Designing inclusive urban spaces

CWLane Reading Space: Exploring potentials and limitations of temporary urbanism in Hong Kong

Francesco Rossini

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the first pilot project realised in Hong Kong as part of a research study aimed at reconnecting people with underutilized public spaces through temporary architectural interventions (TAI). Beyond exploring alternative solutions that could positively impact the community, the project challenges the rules, constraints, and guidelines present in government-managed spaces, which are typically implemented through a top-down approach.

The paper outlines the research framework and presents preliminary findings from one of three pilot projects carried out in one of Hong Kong's oldest districts. It details the overall methodology, structured around four interrelated phases: 'Participatory Process,' 'Prototype Implementation,' and 'Process Evaluation.' The fourth phase, dedicated to producing the final report, synthesizes the research findings and offers recommendations for adopting TAI as a strategy to reactivate underutilized public spaces. Additionally, it explores how these temporary interventions can serve as a platform for discussing potential long-term transformations of the selected spaces.

One of the aims of this research is to raise awareness of the impact of this approach, as its temporary nature fosters innovation, adaptability, and responsiveness to social, environmental, and spatial needs, making it a powerful tool in contemporary architectural discourse. The findings will contribute to the Hong Kong Government's current planning initiative, 'HK2030+', aimed at creating a more sustainable and livable environment. Additionally, the results will serve as a valuable reference for public space policymakers in Hong Kong, advocating for the use of site-specific temporary interventions to test alternative spatial arrangements while fostering a critical bridge between municipal authorities and the community.

KEYWORDS:

Making place, Temporary Urbanism, Public Open Spaces, Hong Kong

CWLane Reading Space: Esplorare potenzialità e limiti dell'urbanistica temporanea a Hong Kong

Questo articolo esamina l'impatto del primo progetto pilota realizzato a Hong Kong nell'ambito di uno studio di ricerca volto a riconnettere le persone con spazi pubblici sottoutilizzati attraverso interventi architettonici temporanei (TAI). Oltre a esplorare soluzioni alternative che potrebbero avere un impatto positivo sulla comunità, il progetto mette in discussione le regole, i vincoli e le linee guida presenti negli spazi gestiti dal governo, che di solito vengono implementati attraverso un approccio top-down. L'articolo delinea il quadro di ricerca e presenta i risultati preliminari di uno dei tre progetti pilota realizzati in uno dei quartieri più antichi di Hong Kong. Descrive nel dettaglio la metodologia generale, strutturata in quattro fasi interconnesse: 'Processo Partecipativo,' 'Implementazione del Prototipo' e 'Valutazione del Processo.' La quarta fase, dedicata alla redazione della relazione finale, sintetizza i risultati della ricerca e offre raccomandazioni per adottare i TAI come strategia per riattivare spazi pubblici sottoutilizzati. Inoltre, esplora come questi interventi temporanei possano servire come piattaforma per discutere potenziali trasformazioni a lungo termine degli spazi selezionati. Uno degli obiettivi di questa ricerca è aumentare la consapevolezza sull'impatto di questo approccio, poiché la sua natura temporanea favorisce l'innovazione, l'adattabilità e la reattività alle esigenze sociali, ambientali e spaziali, rendendolo uno strumento potente nel dibattito architettonico contemporaneo. I risultati contribuiranno all'attuale iniziativa di pianificazione del governo di Hong Kong, 'HK2030+', volta a creare un ambiente più sostenibile e vivibile. Inoltre, le conclusioni forniranno un riferimento prezioso per i responsabili delle politiche sugli spazi pubblici a Hong Kong, promuovendo l'uso di interventi temporanei specifici per il sito al fine di testare configurazioni spaziali alternative e favorire un ponte critico tra le autorità municipali e la comunità.

Parole Chiave:
Making place, Urbanistica Tattica, Spazio Pubblico, Hong Kong

CWLane Reading Space: Exploring potentials and limitations of temporary urbanism in Hong Kong

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1. Introduction

This research builds on two interrelated studies funded by a competitive grant from the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong, for which the author served as the Principal Investigator (PI). The first three-year study aimed to investigate why Public Open Spaces (POS) in Hong Kong are insufficient, unevenly distributed across the city, and not often actively used as part of citizens' daily routines. Based on this premise, the author analysed 27 POS in one of Hong Kong's core districts, examining their socio-spatial conditions to assess their function, usage, and role within the urban structure. The findings indicated that a significant percentage of the examined POS suffer from various shortcomings, likely contributing to their low usage and lack of attractiveness (Rossini, 2022).

In the second study, the author sought to investigate whether the implementation of TAI could reveal underlying issues in these spaces by testing short-term revitalization strategies and assessing whether this approach could provide insights for potential long-term improvements. Based on previously collected data, we identified three POS that exhibit key characteristics affecting their usability. These spaces are either forgotten or hidden, disconnected from pedestrian flows, and constrained by rigid spatial layouts. Additionally, they feature passive edges and blank walls, limiting interaction between public and private realms. These locations serve as valuable testing grounds for our research approach, allowing us to explore and address the specific challenges each space presents.

The author believes in the role of design as a key contributor to the success of a place. While design is not the sole determining factor, site-specific solutions and innovative-explorative architectural approaches can significantly enhance the usability of underutilized or dysfunctional public spaces. A novel aspect of the proposed TAI is its site-specific nature, which goes beyond the broader approach of traditional placemaking. While the methods used in these projects can be replicated, the designs are customized to the unique characteristics of each site, ensuring their relevance and impact in specific contexts. The goal is to address common deficiencies they exhibit and enhance key qualities such as accessibility, comfort, and the capacity to facilitate social activities (PPS, 2008).

The concept of Making Place explored in this study emphasizes that place is a dynamic rather than a static entity. Geographer Tim Cresswell (2006) argues that place is not a predefined label of identity but rather enables creative social practices. Transforming

space through collective actions and incremental, small-scale adaptations can have a profound impact on the creation of meaningful places. As previously mentioned, public open spaces in Hong Kong are limited and often underutilized. This study introduces an innovative approach to reengage people with these spaces. By implementing short-term pilot interventions, it seeks to establish an alternative planning strategy that can drive long-term improvements.

The following sections will describe CWLane Reading Space, a TAI designed to promote the alternative use of a neglected public space in the Central district of Hong Kong. The project was implemented in October 2023, and its impact was monitored over five weeks through on-site observations using time sampling methods, as well as data collected from questionnaires and informal interviews. By examining the effects of these TAI on both the spaces and people's behaviour, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of existing issues and their underlying causes, while also exploring potential policy alternatives (Andranovich and Riposa, 2011).

2. Public Space Relevance and Temporary Urban Strategies

Much of our daily life takes place between buildings—whether commuting, exercising, or meeting friends, we continuously interact with outdoor spaces such as sidewalks, squares, and parks. Amanda Burden (2015), urban planner and former director of the New York City Department of City Planning, emphasized that public spaces are even more important than the buildings themselves, as they shape social interactions and urban experiences. Today, some of the most transformative urban initiatives are happening within these spaces, redefining their role in city life. The discourse on the importance of public spaces has long been a relevant research topic, but in recent decades, it has become a key indicator of quality of life. Over the years several scholars (Carr et al. 1992; Crowhurst-Lennard & Lennard 1995; Banerjee, T. 2001; Gehl, J. 2010, Carmona 2015) have highlighted their importance in various aspects, yet urban transformations driven by top-down planning have often prioritized quantitative aspects over qualitative considerations. As a result, many public spaces fail to adequately meet people's needs, tending to be generic and lacking specificity. While cities have begun to explore new forms of public engagement and adapt existing spaces to contemporary needs (Metha, 2010), recent decades have seen the rise of global urban activism led by citizens, non-profits, and resident associations. These grassroots initiatives have filled gaps in formal planning, providing effective, low-cost solutions that respond proactively to community needs through creative placemaking.

In contemporary practice, architects and urban designers work alongside sociologists and anthropologists to develop strategies that capture a place's identity by mapping its social and urban context. This approach is often integrated with participatory design, fostering direct collaboration with local communities to address citizens' specific needs (Casanova & Hernandez, 2014). Their positive effects could

be manifested at different scales (Marshall et al., 2016), providing temporary use models to reclaim cities' dysfunctional spaces or abandoned areas and allowing solutions to be tested first, which would otherwise be very costly to implement (Leonard, 2015). They are 'tactical' because, as argued by Lydon and Garcia (2015), they use accessible means for achieving pre-set goals while embedding flexibility into the planning and project delivery process. Taking it one step further, these tactical initiatives involve a broader field of action for citizens in a context where public institutions are less responsive to people's needs (Silva, 2016).

The use of placemaking it is now an established approach to involve citizens in the transformation of the urban environment. The benefit of these initiatives in the short-term has been discussed at length. While some of these temporary projects might someday become permanent, few studies have examined how these temporary urban interventions could be used in a more systematic way and thereby leveraged as a planning tool for planners and government departments (Wohl 2018). The temporary nature of such interventions offers two key benefits. First, its limited time frame enables experimentation and the testing of solutions that strategically address issues in a flexible manner. Second, it reduces the reluctance of government departments to adopt new strategies, as it allows for the exploration of innovative solutions without requiring a long-term commitment.

In this context, a complementary theoretical approach can offer valuable insight into the interaction between people and public spaces. Drawing on the concept of Prototyping in the Wild (Rogers, 2011) from sociology, this research project explores how design choices and alternative spatial arrangements influence people's behavior on-site. By testing TAI in real-world settings over several weeks, this approach can help identify specific improvements while reassessing Hong Kong's underutilized or dysfunctional public spaces. Ultimately, it promotes an experimental methodology to foster more inclusive urban planning and design.

3. The Hong Kong Context

Public open spaces are a crucial asset in high-density cities, especially in Hong Kong. Given the city's distinct vertical urbanism, particularly in older neighborhoods, these spaces are scarce, making their function even more critical. Over the years, the city's planning strategies have lacked a comprehensive approach to developing this essential urban element (Xue & Manuel, 2001). The limited availability of land, combined with a laissez-faire government approach, has resulted in open spaces being provided at the minimum standard of 2m² per person set by the Hong Kong Planning Department. This has negatively impacted both their quantity and, often, their quality. Most of these spaces were developed using a rigid, top-down approach that applied standard solutions to diverse sites and urban conditions. As a result, these valuable yet often underutilized open spaces do little to meet residents' needs, as they neither foster social interaction nor promote community activity (Figure 1).
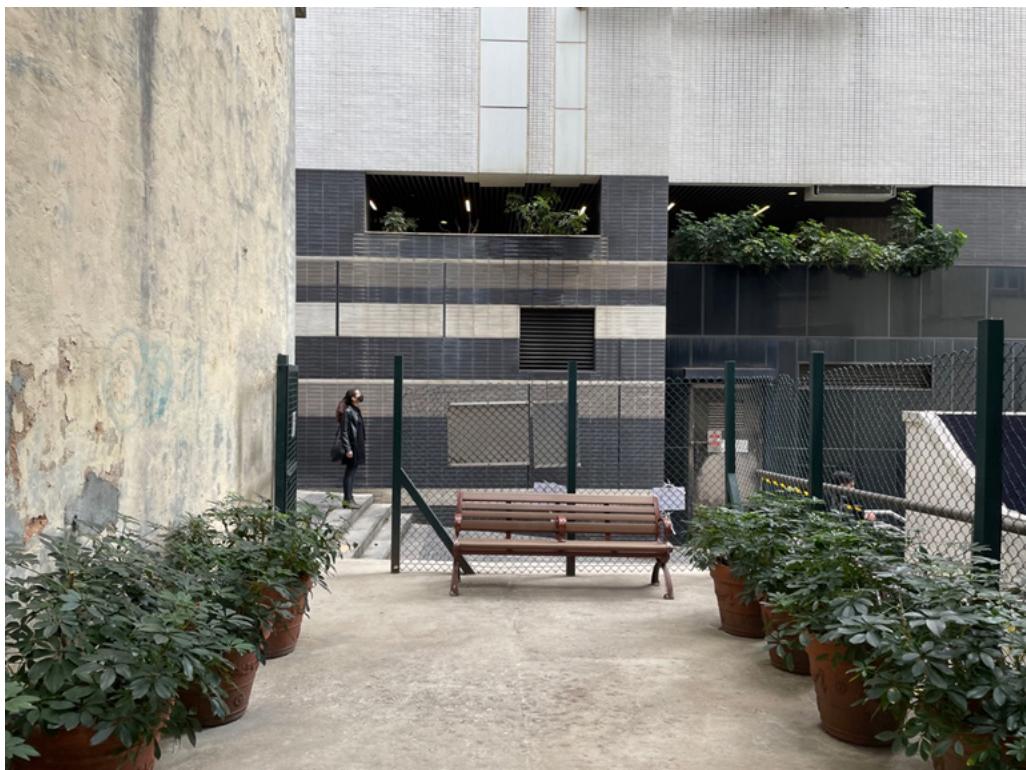
Fig. 1 - Chung Wo Lane Sitting-out Area, Central District (Photo by Francesco Rossini).

Moreover, strict regulations and outdated guidelines have discouraged flexible usage (Carlow, 2013), resulting in most public open spaces being designed primarily to meet safety standards and facilitate easy maintenance rather than to enhance user comfort and enjoyment (Lai, 2017, p. 59). Paradoxically, the Hong Kong Government itself acknowledged that open spaces in older urban areas are often "small, fragmented, and sometimes hidden, rendering them unpopular and counterproductive to their intended purpose" (HKGOV, 2016, p. 33).

Over the course of our three-year study (the first grant), we aimed to clarify this issue by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the socio-spatial conditions of these public spaces. The spatial analysis revealed that factors such as poor accessibility, outdated design principles, the absence of active frontages, and a lack of flexibility in the use of space are some of the reasons that may have contributed to their underuse. The combined use of questionnaires and interviews revealed that on average, 68% of residents expressed the desire to have more active engagement and social interaction in public spaces. Temporary events such as second-hand markets or musical performances were identified as a possible way to generate place attachment and social activities. Interestingly enough, almost 73% of interviewees responded that they would like to be involved in a participatory process to create more enjoyable public spaces in their district (Rossini, 2022).

While the study highlighted some positive aspects, such as small-scale adaptations of the urban environment and intangible narratives tied to public spaces, the data revealed that these spaces fail to foster a diverse and vibrant urban environment, having become

somewhat marginal within the urban structure. This conclusion aligns with Lai's 2018 study, which showed that residents in older urban areas have a generally poor perception of the public spaces in their neighborhoods.

4. Research structure and implementation methods

The research has been structured as three interrelated phases: 'Participatory Process', 'Prototype Implementation' and 'Process Evaluation'. Each phase details several key tasks that combine empirical research methods to fulfil the proposal objectives. These methods include behavioural mapping, trace measures, counting, and tracking public space users as well as techniques for measuring people's perceptions through interviews and questionnaires (PPS 2008). The fourth phase, the production of the final report, will summarise and conclude the research activities.

4.1 Participatory process

The design development of each TAI was planned to be conducted via a two-stage approach. We first planned a series of workshops organized together with community associations and NGOs. The second stage was focused on the realisation of TAI in three selected public spaces, with the goal of putting into practice the knowledge gained during the workshops. In this stage, it was important to maintain effective communication with the community to ensure equitable and effective agreements were reached and to hold people to their commitments. In this phase, key references like the Community Planning Toolkit (2014), Guide to Neighborhood Placemaking in Chicago (2008), and A Playbook for Inclusive Placemaking (2019) were used to shape the participatory process and meet the initial research goals. These resources offer various methods and tools, which were tailored to the specific context of Hong Kong. An important aspect of this phase was organizing community focus groups for each project to assign roles and clarify responsibilities. In principle we planned to have teams of 3-6 people to work on five areas: identifying needs, planning social activities, design and implementation, follow-up strategies, and management.

4.2 Prototype Implementation

The development of each TAI consisted of two phases: organizing a series of community workshops and the actual construction of the prototype. The workshops were designed, as much as possible, to encourage active participation in every stage of the decision-making process and, crucially, to ensure that both the design and execution of the project reflected the community's expectations. The projects' sites were selected based on the assessment done in the first part of the research. All the sites were in the Central and Western District under the management of the Leisure and Culture Service Department (LCSD) of Hong Kong. Although the projects were intended to be temporary, the goal was to design site-specific interventions that addressed each site's dysfunctions and challenges, incorporating input from the community. The

implementation plan for these low-cost interventions included the discussion with the community to coordinate activities, assign roles, and prepare all the documents and initial work for the realization of each project. This included preliminary site inspections, authorization by pertinent government authorities, obtaining materials and construction tools, and organizing actions plans and safety measures.

4.3 Process Evaluation

The Public Space Index (PSI), developed by Vikas Mehta (2014), was used to assess the public spaces before, during, and after the installation of each TAI. We empirically evaluated what Mehta called the five dimensions of public spaces: inclusiveness, meaningfulness, safety, comfort, and 'pleasurability'. The PSI comprises several variables and seeks to capture and measure the physical qualities of the spaces as well as observed behaviour (rated by the research team) and perceptions of public space (rated by users with questionnaires and interviews conducted on-site). The variables, based on a rating scale from 0 to 3, examined the presence of community-gathering 'third places,' the flexibility of the space to suit user needs, and its visual and physical connection to adjacent streets or spaces. By using the PSI, we were able to evaluate the impact that each intervention had on the space and on people's behaviour. The analysis was conducted in all three target areas through multiple field surveys (twice a week) over approximately five weeks for each project. To capture the range of activities and behaviours in public space, the observation plan was elaborated considering both weekdays and weekends. The days were split into four timeslots: morning, lunchtime, afternoon, and evening, from 9 am to 7 pm.

5. CWLane Reading Space

The project was designed to answer the following questions: How can people and underutilized public spaces be reconnected through low-cost architectural interventions? How could temporary architectural interventions promote alternative uses in public open spaces? How can pilot urban projects challenge outdated design guidelines and rigid planning rules?

By addressing these questions, we conceptualized a series of design options that responded to the site's spatial conditions and constrains. The conceptualization phase of CWLane Reading Space lasted over a month, during which the research team developed the project by constructing multiple models and refining the design concept based on community feedback. One of the outcomes of our discussions with residents and shop owners was the idea of using the space in a more active way. Some of them were not even aware of its existence. During our observations, we also noticed an old fridge repurposed as a small community library, managed by a nearby coffee shop. This inspired us to expand on the concept by transforming the space into a dedicated reading area. As a result of our discussions, we conceptualized the project by combining a community library and flexible seating spaces within a single structure.

Fig. 2 - Full-scale 1:1 mock-up of the library shelving system (Photo by Francesco Rossini)

Fig. 3 - Construction of the library in the atrium of the School of Architecture at CUHK (Photo by Francesco Rossini)
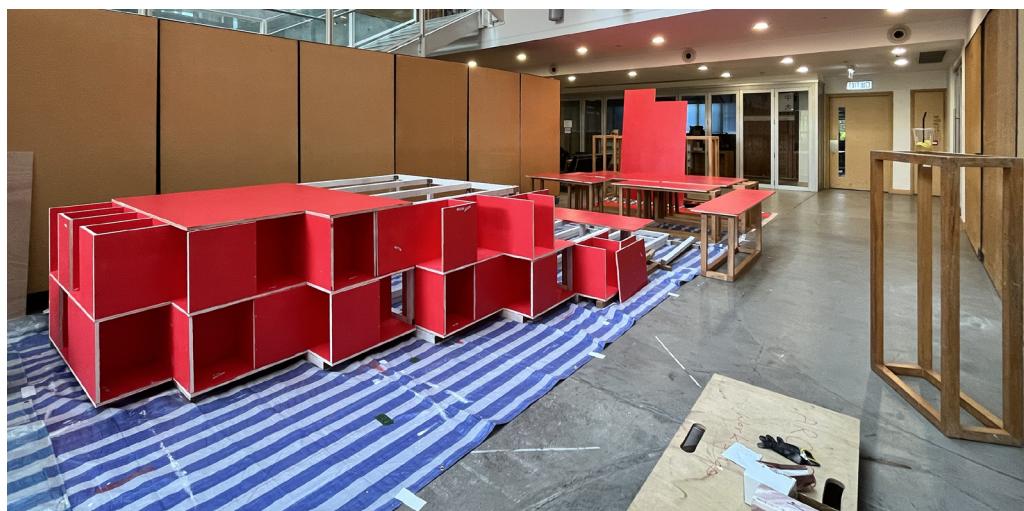
The project involved over 250 precisely cut pieces of 18mm plywood, which were assembled on a timber framework of 48mm section. Additionally, we built a full-scale 1:1 mock-up to rigorously test the assembly of all components, with special emphasis on the most challenging element: the custom shelving designed specifically for books. (Figure 2). To finalize the various phases of the project, we primarily utilized the fabrication lab at the School of Architecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong. In addition, the atrium served as a temporary workspace and was transformed over one month

Fig. 4 - The research team assembling the project structure, built with a timber framework of 48mm section (Photo by Giovanna Santoro)

Fig. 5 - The project was preassembled at the School of Architecture and completed on-site in three days by the research team and volunteers (Photo by Giovanna Santoro)

into a dynamic hub for cutting, painting, and assembling components (Figure 3). The overall structure waw partially pre-assembled in the atrium and then transported to the site, where it was fully constructed and completed within three days by students, volunteers, and residents (Figures 4,5).

The bright red color and white geometric pattern used in the project were designed to capture the attention of passersby and invite them to explore and make use of a hidden, underutilized pocket space in one of the oldest districts of Hong Kong. As
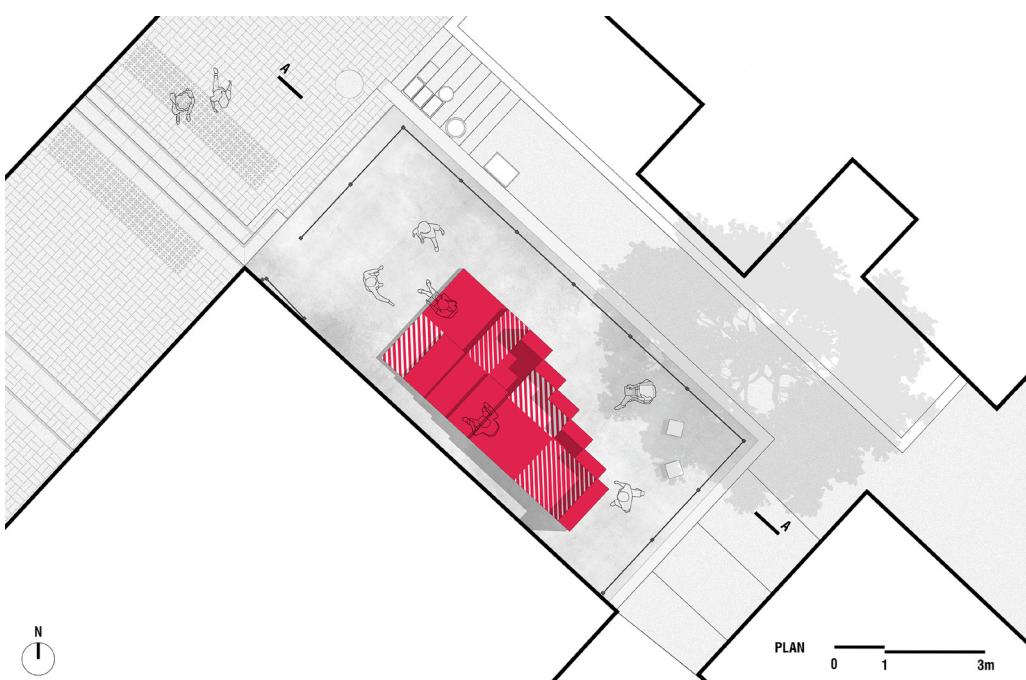
Fig. 6 - CWLane Reading Space, Layout Plan (illustration by Francesco Rossini)

previously outlined, the community library incorporated a series of steps and platforms designed to create flexible, versatile seating areas. The concept of these sequential steps drew inspiration from the stairways and ladder streets scattered throughout this part of the city. Embedded in Hong Kong's cultural and architectural heritage, these urban elements have long served as both essential passageways and informal

Fig. 7 - CWLane Reading Space, Elevation (illustration by Francesco Rossini)
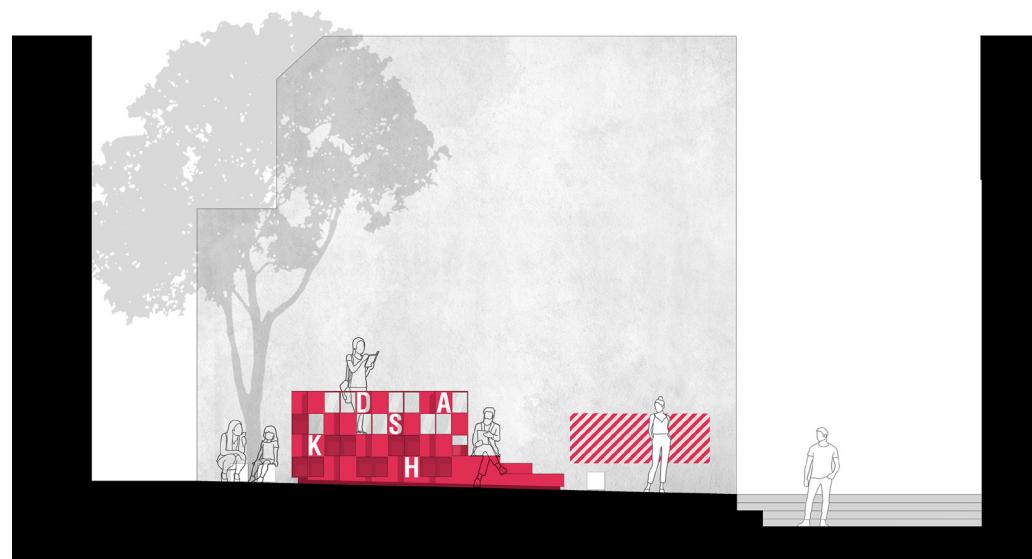
Fig. 8 - CWLane Reading Space, Axonometric view (illustration by Francesco Rossini)
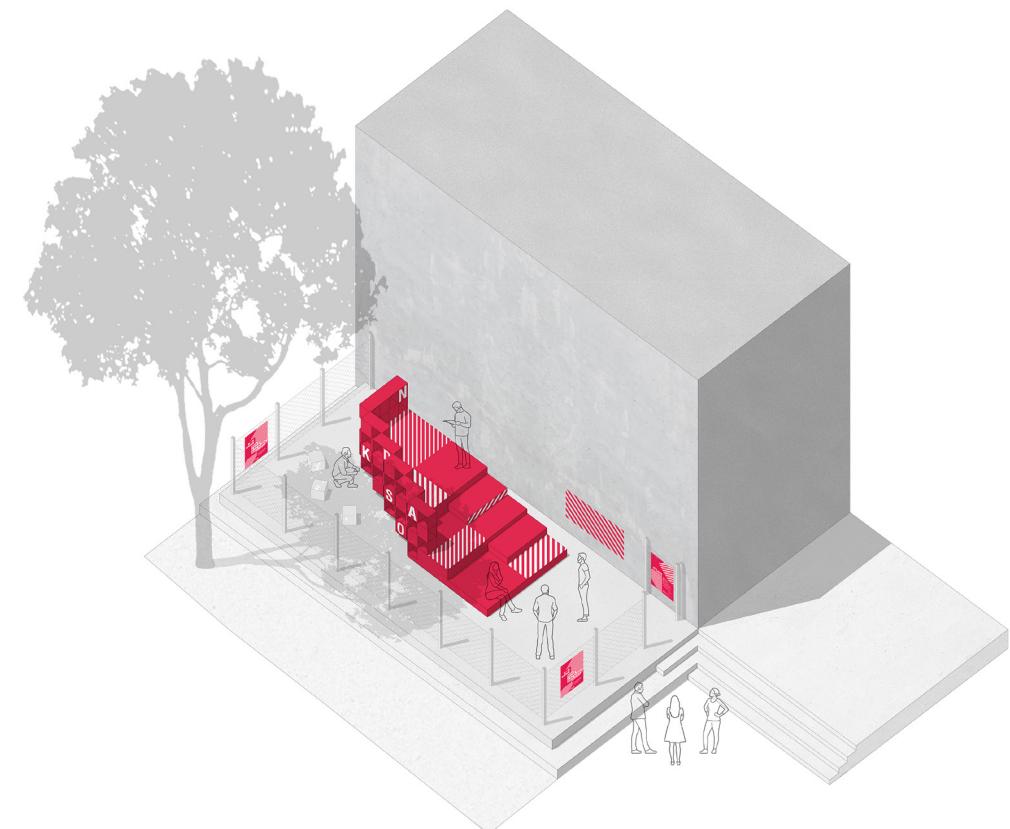
gathering spaces, shaping social interactions and the way residents engage with their surroundings.

The design of the library was characterized by a sequence of interlocking shelves that created a series of setbacks, strategically optimizing the use of space. These shelves accommodated over 350 titles spanning architecture, design, history, philosophy, education, and a diverse collection of children's books. As illustrated in Figures 6, 7, and 8, which highlight the key characteristics of the project, this spatial configuration of the library not only provided additional space for browsing books but also created an intimate reading area near the existing tree. Designed as a community-driven initiative, the library was self-managed by its users and residents for over five weeks, du-

Fig. 9 - The library had a positive impact on the neighborhood, with data showing that a total of 170 books were exchanged during the project's five-week implementation (Photo by Francesco Rossini)

ring which they were encouraged to exchange their preloved books (Figures 9 and 10).

6. Analysis / Findings

During the five weeks of the CWLane Reading Space installation period, we carried out a series of field evaluations, focusing on the three main aspects of this research: participatory processes, implementation, and assessment. Since the methodology involved several steps to engage local residents in the project, we launched a call to action on social media and promoted public involvement through on-site flyer distribution and posters displayed in neighborhood shops. Additionally, we collaborated with two community associations to facilitate the recruitment of volunteers for the project. Despite our initial efforts, we struggled to achieve the level of community participation we had anticipated. Early on, we received support from Very Hong Kong, a local NGO dedicated to activating commu-

Fig. 10 - People visiting CWLane Reading Space during the weekend (Photo by Francesco Rossini)

nity and public spaces, which provided volunteers from its network. However, given the limited involvement of residents, we shifted our strategy toward engaging nearby shop owners, recognizing their potential to foster a more meaningful connection with the project. Our next objective was to involve them and their collaborators at various stages, including the production phase. While they enthusiastically supported the initiative by distributing flyers, promoting it, and offering valuable feedback and suggestions, securing a deeper, more hands-on level of engagement remained a challenge.

In response to these early challenges, we revised our participatory strategy. Rather than continuing with a co-design process, we redirected our efforts to gathering detailed feedback on the types of projects, functions, and activities that local businesses and residents desired for their district. Drawing from this input, we developed a comprehensive concept, which we then presented for a second round of feedback and suggestions. We visited every shop in the area, carrying our laptop and scaled models (at 1:50 and 1:20), to illustrate the concept. During these visits, we engaged not only shop owners but also temporary visitors, regular customers, and residents frequenting nearby cafés and bars, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives informed the project.

This approach facilitated more direct and meaningful conversations about the project, deepening our engagement with the local community. As part of the mobilization process, we established continuous communication with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), conducting multiple site inspections and presenting various conceptual stages of the project. Given our responsibility for all activities within the space, we also had to secure mandatory public liability insurance to cover potential damages—both to the site itself and to individuals—arising from the project's installation and use during the occupation period.

According to the collected data, CWLane Reading Space received an average of 37 visitors

per week, a significant increase compared to its previous lack of use. On weekdays, visitors typically spent between 5 and 10 minutes in the area, while on weekends—when families were the primary users—the average duration increased to 15–20 minutes. In terms of activities, approximately 34% of visitors used the space for sitting, 24% for browsing books, and 8% remained on-site to read. Additionally, 18% of visitors lingered on-site without engaging in any specific activity. Our observations revealed that children were particularly attracted to the library, enjoying the opportunity to play and select books to read on the steps (Figures 11 and 12). We also analysed how users positioned themselves within the

Fig. 11 - The steps have proven to be an excellent place for children to read and play (Photo by Francesco Rossini)

Fig. 12 - A young reader exploring books for children at CWLane Reading Space (Photo by Francesco Rossini)

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Fig. 13 - The graphic illustrates how users interact with the space, showing that 31% of people use the existing bench, 28% sit on the steps, and 15% choose the movable cubes (Graphic by Francesco Rossini)

space. The findings showed that 31% preferred sitting on the existing bench, 28% on the steps, and 15% on the movable cubes (Figures 13 and 14).

Data showed that a total of 170 books were exchanged during the five-week installation period. As part of our efforts to promote engagement with the space, we organized an event called "Steps Talks," where several speakers were invited to present their work to the com-

4% Chatting

12% Other
exercising
cleaning
walking dog
sleeping

7% Reading

29% Sitting

8% Eating

22% Visiting

18% Book Searching
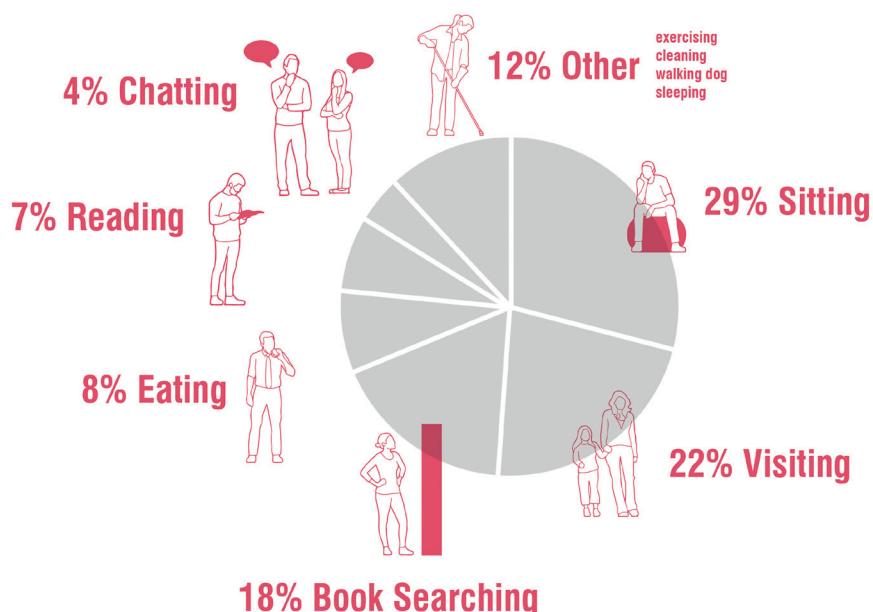
Fig. 14 - The graphic illustrates the main activities observed during the five-week implementation of the project (Graphic by Francesco Rossini)

munity. These casual lectures and discussions served not only as moments of knowledge sharing but also as opportunities to bring architectural discourse into the public realm (Figures 15 and 16). A total of 80 people attended the event, which featured lectures by seven guests from both academia and professional practice.

In comparing the use of the space before and after the installation, the public space index indicated a consistent improvement across all assessed variables. Prior to the implementation of the project, the area was rarely utilized, making it challenging to collect a sufficient number of completed questionnaires. However, during the five-week period, we successfully gathered 32 questionnaires, demonstrating that the space had become significantly more

Fig. 15 - People attending one of the "Steps Talks" lectures (Photograph by Tongyun Zhu Terrie)

inviting and safer, while also fostering greater social interaction compared to its previous condition.

7. Conclusion

Looking at the overall process, we can conclude that the first TAI achieved most of its objectives, demonstrating that the research approach could effectively contribute to the creation of alternative social spaces for the community. Based on the findings from this initial prototype, a more robust participatory process—or at least different engagement strategies—needed to be tested and tailored to the specific local conditions of each intervention site. We had anticipated broader participation, but we were only able to engage shop owners and their clients (including habitual customers and residents) to a certain extent. As a result, we had to adjust our engagement strategy—an unexpected shift, yet one that proved valuable in developing a more comprehensive understanding of this type of process.

During the development of the concept, navigating the bureaucratic aspects with officials from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) proved particularly insightful, as they kindly supported us throughout the pre-implementation phase. One of the key discussions focused on extending the installation period in the selected public space to five weeks—a timeframe that had never been approved before—since we were informed that the typical occupation period usually lasted only one or two days. In this regard, the project provided valuable insight into the regulations and limitations governing these spaces, including the restriction on the use of movable furniture. As a result, we had to request special permission for the installation of our movable seating cubes within the reading space.

Overall, we were highly satisfied with the outcome of this first intervention. Following the dismantling of the library, we had the opportunity to discuss potential long-term improvements with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to enhance and encourage

the usage of this hidden yet valuable Sitting-out Area.

In terms of dissemination and reception, the CWLane Reading Space was featured in major online architecture magazines, including ArchDaily, UrbanNext, and Baunetz Campus. Articles on the project have been published in Spanish, English, German, and Italian. Additionally, it was featured in Artribune's newsletter 'Render', accompanied by an interview with the author. The project was presented as a case study at the 14th Biennale of European Towns and Town Planners in Naples in April and at the 36th AESOP Annual Congress in Paris in July. The project garnered significant international recognition, earning a Special Mention at the 2024 Architizer Awards in the Architecture + Knowledge category, as well as an Honorable Mention in the 2024 Design Educates Awards.

In a context like Hong Kong, where public open spaces are limited and often underutilized by the local population, this study explored an alternative approach to reconnect people with these spaces through the deployment of TAI. The objective was to address the underuse and lack of social interaction in public spaces within older urban areas by establishing a participatory mechanism through which these interventions could strategically tackle key challenges at the district level.

The site-specific nature of these pilot projects, combined with their role as catalysts for initiating upgrades and long-term transformations, sought to respond to specific urban conditions, community needs, and regulatory constraints. At the same time, these initiatives contributed to a broader strategic vision, expanding toward a more city-wide operational approach. We hope that this study will help deepen the understanding of how to mitigate common dysfunctions in public spaces while simultaneously enhancing key qualities such as accessibility, comfort, and the ability to facilitate social interaction.

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