

Conservation as a Way of Regenerating Urban Life



Shanghai's skyline is made up of modern tall buildings juxtaposed against historic streets.

Source: xinwen, qq

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Heritage preservation and economic regeneration can work hand in hand for better urban outcomes. This was the case put forth by Dr Wang Lin at her CLC lecture on 21 April 2018. The architecture professor from the Shanghai Jiao Tong University drew on her experience of working in Shanghai's planning authority to demonstrate how the city has kept heritage areas in the everyday fabric of city life.

"If we preserve where we should preserve, we can build something new. Regeneration and conservation can be combined to make a better life for the future," she said. "We preserve culture, the building, but we also need to meet the needs of the future."

Today, Shanghai has defined more than 40 historical areas, including one third of its central downtown. These include the old Shanghai town area, the Bund and the Hensan-Fuxin area. The last two were British and French concessions in the 19th century respectively, and both have been readapted for modern use. Besides drawing up historic areas and designating individual buildings for preservation, the Shanghai authorities also define how these areas are

“I always say conservation and regeneration [are] the same issue.”

- Dr Wang Lin, Professor, Architecture Department, Design School, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

regenerated and redeveloped through planning and project permissions for new developments.

Such strategies and policies are vital to address any conflicts that arise from having conservation and regeneration, explains Dr Wang. In Shanghai, the authorities have also developed detailed guidelines over the last two decades to ensure conservation adds to the experience of the city. Besides defining zoning requirements for the rates of floor areas, building coverage and development heights, conservation and urban design guidelines provide for setbacks from the streets, building scale, texture, colour and material as well as pedestrian access.

“We pay attention to the landscape, not only individual buildings,” she said. More than 150 streets in Shanghai have been defined as historic and road widening is restricted in these areas so as to preserve a human scale and historic memory. “Historic streets are important for the image of the city. For most people, it’s not about individual buildings. If you walk [on the street, it’s about] the scale [of developments], the texture of the streets. If you destroy historic streets, you destroy the landscape of these areas.”

Managing the Impact of Regeneration

As part of the conservation process, it is important to work with relevant stakeholders such as government agencies and the community of a place. Dr Wang shared how the government garnered public feedback that shaped the design of the Bund tunnel and the Suzhou Creek warehouses. The latter even won a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Ward for Cultural Heritage Conservation in 2004.

The Tianzifang area is another example where a lighter touch from the authorities and community involvement became an effective strategy for conservation. The area comprising of traditional residential layout known as linong, saw an influx of artists and other creatives in the early 2000s. While older residents favoured redevelopment, the establishment of new creative industries in the area gave the authorities pause. They allowed the local community to evolve new uses for the area. Today, Tianzifang is a bustling arts and culture enclave. But the area has also become gentrified and commercialised, and the authorities have yet to figure a solution for the overcrowding.

When asked about the impacts of tourism on historic areas during the dialogue session, Dr Wang said tourism is always at odds with historic preservation. “[B]ut generally speaking, when you preserve a building, and a



Dr Wang shared several notable examples in Shanghai to illustrate conservation ideas.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



The lecture attracted a vast range of audience keen to learn about Shanghai's conservation methods.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



After her lecture, URA's Conservation Director Kelvin Ang moderated a lively discussion.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities



The audience enjoyed a hearty and candid discussion with Dr Wang.
Source: The Centre for Liveable Cities

lot of people take note of it, maybe that's a way to educate people," she said. One example of managing this is the Forbidden Palace in Beijing, where access is controlled through registrations and scheduling for better visitor experiences.

Dr Wang also touched on the need to conserve a city's industrial heritage, such as how a former steel plant was re-adapted into the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts building. She added that cities should preserve residential areas and locations where there are strong social memories too.

"We preserve some things not only for their beauty, but also because [they relate] to the memories of a group of people," she said.

About the Speakers



SPEAKER

Dr Wang Lin

Professor,
Architecture Department,
Design School,
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Wang Lin is a Professor in the Architecture Department at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a researcher of China Urban Governance Institute, and the Director of the Center for Urban Studies focusing on regeneration, preservation and innovation of cities. She has played key roles in urban planning, including the Master Planning of Shanghai, strategy planning of the Shanghai metropolitan area and the redevelopment of Shanghai waterfronts and conservation planning of Shanghai historical areas.



MODERATOR

Kelvin Ang

Director,
Conservation Department (Conservation Management),
Urban Redevelopment Authority

Kelvin Ang has over a decade of experience in architecture and conservation at the URA. URA is Singapore's national planning, land use and building conservation authority. He has led a multidisciplinary team to deliver several conservation projects including the gazette of over 700 buildings since 2003. His portfolio includes public education and partnership programmes, overseeing Place Management efforts and enforcement work.

About the CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. The CLC Lecture Series is a platform for urban experts to share their knowledge with other practitioners. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>