.' A designer should understand what types of temporary uses can possibly occur if certain types of space are provided. S/he can design a physical space for that temporality of social uses and activities to happen with intertwining to the building surrounding as a whole. S/he can foresee the extent to which and the ways in which his/her designed space or building will respond or react to the predicted temporary uses.
- The planning body can initiate the incentive for private projects that provide the physical space for the occurring to temporary public space uses. Similarly, building codes and regulations should be able to be amended for both public and private gain. In so doing, they protect the property, right of possession and right of uses.
- Time management is important. For it can help subdue spatial disparity through the permission for temporary public uses in the private spaces.
- It is possible that the provided space can be unavailable for some time. The programme and negotiation can help sort out this availability and unavailability.
- Application for temporary uses and space provision differs from various contexts depending on the acceptable degrees of urban density and intensity for every context.

### Examples and proposals

Examples and proposals are selected and drawn from the framework, with Bangkok being the urban context. They consist of three types based on the scales, conditions and local contexts.

#### L: Community mall at the urban edge

In the past decade, Bangkok has witnessed an extraordinary increase of gated communities, horizontally and vertically. The one discussed here is the horizontal expansion of the gated communities. As commonly spreading throughout the urban edges, the gated housing estates replace the local existing neighbourhoods. Following their expansions is the community mall development with eateries and supermarkets. The local on the other hand are served by the fresh markets or weekend markets.

Although the urban edges and the gated communities may have low density than the city centre, it does not guarantee that social spaces for temporary uses are provided. Besides, the community malls

are the private development projects for public uses which may or may not intend to be for social uses. Public uses here are for profitability, whereas social uses may not.

The proposal is to initiate an incentive through planning. This means to encourage the private developers to provide some spaces for temporary social uses that may not be profitable but can netting the community between the existing local and the new comers of the gated communities. Designer, on the other hand, have to understand the different lifestyles to coexist, and provide space for this coexistence. The open space of the malls can transform to be the social space for temporary uses. If this is the case, the private property permit the public the right for a civil society (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A community mall at the Western edge of Bangkok with potential spaces for social temporary uses



At this level, the impact scale can extend to the entire city. A new shopping complex, Asiatique, has just opened in Bangkok two years ago. The signification of Asiatique is that it is the privately developed project for the public uses of the riverscape, which is a rarity in Bangkok. Most of the riverside areas are privately own. Riverside public spaces provided by the city are so few and quite far apart. Nevertheless, the public space of Asiatique, by far, are similar to any other community mall: not intended for temporary social uses.

#### M: Open space of some types of gated communities

In the city centre, the situation is different from that of the edges: clustering with high-rise buildings and high density areas. The proposed sites are of two types: those between the high-rise buildings, and the neglected sites of the old neighbourhoods. Building codes and regulations required the high-rise condominium to have an open space of 30 percents of the plot area, including the green space and the hardscape. Due to the common height and total areas, the building walls must be set back more than 6.00 meters from all site's perimeters. If the plot has more than one building, distances between two buildings must not be less than 9.00 meters.

As the residential neighbourhoods of Bangkok are of low height but high density, the height and clustering of the condominiums are so contrast to the existing condition. Besides, the condominium complex are walled with two checked gates, the plot's main entrance and the reception entrance. The proposal is to encourage the permission to use ground floor open space surrounded the buildings for temporary public uses, public in the sense of both the public uses of the condominium residents and the neighbourhood residents (Figure 2).

Typical old neighbourhood in Bangkok consists of a Buddhist temple or two. Every temple has a forecourt for religion purposes and events. These events are not occurring every month. As a result, majority of the forecourts of the temples have been turned into parking lots, a use most suitable for Bangkok due to its severe traffic jam and a lack of comprehensive mass transit system. The proposal is to take this forecourt to be the site of the social temporary uses with a well manageable programme and design to suit most of the uses (Figure 3).

Figure 2: An open space between two condominium in Bangkok proposed as the site for temporary uses, with the background of the surrounding neighbourhood's building



Figure 3: A forecourt of a Buddhist temple of Vietnamese sect proposed as the site for temporary uses instead of a parking lot

Not all complex will willing to yield for this permission. Again, assurance on security and management can help, plus some push incentive from the city authority. Designers of the complex and the temple themselves will have more concern with the spatial and programmatic design to serve all prospect users. The open spaces of different types of private properties are able to be transformed for the public and social temporary activities.

#### S: Corner plot of the shophouse

Walking along the streets in Bangkok, one finds rows of shophouses almost everywhere. Internally, trade is usually conducted on the ground floor and residency takes place on the above floors. A closer look at the shophouses displays that there are some degrees of arrangements at their shopfront. Some shopfront are highly elaborated, while the other are not. Some are for commercial assistance, while the other are for leisure provision, i.e., plants and stools. What is common is that shopfronts can be used for social as well as commercial activities from other parties.

According to building codes and regulations, shophouses' front must be set back to 2.00 meters from plot line facing the street. The corner shophouse has another applied code. Without an opening, the wall on the corner side can be set back at 1.00 meter from the plot line (Figure 4a). With an opening, the wall on corner side has to be set back more than 2.00 meters for the ground and the second floor from the plot line (Figure 4b), while for the third floor or higher floor, the wall must be set back to 3.00 meters. A proposal here is: if the ground on the corner side of the shophouse is provided for temporary public uses, the wall of the above floors can be extended to the 1.00 meter set back distance from the plot line (Figure 4c). By doing that, the ownership of the land still belong to the corner shophouse. The shophouse itself can gain the extra area on each floor while it is able to have the opening for natural ventilation and light. The public will have the space for their temporary uses. Obviously, time management, selection of the uses for the programme and spatial closure are negotiable.

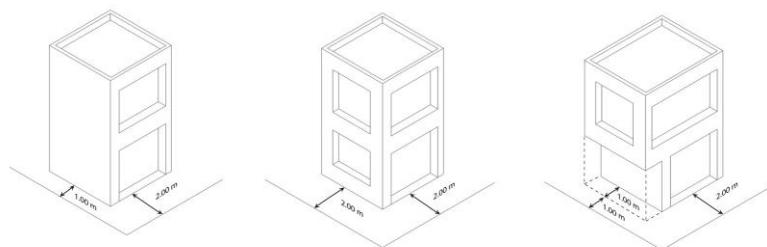


Figure 4: A proposal for a corner shophouse to provide space for temporary uses.

Another example and proposal is the front of convenience store. There

usually exists a number of stalls subletting from the store. By initiating the social micro-programme, the convenience store's front can transformed to be the community space temporarily (Figure 5).

Figure 5: A Connivence store front

By far, we have demonstrate an idea for the future urban development.



With the crowded city, intense living and fixed available space, to utilise all available spaces for some social or leisure activities is crucial even for temporary, in order to release the pressure of the future living. We propose that temporary sharing space can be the future urban tool to positively counter negative effect of urban density and living intensity of the overcrowding city. This idea is not new, and in the context of developing countries we may have some examples already. However, those examples are unorganised and may not help subdue the spatial disparity between people of different incomes. Thus, the existing examples are for personal gain or profitability rather than social purposes. It is important therefore to raise the awareness that temporary shared space can be much more socially meaningful and to identify the possible available spaces through the planning assistance and foreseeability of the designer to be able to plan the unplanned.

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