

Dean's Roundup

Friday, November 8th, 2013

Roundup: *Ceiling function*, the mathematical operation of rounding a number up to the next higher integer.

Roundup: a term in American English referring to the process of gathering animals into an area, known as a "Muster" in Australia.

Rounding up: when a helmsman cannot control a boat and it heads into the wind

Roundup: the plan for an invasion of northern France by Allied forces during World War II (WikipediA)

Dean's Roundup: part blog, part bulletin; part honour roll, part curatorial [**cu'ra-to' ri-al** (ky^{oo}r^ə-tô^r'ē-əl, -tô^r')] n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial]

Dear All,

First a big thank you to teachers who donned medieval attire in today's graduation congregation procession and to the Faculty Office support staff who organised the show so smoothly, ably led by Ivan and Joanna. And of course biggest thanks to our students of whom we are so proud.

I was at the American Institute of Architects (HK) awards ceremony this week, admiring our own Anderson Lee's minimalist wedge-shape house design – possibly the only single house design in the competition (and certainly the only building that looked like a giant slice of concrete cheese). The site is a residual plot of land in the corner of an already developed low-rise gated community in Guangdong province. As with most residual plots, it is an awkward shape – a long and impossibly thin triangle and has resisted development probably for technical, design and financing reasons. Threat of resumption by the government induced the owner to seek an experienced and celebrated one-off house designer, which he sourced from HK.

In telling me this story, Anderson asked a profound question: where are the single-house designers in China? He contacted some mainland architect friends and asked them if they had experience on a single house project. None had. A freshly graduated designer in the Mainland is likely to be working on a residential tower, a mall or at the nearest to a house, an estate of townhouses. Single houses are extremely rare amongst the vast acreages of 'commodity housing' built in the Mainland over the past 30 years. The reasons are several and interrelated. Government supplies land for urbanization and therefore controls the pattern of land subdivision. This is entirely stacked in favour of high-density mass-housing. In the relatively few villa estates that buck the economics and policy norms, it is template-designed individual properties that emerge (choose off-plan between 3 designs: Tuscan, Californian and English Tudor). Another reason is that in response to the land planning and subdivision tradition, the construction industry has adapted itself to large-scale production. As Anderson said: "few architectural offices would be interested in one-off house projects because the returns would not match those from designing housing at scale." One suspects also that other features of the industry are not geared to small-scale land development. The transaction costs of lending for standardized apartment purchases are super-low. Banks are likely to be wary of non-standard products where there is no established secondary market (as banks are, for example, with prefabricated houses on the European continent south of Scandinavia – it is easy to get a mortgage for a prefab in Norway because the short building season, when permafrost has melted, makes prefabs very common). Tellingly, Anderson reported problems in hiring construction staff for his cheese-shaped house and in fact only secured them because the land-owner had other projects going on. Builders and tradesmen don't have the skills; those that might are likely to live too far away; and firms are not organized and the industry not structured to support multiple unrelated small projects as a business model.

Anderson's big question to me therefore was 'who will design the one-off houses of the future?'

One answer is that there will be *no* one-off houses in the Mainland's future. Depressing though the thought is, it could be true. As I noted in a recent Deans Roundup, the Beijing Government has recently outlawed low density homes. This means no more villas and probably no more town houses. At least officially. I've spoken to at least one district-level government official in China who told me that they will find ways around the ban. Notwithstanding such infringements, the single house in Chinese cities seems set to become even rarer. Too bad for those 100s of millions of apartment owners who aspire to live at low suburban leafy densities.

Cue *land reform*.

My response to Anderson's question was a prediction that within 10, possibly 15 years, Chinese cities (if consumers have their way) will, in fact, have a vast supply of single occupancy, one-off detached housing. Where will the hundreds of square kilometers of suburban land required to support such a housing sub-market in a single city come from? Answer: currently ex-urban villages.

Take a car out of Shanghai in any direction but east and you drive for 2 – 3 hours through 'ex-urbanized' villages in the countryside. 'Ex-urbanised' in the sense that villagers have torn down their mark 1 homes (original farm houses) and sometimes mark 2 homes (1-2 floor primitive villas) to build 3-4 floor mini-mansions in a range of eclectic styles. Due to the prominence given to decorative gable-ends they typically resemble villages in northern continental Europe, and where they are built around canals as in the coastal lands around Pudong Airport, they could easily be mistaken for carefully manicured Dutch villages. Most of these are designed and built as job lots in the same way that the villas in gated communities tend to be (only the templates are rather more idiosyncratic localized interpretations of exotic vernacular). The ubiquitous presence of these 'high density' single-house villages reveals the spatial extent of the urban land market effect around the core city. These villagers are acting rationally as urban land owners, maximizing capital investment on the land allocated to them by the village committee. They cannot profit from the land by selling so they build as high as they can for the use that locally prevails – own-use or increasingly, rental to weekenders or to illegal subleasing commuters. I have seen 5 floor detached Dutch-English style single homes, but beyond this requires an elevator and in any case, must look odd even to the most unsophisticated village land owner. So make no mistake, these villages stretching a hundred miles or more out of Shanghai are an urban phenomenon.

The land reform question is: how long can the national government hold out in imposing a dual land market on such a heavily backed-up demand for low density single housing living? If it cannot hold out, greater Shanghai will overnight double or quadruple in size as villagers sell these single housing units and plots to outwardly mobile commuters. Government will eventually have to respond by building commuter railways and expressways (many of the expressways are there already, serving inter-provincial traffic).

Many of the tens of thousands of Chinese 'MucMansions' ('MaoMansions?') in Shanghai's exurbia will, I think, be torn down to build 'mark 4' village houses. These may be smaller – if I were a village landowner in 2020, with the right to sell my land newly given me by a land reform law, I would probably demolish and build two houses, or cooperate with other in the village to readjust land so that each household could build three. Some of the villages in better locations will become sought after for des-res homes.

Cue Anderson Lee and others interested in variegating the Chinese cityscape with detached homes of bespoke design. Who will train Chinese architects to respond to the mass demand for individual designs when the gate goes up? Anderson thinks it will be Taiwanese architects, who have a stronger experience in small-scale home-building.

It sounds to me like a great niche for the designers in HKUrbanLab. And who will help restructure Mainland China's construction industry labour, materials and capital markets?

Congratulations to everyone listed below for their writing, designing, speaking, advising, researching and publishing. And to the 31 colleagues who have submitted GRF research bids – up hugely on last year.

Chris

¹ thanks to Winnie and Cordelia for the Cantonese interpretation

Department of Architecture

1. Dr. Lee Ho Yin (ACP Director)
 - invited by the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage to give a public lecture, entitled "From Silent Film to Blue Movies: The Rise and Fall of Yau Ma Tei Theatre" (in Cantonese), at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, on November 2nd, 2013. (http://cache.org.hk/blog/YMT_cinema_talk/)
2. Tom Verebes
 - his practice, OCEAN CN, has been invited by competition jurors/organisers, Tadao Ando and Kengo Kuma, to participate in a two-stage "Invited Design Competition" for an urban landscape and architectural development zone adjacent to Osaka JR Station, in Japan
 - delivered an Evening Lecture on October 31st, titled, 'Masterplanning the Adaptive City', at The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Macau.

Department of Real Estate and Construction

1. Mr. Liang Cong (PhD student)
 - gave a talk "Measuring the overall benefits of BIM implementation in housing projects" at HKHA HQ on November 1st, 2013 (I am happy to see that without my accompanying a PhD student of ours was able to step in HKHA and gave a talk to those most experienced frontline practitioners – Wilson)
2. Goh Cheng Siew
 - presented a paper "Goh, C.S., Rowlinson, S. and Yip, B. (2013). An Exploration of Stakeholders' Perceptions of Sustainable Construction. The 6th International Conference on Sustainable Development in Building and Environmental, Chongqing, October 25th -27th, 2013.
3. Dr. Wilson Lu
 - Published a paper "Ye, K.H., Shen, L.Y., and Lu, W.S. (2013). A Discriminant Model for Measuring Competition Intensity of Construction Market. Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management, forthcoming.
 - Gave a talk "BIMatizing construction project management: theories and empirics" at South China University of Technology (SCUT) on November 1st, 2013.
4. Professor Steve Rowlinson
 - was invited to delivered a speech of "Heat Stress in Construction Workers: A Review of Best Practice" in The 6th International Conference on Sustainable Development in Building and Environmental, October 25 - 27th, 2013 in Chongqing, which was organised by Chongqing University and China Green Building Council.
 - represented HKU at the Inaugural Meeting of the International Green Campus Alliance

Department of Urban Planning and Design

I. Dr. Roger Chan

- As the academic advisor to the CPD programme of the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (Shenzhen) entitled “Urban Planning System in Hong Kong”, Dr. Chan started the week-long programme with an excursion to the Tai Tam Reservoir Road and the Tai Tam Inner Bay SSCI held on November 3rd, 2013. The walk was joined by 25 members of the CPD course. Mr. K.K. Ling, Director of Planning and graduate of our MSc Urban Planning, served as the honorary guide.
- Dr. Chan and Director Mr. Cai Zhen (CAUPD) visited the Faculty KE project on “The Engineering History of the Tai Tam Upper Reservoir”.



2. Professor Rebecca Chiu

- chaired a workshop session and gave a report on the session at the *Hong Kong Housing Society 65th Anniversary International Conference* on “Housing in an Ageing Community” and, organized by the Hong Kong Housing Society, from October 30th – 31st, 2013 in Hong Kong.
- was invited to give a presentation entitled “The Airport New Town of Hong Kong: Implications for Urban Planning and Real Estate Market” at the *International Conference “The Influence of Large-scale Urban Development on the Real Estate Market”* in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Department of Urban Planning and Real Estate, Chung Ang University, November 1st, 2013, Seoul, South Korea.
- Commissioned by the Hong Kong Housing Society, Prof. Rebecca Chiu has undertaken a contract research on “A Comprehensive Study on Housing in an Ageing Community” as Principal Investigator, to be completed by November 2014. Other team members include Prof. Bo-sin Tang and Ms. Jacqueline Tse of CUSUP, Ms. Tris Kee from the Department of Architecture and two other academic staff in the Department of Social Administration and Social Work. The funding amounts to HK\$1.93 million.

3. Prof. Bo-sin Tang, Dr. Raul Lejano, Dr. Weifeng Li, Dr. Feng Zhang and Dr. Jianxiang Huang

- a group of Russian delegation led by the Vice Mayor of Irkutsk City, Alexei Almuamedov, and CEO of Centre for Strategic North West Research, Mr. Vladimir Knjagin visited the Centre of Urban Studies and Urban Planning (CUSUP) and had a roundtable discussion about research and education with CUSUP fellows represented by Prof. Bo-sin Tang, Dr. Raul Lejano, Dr. Weifeng Li, Dr. Feng Zhang and Dr. Jianxiang Huang, on November 4th, 2013.



4. Professor Anthony Yeh

- was re-elected Secretary –General (2013-2015) of the Asian Planning Schools Association (APSA) in its 11th General Assembly that was held during the *12th International Congress of Asian Planning Schools Association* organized by the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University, from November 1st to 3rd, 2013 in Taipei.
- This year is the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Association the 2nd International Congress of APSA that was held at the University of Hong Kong in 1993. APSA at present is part of the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) which was formed after the *1st World Planning Schools Congress* that was held at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning of Tongji University, Shanghai, China, in 2001.

5. Prof. Anthony Yeh, Prof. Bo-sin Tang and Mr. Jiejing Wang (PhD Student)

- attended the *12th International Congress of Asian Planning Schools Association* organized by the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University, from November 1st to 3rd, 2013 in Taipei. Mr. Wang and Prof. Yeh presented a paper on “Urban System Development and Rise of Mega-city Regions in China, 2000-2010” and Prof. Tang , “From Fragmented Open Space to Networked Open Space” (co-authored with Mr. Darren Man-wai Cheung).

6. Dean Webster

- gave the following talk:

Webster CJ (2013) **Refutation and the Scientific Knowledge base of Urban Planning**. Keynote lecture given to the 10th anniversary forum of China’s top planning journal - Urban Planning Forum, held at Tongji University, on November 2nd, 2013.

- had the following paper published:
Cooper C, Orford S, Webster C, Jones C B, 2013, "Exploring the ripple effect and spatial volatility in house prices in England and Wales: regressing interaction domain cross-correlations against reactive statistics" *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* **40**(5) 763 – 782. Abstract: In this study we conduct an exploratory spatiotemporal analysis of recent UK housing-market data 2000–06, fine grained both in space and in time. We present firstly the exploratory technique itself, and secondly an overview of patterns found in the dataset. A broadly scoped metamodel is created which points towards fruitful avenues for further investigation and understanding of the driving forces behind price propagation in the housing market. At the core of this model is an 8850 × 8850 cross-correlation matrix representing price linkage between different areas, which is

analyzed by a custom regression engine. Hence this is the first study to unify both local and regional house-price modelling, and the first to look for a quantitative explanation of the structure of any house-price interaction matrix on a large scale. Findings corroborate existing research on the ripple effect and spatial volatility, and point towards mechanisms through which these might arise, as a combination of local interaction and market segmentation broken by lifecycle migration patterns.

Shanghai Study Centre

I. Bert de Muynck (Assistant Professor, co-director of Moving Cities)

- ABITARE China magazine invited MovingCities to guest edit its summer issue on the topic of "(re) Design Heritage Strategies of Urban Renewal and the Chinese City." MovingCities took this opportunity to address one of the most urgent issues to discuss when dealing with the urban, architectural, cultural, social and economical development of the city of Beijing (北京): heritage, preservation, adaptive strategies and the hutong (胡同). Hence "HUTONG /Adaptation" was chosen as the unifying theme, wishing to approach this much debated issue by bringing together a great variety of local and international professionals from the conservation/preservation design and architecture fields who have long worked with this subject matter, therefore forming visions and highlighting proposed solutions which need to be confronted and divulged for/with a wider public. Amongst other contributors include Hirako Yutaka (平子丰) / Tibet Heritage Fund (THF); Matthew Hu (胡新宇); Hua Xinmin (华新); Prof. Zhang Jie (张杰) / School of Architecture of Tsinghua University, Beijing; Liang Jingyu (梁井宇) / approach architecture studio (场域建筑) and Aric Chen (陈伯康).

More information and background:

<http://movingcities.org/movingmemos/hutong-adaptation-abitare-china/>