

Asian Public Space since 1945: From Mao to the Mall and Beyond

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While the United Nations predicts the shift of the majority of the urban world population to cities in Asia, the form of the city and its public spaces are also changing. This short survey tracks the retreat of the European imperial space systems as Asian nations gained their independence and then the multcentred, global corporate system of public space-making that emerged as the dominant system from 1990-2008. This survey also tracks the appearance of a specifically Asian rural-urban space-making system of urban villages that has emerged as a long cultural continuity in and around Asian cities.

A shifting cast of urban actors, each of which thought their way of making space was the best, employed four models of urban space: the Metropolis, the Megalopolis, the Fragmented Metropolis, and the Megacity/Metacity. It is tempting to say that each model followed the next at 15-year intervals, but this ignores the different rates of development in different places.¹ All are simultaneously present in the Asian city making a simple narrative extremely difficult. Different actors hybridize and mix models at different times and in different places, this spatial heterogeneity gives the Asian city great resilience and a varied capacity for innovation at multiple scales. The four thematic models form parallel timelines or narratives, one for each model, weaving around each other over time as the shift in power source (as diagrammed in the illustration below).

After the 2008 crash there is reason to pause and re-evaluate this highly successful, emerging Asian urban system and its public spaces, especially in view of the likely implications of energy supplies and climate change on key Asian cities located in coastal and river valley situations. [fig. 1]

Public Space in the Asian Metropolis, 1945-1970

In 1945 the Forbidden Palace in Beijing represented the old Asian imperial public space system, a remnant of a metropolitan model of the state capital city that had survived for centuries in India and China, with their varying dynasties and surrounding vassal states offering tributes.² In these ancient systems a single sacred centre lay in a megablock system at the heart of a hierarchy of public spaces that descended from the emperor in the temple palace, via nested approach courtyards and squares opening out to wide approach avenues, often including canal systems, linking to smaller towns and outlying villages. European and Japanese empires overlaid their versions of commercial enterprise and state organization on these earlier imperial models. Twentieth-century colonial examples of the monumental approach axis and courtyard spatial system include the British Imperial Viceroy's Palace in New Delhi, built in the 1930s, or the Japanese Empire's gridded administrative campuses added to the side of older towns as in Seoul or Taipei.³

After the end of empire the leaders of each of the Asian independent states sought to transform these monumental colonial public realms into a new symbolic sphere. Nehru, for instance, employed Le Corbusier to design one of the six Indian New Towns intended to house some of the 17 million refugees made homeless by the 1947 British India-Pakistan partition (and also jump-start an Indian industrial revolution). In an economy without automobiles, Le Corbusier planned a city based on a 1.0 x 1.5-mile grid of broad highways, with deep tree-lined reservations around each megablock district, containing four or five superblocks that Corbusier and his associates described as villages. [fig. 2] The Greek architect-planner Constantine Doxiadis employed a similar auto-scaled 1.25 x 1.25-mile (2 km x 2 km) scheme of megablocks in laying out Islamabad (1961), the new capital of Pakistan.

Le Corbusier's plans did not show the existing agricultural villages on the site, but did preserve the lines of watercourses as linear parks, resulting in a Garden City on a vast scale. Following modernist principles, Le Corbusier also segregated the monumental administrative centre from the commercial market centre, also separating the industrial estates. The heavy state symbolism and colossal scale of the public spaces in the isolated monumental campus has proved difficult to inhabit, with neighbouring villages playing cricket and grazing cows there. Punjabi nationalists divided their local symbolic space from the federal space with a high wire fence.⁴

The dream of leaders such as Mao, Nehru, or Sukarno (in oil-rich Indonesia), was to create a new monumental public realm, to represent the new government in a new metropolis. Moscow, the communist world capital, often formed a potent model for this postcolonial transformation. Mao, for instance, rejected Liang's Sicheng proposal to preserve the old city of Beijing and its walls as a museum and build a modern administrative New

Town beside it. Instead he chose to follow the Soviet model of new rings and radial avenues around the compact old core, with new towns and factories on the perimeter linked by public transportation and subways.⁵ Within the old city fabric the nationalization of land allowed the housing of multiple families within the traditional single family courtyard houses of the Beijing *hutong* or Shanghai *lilong* lane systems within urban blocks. This vastly increased the residential population. Public toilets and bath houses provided essential water and sanitary services for these traditional areas, where tea houses, bars, and restaurants also survived at a small scale along the perimeter walls.⁶

The new central public space of Tiananmen Square, opened up in 1956, created an enormous new public realm that could accommodate a million people, twice the size of the Red Square in Moscow. From the front balcony of the Forbidden City, Mao could address this mass audience via a loudspeaker system manufactured at the new Dàshānzi electronics factory town (1957), built with technical advice from East German engineers, now known as 798, the Beijing arts district.⁷ This factory town housed 12,000 people at its peak, representing a typical Maoist *danwei* 'work unit' with modern factory sheds, prefabricated concrete panel housing blocks set in gardens, central dining halls, recreation centres, schools, hospitals, a cinema, and even its own electrical generation plant, water supply, and sewage system, housed in a megablock of over 160 acres (64 hectares).⁸

The public avenues connecting the old city core and peripheral factory or other public enclaves, like the university campus, military installations, or the airport, were enormous, as in Moscow, far wider than the Parisian boulevards of Haussmann that were their model. The enlarged east-west Chang'an Boulevard, for instance, linking to Tiananmen Square, was 16 lanes wide with 30-ft green set-back reservations of public space on either side, creating

City Model Timelines.

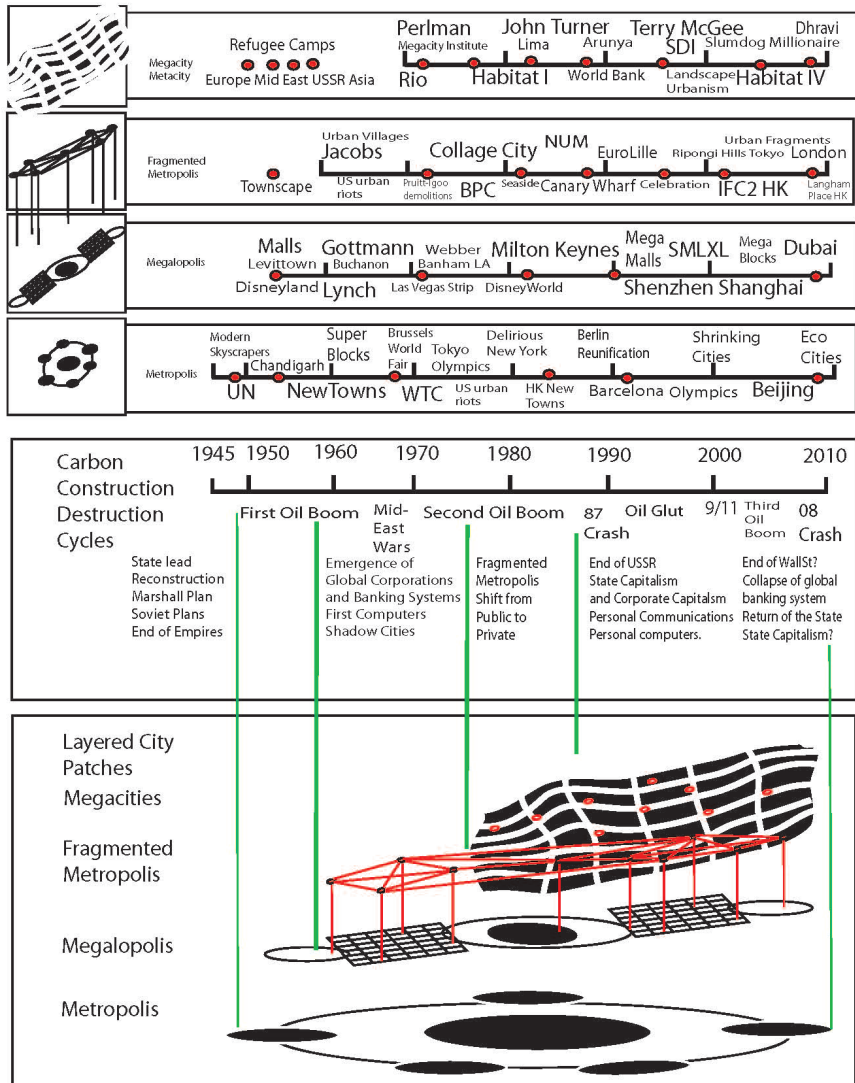


Fig. 1: Diagram of timelines of Urban Design Models 1945-2012; D.G.Shane (from *Urban Design Since 1945; a global perspective*). © D.G.Shane.

a street 1,000 ft wide with public administration palaces, grand hotels, etcetera, arranged along its edges. Agricultural work units in villages in the surrounding green belts and Chinese countryside also provided a new communal space for peasant farm collectivization, as in the Soviet model, resulting in large agricultural cluster settlements with shared facilities among the old field and irrigation patterns.

The European welfare state did pose an alternative to this early anti-colonial reaction against big cities as colonial extractive devices. Abercrombie's 1944 Greater London Plan, based on Ebenezer Howard's 1898 ring radial pattern of New Towns, influenced colonial Hong Kong's planning after the 1954 Shep Kip Mei fire. This disaster made 54,000 shanty dwellers homeless on Christmas Day, beginning the city's mass production housing programme, also influencing Singapore and Tokyo New Town plans of the 1960s. These Asian cities rejected Howard's Garden City cottage morphology (enshrined in Levittown, see below), choosing instead the high-density slab and tower block designs of the Swedish welfare state, exemplified by Vallingby (1953) New Town outside Stockholm. Here housing towers surrounded an open-air shopping mall and small theatre area with a church over a subway station connecting to the city centre.

Vallingby's public urban space posed an important model for American mall designers and Soviet planners alike. The associated 1952 Hotorget development in downtown Stockholm over the same subway line provided another important urban space innovation.⁹ This combined a pedestrianized mall in a layered base podium with five skyscraper towers, considerably developing the new urban public-space street section pioneered by Skidmore Owings Merrill at the Lever House, New York (1951). This multilayered mall matrix, with underground by-pass roads, a recessed public space for political meetings, public theatres, street markets,

and a Pompidou-like art gallery space provided an important model for Asian developers, in Tokyo and Hong Kong, even being copied in Moscow in Khrushchev's Novy Arbat Street (1960s).

Today the monumental scale of the modern communist metropolis still survives in a pure form in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, but even here reform influences are evident. The Beijing Olympics showed how the monumental dimension of the metropolis could be modernized at a massive new scale in the Olympic Park, which is aligned with the Forbidden City.¹⁰ Elsewhere in Asia the monumental space impulse remains as a colonial trace in grand boulevards and public squares leading to government palaces in Hanoi, in Seoul, or Taipei, or linked to royal palaces and temples as in Bangkok. Occasionally, as in Chandigarh, the grand postcolonial public spaces failed and were abandoned, more often they became choked with either traffic or tourists, sometimes both as in Bangkok or Beijing.

In the Cold War years New York stood as the commercial, dynamic metropolis opposite the centrally planned communist city.¹¹ From 1945 to 1990, Moscow strictly controlled skyscrapers as isolated, skyline markers, which were not allowed to form clusters as on Wall Street. Contemporary Pudong, across from the colonial-era Bund in Shanghai, demonstrates the continuing power of the New York metropolitan image in communist countries after reform. Here corporate skyscrapers cluster on a peninsular to dominate the skyline of the Asian port city, as in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Mumbai. The monumental scale of Pudong skyscrapers and their layout around a green circle, with their base podiums only now being incrementally connected to public transport by raised shopping mall walkways, provides a salutary lesson on the surprising potential for hybridization of public space typologies in the Asian metropolitan model.

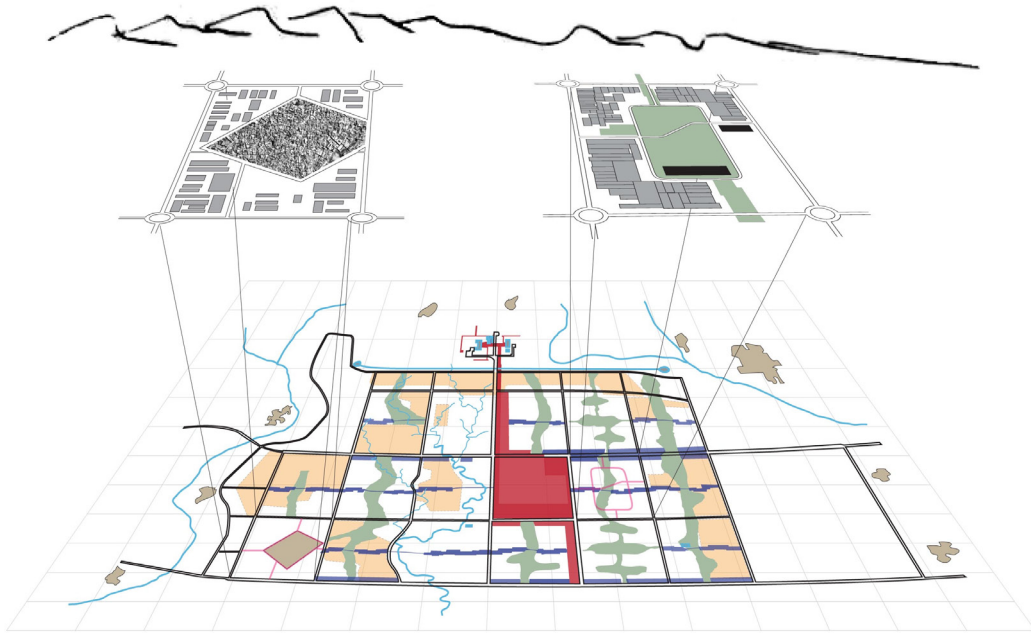


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2: Le Corbusier, P. Jeanneret, Fry and Drew, 1950's, Chandigarh Plan, redrawn by D.G. Shane and U. Wegman to show pre-existing villages not included in the masterplan set within diamonds inside 1 mile square highway megablocks. © D.G.Shane and U. Wegman, 2011.

Fig. 3: Milton Keynes plan, 1968; Redrawn by D.G. Shane and U. Wegman to show the historic villages and stream beds preserved within the one kilometer square highway megablocks. © D.G.Shane and U. Wegman, 2011.

Asian Public Space in the Megalopolis and Fragmented Metropolis, 1960-2010

In *Megalopolis* (1961), Jean Gottmann defined the territory of his study as 'the urbanized North Eastern Seaboard of the United States', an area containing 32 million people. His analysis incorporated an enormous regional planning perspective. Gottmann knew where the food and water came from, which suburbs had been built when, and how many flights and phone calls connected Boston, Washington, and New York. New broadcasting systems like television held this area together, carrying advertising for commercial products and outlets, supermarkets, and malls to the dispersed single-family homes as in the 4,400-acre (17.8-km²) Levittown, Long Island, New York (1947-1951).

Contemporary American highway engineers built a low-rise, elevated highway through the heart of Boston in the mid-1950s, whose impact was described by Kevin Lynch.¹² Lynch proposed a system of new urban space notation to preserve the neighbouring historic Faneuil Hall Market District, and to build a new government centre across the highway towards Beacon Hill. In Tokyo at the time of the 1964 Olympics, highway engineers built high-rise, 4 lane, elevated roads 60 ft (20 m) above the canal system that penetrated the core of the historic merchant city area. In the same period 1000 ft wide highways reservations with forest side reservations formed a 1 x 1 km (0.62 x 0.62 mi) grid dominating the plan of the last British New Town, Milton Keynes (1968), where architect Derek Walker innovated with an American-style Central Shopping Centre as a city centre.¹³ [fig. 3]. During the 1970s Tokyo's elevated highway system became the default Asian solution, cutting through Seoul's shanties above the Cheonggyecheon Stream (1976), flying across central Taipei, and surrounding central Bangkok. In an Asian innovation the areas under these elevated highways often became parks, as in the Yanzhong Park extending west beneath the Yan'an East Expressway (1996) interchange in Shanghai.

Gottmann mapped the transformation of New York, the premier, global, commercial metropolis from a ring-radial city into the new linear format of the megalopolis. New forms of urban public space emerged on the metropolitan periphery. Architect Victor Gruen (1964), for example, described how the typical American regional dumbbell mall needed half a million people within 20 minutes driving time, 40 acres for parking and a 600-ft-long (200-m) pedestrian shopping armature between two 'anchor' department stores, for success. This pattern proliferated later across Asia, as well as drive-in cinemas and strip malls, for instance along Rama I Road in Bangkok during the Vietnam War.¹⁴ Gruen confronted the problem of the introduction of highways as new public spaces in central city areas in the USA in his plan for the pedestrianization of downtown Fort Worth (1955), with an inner ring road, towers on podiums as in Hotoroget and multiple, peripheral parking lots (unsuccessfully applied in Rochester New York, 1956).

In contrast, Kenzo Tange (1960) proposed that the new city was a vast metabolism consuming enormous amounts of energy that should be built out on an enormous highway grid over Tokyo Bay. Compact, high-density, A-section megastructural residential neighbourhoods would house its multiple uses above the highways.¹⁵ Tokyo had grown rapidly after the beginning of the Korean War and the Cold War from the early 1950s onwards. At the World Design Conference in Tokyo, Tange's student Fumihiko Maki (1960) drew a simple diagram illustrating the old Beaux-Arts and modernist pavilion layout systems, the massive scale of the new megastructural city, and contrasted both with the 'collective form' of a small-scale, village-like structure made up of many fractals. This small-scale fabric was similar to the many suburbs being built around Tokyo along the railway lines with each house filling its lot but not touching its neighbour because of earthquake regulations.¹⁶

While Tange did not build his megastructures in Tokyo Bay, architect Kim Swoogeun built the mile-long Namdaemun Market (1966) mixed-use megastructure in Seoul, South Korea, which was later invaded by the informal electronics market that took over its parking lot and section.¹⁷ In Singapore, the Design Partnership built the Golden Mile (1973) megastructure with a Tange-like split-A-frame section of housing with the addition of a commercial mall below, now occupied by Thai traders. In Tokyo the national railway company began to develop the land above its five ring stations around the Imperial Palace as high-density nodes in fragmented, incremental, megastructural formations, as in Shinjuku (begun with the Kieo Plaza Hotel tower in 1971).

In Shinjuku pedestrian decks and bridges over the railway connected mixed-use office towers that contained railway stations, multilevel shopping malls, department stores, exhibition halls, universities, hospitals, hotels, and residential apartments, beside older parks.¹⁸ An earlier low-rise cheap electronics area survived beside the station, as did earlier villages as a red-light (Kabuukicho), geisha district (Kagurazaka), and entertainment districts (Golden Gai). Tange later added the twin towers of a huge new Metropolitan Government Center (1991), whose base contained a double-layered megablock podium, with a huge new open-air public space inside double-layered connector roads with two-level garden sidewalks joining the different levels. Architect Riken Yamamoto further developed this realm of double-layered new public-private urban space in his highly successful mixed-use Jianwai Soho Beijing (2008), where small offices as well as apartments are mixed in with the towers.

In Asia the megalopolis took on a fundamentally different form from the American original, because oil was expensive, land was restricted, and cars were expensive. As a result Asian cities tended to concentrate and cluster their development around transport hubs, especially railway, commercial

developments as in Japan where large companies undertook the unified, modern developments.¹⁹ In the American model the inner-city metropolis decayed as a result of the rapid corridor of suburban growth between Boston and Washington. New York, for instance, lost its tax base, industrial jobs, and population as urban riots erupted in the late 1960s and the city approached bankruptcy in 1976. Under the influence of Jane Jacobs's (1961) arguments in defence of urban villages, the New York City Council rejected the City Planning Commission's 1968 Master Plan with its Robert Moses highways. In response, the newly formed Urban Design Group proposed a system of Special District micro-plans that included a process of village and neighbourhood community consultation as well as developer inputs.²⁰ The system proved extremely successful and was extended by the state, without participatory component, to Battery Park City, a New Town-in-town planned in 1978.

Battery Park City became a global model for the Fragmented Metropolis based on Special Districts and street corridors in small blocks. Cooper and Eckstut's winning design reintroduced the traditional street grid and 1916 zoning code controls, recreating the public spaces of the traditional New York city-block structure. As the city was nearly bankrupt, this incremental approach made financing easier for developers who also benefitted from innovative public-private-hybrid state-backed bonds. In the centre of Battery Park City, Cesar Pelli designed the World Financial Center (1985-1988) as a Hong King-like mall podium-and-tower complex with sky bridges between blocks.²¹ This core set a global model for gigantic urban fragments, a piece of the New York global financial metropolis copied in London at Canary Wharf (1990-1991), in Tokyo (2000), in Hong Kong (International Finance Centre 1 and 2 by Pelli, 2003), and even in Moscow (International Business Center, begun 2001), Shanghai (World Financial Center by Kohn, Pederson, Fox, 2007) and Beijing (World Financial

Center by Pelli, 2009).

Walt Disney's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT, 1982) in his Florida mega-theme park development demonstrated the enclave logic of the new global urban space-making system, based on urban fragments and associated villages in global networks. [fig. 4] Visitors to EPCOT entered past corporate pavilions that emphasized the connective power of corporate America in the global system with General Motors providing transport, AT&T providing communication systems, and Kodak storing our memories. After this entry, visitors confronted a lake, symbolizing the ocean, surrounded by a selection of old empires, like China, Britain, France, Italy, or Japan, all accessible by ferry. Each nation became a village street stage set with a vertical element, the Eiffel Tower for France, Big Ben for Britain, and so forth. Disney designers reversed the spatial relationship between the Saint Mark's Campanile and the Doge's Palace, for instance, to show that the new space was a simulacra, a transformed memory of the old city.²² Las Vegas casinos copied this global marketing technique as at the \$1.8 billion Venetian Casino (1999), with its second floor replica of the Grand Canal below the housing tower. Macao casinos repeated this same pattern of urban village simulacra on an even grander mega-scale (2007).

As Saskia Sassen pointed out in *Global Cities; New York, London, Tokyo* (1991), such global hubs often depended for their servicing on nearby, hidden ghettos of cheap immigrant labour, often contained in illegal urban village settlements. Such settlements could even occur in China's planned economy as in the first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Shenzhen (1980), across the border from Hong Kong. Here the symbolism of the enormous public spaces of Mao's Beijing were transformed into a central park surrounded by multilane highways. Milton Keynes' designers Llewelyn Davis Weeks and Partners became advisors to the local Planning Institute,

but no limit was set on the existing Maoist farm collectives captured by the highway network. These villages grew into informal, mini-high-rise clusters housing up to 60 per cent of the many illegal workers who worked in the factories without a proper *hukou* or residential permit. Urbanus (2007) proposed to upgrade these ill-served, self-built urban villages by introducing new roof-top communal facilities, bath houses, solar panels, schools, and community gardens in El Lissitzky-like 'Skyhooks' (1920) that preserved the housing below. [fig. 5]

Asian Public Space in the Megacity/Metacity, 1976-2010

Janice Perlman first used the term *Megacity* in her Berkeley PhD thesis to describe Rio de Janeiro and other Latin American cities where informal *favelas* were unmapped but constituted up to 60 per cent of the city.²³ At that time most megacities, defined as having 8 million inhabitants, were either European metropolitan capitals or in North America, Mexico City being one exception. The United Nations accepted the new term and enlarged its definition, first to 10 then 12 million, tracking the shift of megacities from Europe to Asia. The UN has continued to enlarge the scale of the megacity defined in 2011 as megacity regions of 120 million, as exemplified by the Pearl River Delta (PRD), which includes Hong Kong.

At this scale the city becomes a digital construct, a network of statistics that is hard to see on the ground except as a satellite image of urban night lights strung around the world. The Dutch group MVRDV pointed to the conceptual abstraction of this approach in the 2000 Metacity/Datatown project, in which all the information about world urbanization was projected into a virtual data cube. The result was that a single virtual global city, the Metacity, appeared as a series of interactive layers of data inside the cube, a space that could be entered in the original exhibition.²⁴ The inspiration for this dense cube of data was MVRDV's earlier

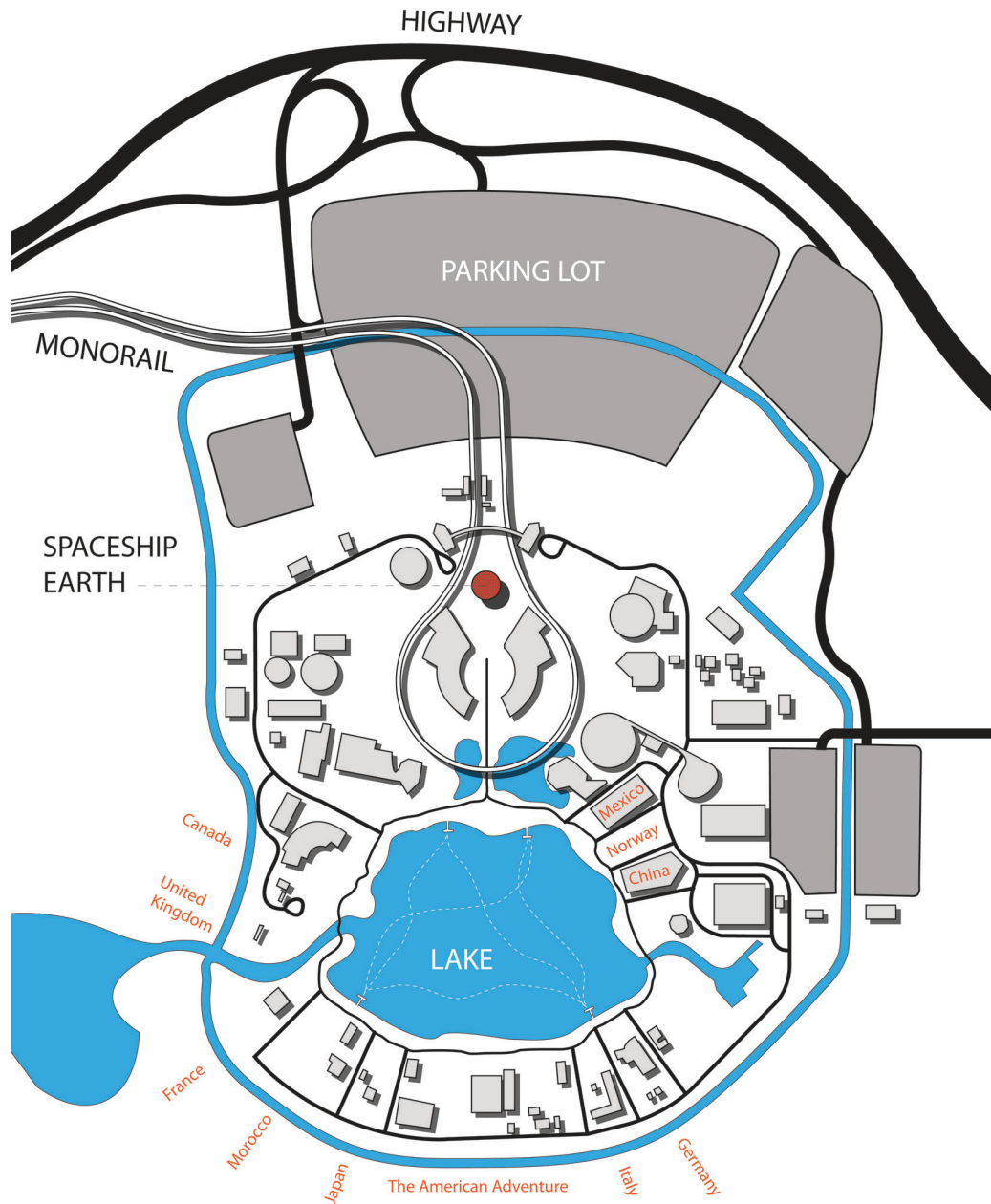


Fig. 4: Disney's Epcot Plan 1982; Redrawn by D.G. Shane and U. Wegman to show the urban villages representing the old European empires, located around a lake with ferries, approached via the ATT corporate communications pavilion (red dot), sited between the General Electric and General Motors Pavilions. © D.G. Shane and U. Wegman, 2011.

research in FAR MAX (1998) on Kowloon's Walled City, a hyper-dense, illegal, self-built urban village demolished by the British authorities in 1998. This data-driven metaphor of the close-packed, three-dimensional city of information was very different from the 'global village' imagined by media theorist Marshall McLuhan.²⁵

Canadian geographer Terry McGee described Asian public space as an unusual network that mixed rural and urban characteristics in a new spatial network, naming it the 'desakota', an Indonesian term meaning village-city.²⁶ McGee's recognition of a new urban territory of dispersal altered the definition of a city in Asian terms. McGee wrote about Jakarta, the capital of the former Dutch colony of oil-rich Indonesia, where colonial and then postcolonial planning had mixed patches of rice-based agricultural *kampungs* (villages) in among factory areas, close to the linear axis of growth that extended from port to central business district. McGee's diagrams identified the desakota as a peri-urban area beyond the edge of the colonial city, usually in river valleys before the 'wild' territory of mountains began (an analysis linked to Patrick Geddes 'valley section' in his *Cities in Evolution*).²⁷

McGee highlighted informal 'grey' areas of complex negotiation where new urban publics and spaces, including virtual spaces in new communication systems, could emerge, dependent on a high degree of personal mobility by bike, motor-bike, bus, or ferry. Desakota regions were extremely flexible, as they industrialized and modernized, excess agricultural labour could switch to the factories or small offices. Desakota areas were also spatially heterogeneous, hosting big factories or big-box retail in hyper-modern enclaves, but also containing medium-size firms and small-scale businesses, besides the housing associated with agriculture and industrial needs.²⁸ McGee's early diagrams showed a generic postcolonial condition that he and other scholars extended through spatial network analysis

from Indonesia to India, Thailand, Taiwan,²⁹ Japan,³⁰ and finally China.³¹

The public space of these new Asian urban areas looked nothing like the monumental city of the compact state-dominated metropolis or the intense commercial sprawl of the megalopolis overlain with metropolitan fragments at strategic intervals. In 2003 in announcing the megacity, the United Nations Habitat sounded an alarm about the dangers of the megacity and its messy, mixed-use public spaces and lack of services of their 'megaslums', a theme echoed by Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums*.³² The United Nations and Davis pointed to Dhavari in Mumbai as the exemplary megaslum housing 1 million people, threatened with development because of its proximity to the World Financial Center across the street.³³

David Satterthwaite pointed out that, based on United Nations figures, 92 per cent of the future urban population will live in cites of 1 to 2 million, only 8 per cent in megacities.³⁴ This makes the future more manageable as municipal authorities and NGOs can work together to solve situations locally. Satterthwaite also pointed out that the definition of what constituted a city varied from country to country, and from continent to continent. Satterthwaite placed great faith in bottom-up, Internet and publicity savvy NGOs like the Mumbai-based Shanty Dwellers International (SDI), which understood the role of villages in Asia, enabling the BBC to present Dhavari as a combination of urban villages; a fishing village, a farming village, a pottery manufacturing village, and an electronics recycling village.³⁵ Some inhabitants were very poor, some middle class, most inhabited self-built houses on tiny alleyways, but some inhabited government-built slab and tower blocks. The result was a heterogeneous and chaotic mixture of village patches in a river estuary lacking proper water supply and sewage, safe electrical service, and normal municipal services, schools, and hospitals, similar to the



Fig. 5: Urbanus, 2005, Plan, photos and project model showing village research program for Gangxia urban village, in downtown megablock, Shenzhen, China. © Urbanus.

favelas of Rio de Janeiro or Caracas, also built in the oil boom years of the 1980s. [fig. 6]

McGee and many other scholars have pointed to the danger that threatens these new Asian networks of urban space as they lie in river valleys and along coastal plains.³⁶ Here the *desakota* areas are subject to flooding due to increasingly violent storms and water level changes, as well as drought due to temperature change and changing precipitation patterns. In Vietnam the government has mandated planning for a 2-m rise in water levels, a demand integrated into the Leuven University ASRO Group's demonstration project for the *desakota* areas surrounding Hue in Vietnam. The United States bombed this old fishing village and colonial port during the Vietnam War. Russian and East-German planners rebuilt the town as a linear industrial city with prefabricated, concrete slab blocks at right angles to the highway leading to the airport. A system of irrigation canals connect the town to a hugely fertile area of rice paddies producing three crops a year, behind a beach resort established by the French colonialists. ASRO proposed to renew the canal system with boats ferrying produce to the town market, also proposing a floating market beside an area of floodable playing fields allowing for the 2-m rise in water level. Raised slab blocks of housing and offices stood on *pilotis* beside the highway bridge across the river, close by the old Soviet-era market hall.³⁷

In many Asian megacities, like Jakarta or Tokyo, the heterogeneous mixture of the *desakota* public space network survives, as in the diverse mixture of village patches around Shinjuku and preserved rice paddies in the megalopolis.³⁸ In Bangkok, because of the royal ownership of much of the city territory, large apple orchards, fish farms, and rice paddy areas surround the megacity, with one side of the river largely reserved for agriculture as in the Dutch city of Amsterdam. The ancient canal irrigation system still remains interwoven with the royal grid

laid out for agricultural development that became invaded by modern development in the Vietnam War and after, creating one of the premier shopping districts of Asia with gigantic mega-malls. These malls evolved rapidly as an Asian space morphology, from open-air to enclosed multilevel spaces, oriented to the interior and then, with the advent of the Skytrain, flipping to open up to the street.³⁹ The 1 x 1 km scale of the grid created megablocks that could contain a heterogeneous mixture of uses as interior superblocks, an ancient temple and monks housing with lily ponds connected to the canal, a factory district and housing, the mall podiums and parking garages, with office, residential, and hotel towers above. The megablock incorporated the earlier lane system of the Thai *soi*, a cul-de-sac version of the village-like Beijing *hutong*. All these patches within the megablock also had a virtual presence on the Internet, even the temple, creating a dense informational system that overlaid the traditional *desakota* system, creating metablocks of information aiding wayfinding and inter-personal communications.

The Bangkok malls' outward turn of public space reflects the major role in the development of this emerging multilayered Asian urban space of Hong Kong's New Towns, pushing forward the Shinjuku heterogeneous network idea. Here architects adapted the dumbbell model of the American suburban mall to new purposes. After Tsuen Wan started in 1959 with a small housing grid and fresh-food market, the town centre expanded in the 1970s as a raised pedestrian network flowing through several multilevel malls between railway stations, surrounded by private and public high-rise housing estates. Subsequent New Towns, like Sha Tin (1973), Tuen Mun (1973) and Tai Po (1976) all followed the same pattern, connecting malls to form the city centre.⁴⁰ Above the later malls gardens on the roofs formed the entry to 30-storey, precast concrete housing towers as illustrated by MVRDV⁴¹ and Map Office.⁴² Below bus stations, car parks,

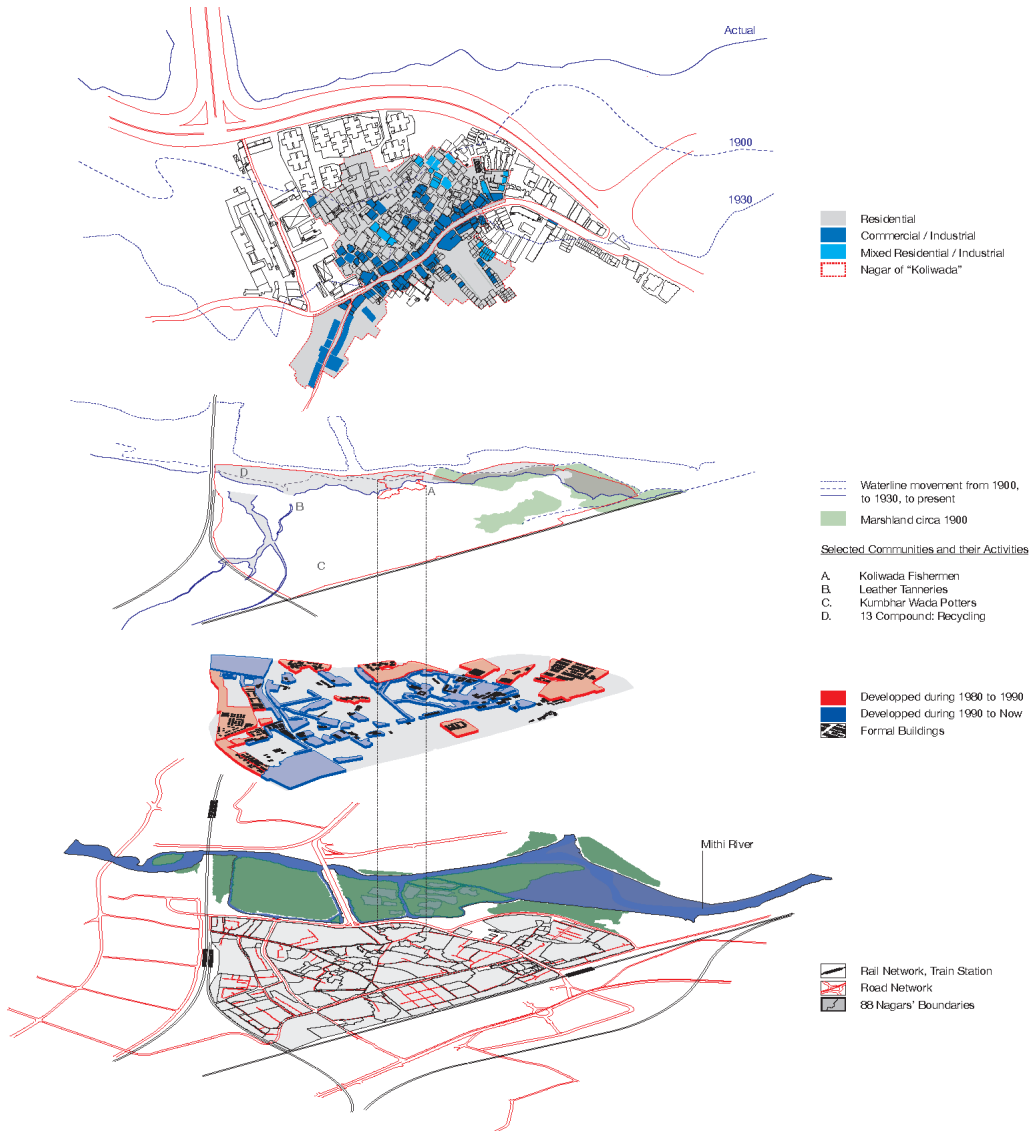
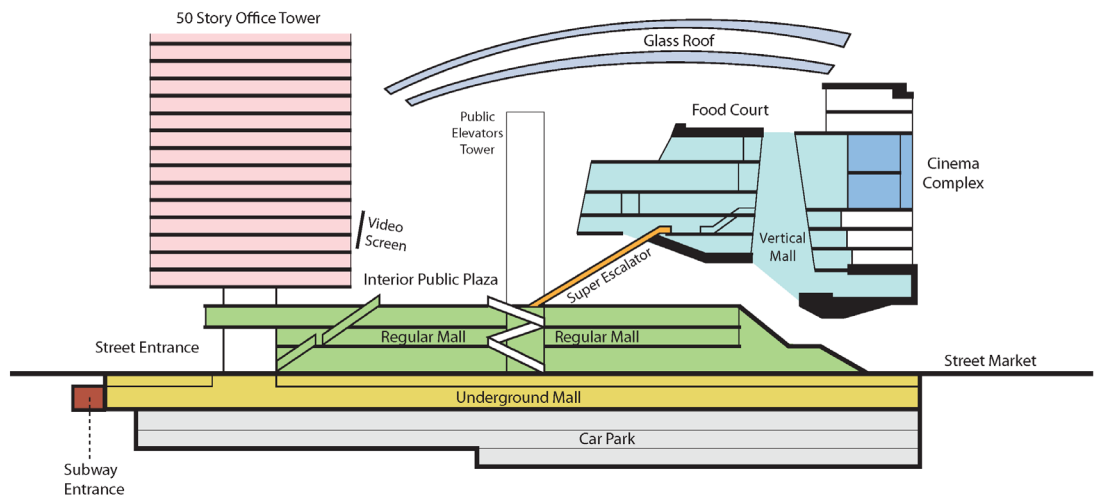


Fig. 6: Analytical Plan of Dharavi Mumbai. © D.G.Shane and Wahid Seraji 2011.



Langham Place, HK, view from Food Court Level.



Langham Place, HK, Section.

Fig. 7: Langham Place HK Section and collage. © D.G.Shane and U. Wegman, 2011.



Fig. 8: Luodong Community Center Taiwan; Field Office Architects; photo. © D.G.Shane

and subways developed the Hotorget model into a complex net of public transport.⁴³

The constellation of Hong Kong New Towns in the New Territories, later extended to Shenzhen as first SEZ, and then to many towns across the Pearl River Delta, forming the basis for the United Nations' Megacity Region designation. Within this vast network of cities that takes three hours to traverse by car, Hong Kong Central and Kowloon Stations have emerged as mega-nodes serving both the mainland hinterland and a global clientele. Here designers have pushed the flexible spatial continuity, interconnectedness, and heterogeneity of the *desakota* system to new limits, developing a multilevel, mixed-use, layered city section within a three-dimensional megablock. In the 1990s the construction of the Mid-Levels Escalators opened up a hillside village to Central, where multilevel shopping malls formed the base of skyscraper offices and hotel complexes.⁴⁴ World Finance Centre 2 (2003) by Pelli added a 1,000-ft-high (305-m) skyscraper with a mall podium that connected not only to the subway, but also to the ferries and the high-speed rail link to the new Foster-designed airport (1998). Across the harbour in the Kowloon Central Railway Station, planned in the 1990s by Farrell's office, subways from Hong Kong Central link into the base of the vast Elements Mall, whose circular roof garden with bars and restaurants forms the base for the 1,000-ft-high International Commerce Centre office tower, a hotel, and several apartment buildings (2007-2011). The high-speed rail station connecting to Beijing is next door, and the new Foster-designed West Kowloon Cultural District will form its waterfront promenade.

Kowloon also contains other examples of the hybridity of the *desakota* projected into extreme three-dimensional projects, such as Langham Place, designed by Jerde Associates (2005). Here the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway company (MTR) and a major developer demolished a

red-light district but kept its popular street market as a street pedestrian link to three malls stacked on top of each other between two towers. An underground two-level mall connected to the subway, a standard dumbbell mall linked to the street market, and on the roof of this mall a public plaza with Japanese jumbotron TV linked to a vertical spiral mall of boutiques, topped by a restaurant court and multiplex cinemas.⁴⁵ [fig. 7]

Echoes of this three-dimensional complexity can be found in Beijing in Steven Holl's *Linked Hybrid* (2009) project with its ring of skywalks, or in projects like OMA's CCTV Tower with its complex interior sections. The scale and symbolism of the CCTV Tower by OMA, with its own guarded plaza and monumental approach courtyard inside its own, raised superblock also demonstrates the continuing power of monumental public space even in the informational *Metacity* model. Indeed, the three-dimensional *desakota* model seems to preoccupy Dutch designers like MVRDV, the originators of the *Metacity* concept, who went on to design a literal three-dimensional Vertical Village research project in Taipei and then apply it in their controversial Cloud Project Seoul (2011).⁴⁶ Here the village fractal terraces will connect the two towers halfway up. Ole Scheeren, Koolhaas's partner on CCTV, went on to design his own MahatNakhonTower (2010) in Bangkok, where small-scale terraces mimicked the *desakota* spiralling up the building.⁴⁷ Scheeren also designed the Angkasa Raya Tower (2011) in Kuala Lumpur with infinity pools in dramatically cantilevered gardens spanning the two towers. UN Studio designed vertical neighbourhoods in the sky above Singapore, their Scott Tower (2011) looking across to Moishe Safde's megastructural Marina Bay Sands Resort (2011) with its roof-top garden spanning three towers.⁴⁸

There are also more humble projections of the *desakota* mixture into three-dimensional Asian urban space, as in architect Huang Sheng-Yuan's

Luodong Cultural Center outside Yilan, Taiwan (2012), built in increments over several years, and still incomplete. The architect's first move was to convince the neighbouring school to add land to the site in exchange for a new running track that created a larger landscape setting for the new building. After that the municipality financed the construction of a huge steel roof structure in two stages, deep enough to walk inside, that covered a paved surface, beside a car park that sometimes hosts a street market. This paved surface and the neighbouring gardens included power sources for small stands and cultural events. Finally, the municipality built a long, thin steel gallery building, midway up the roof structure, and recently began fitting it out as a cultural centre. It is now possible to ascend via a small pedestrian stairway and ramps to the roof of the gallery, and from there to climb stairs up into the gridded, steel matrix of the great roof structure above. It is difficult to think of a more perfect demonstration of the new multilayered, three-dimensional and multi-use Asian public space, ending with spectacular views to the surrounding mountains. [fig. 8]

Conclusion

The transition from the Asian imperial and European colonial public spaces to modern systems took many forms over the last 60 years. Modern public spaces appeared sometimes as overlays or megastructural insertions in the older systems, but often through the creation of New Town enclaves, peripheral factory micro-districts, and new housing superblocks. It is the argument of this paper that these new enclaves contributed new elements to a well-established, distributed urban system that included agriculture as part of an older Asian *desakota* tradition. The flexibility of this city-village (*desakota*) format afforded the public spaces of the urban villages an important role as real and imaginary spaces in Asia's complex urban transitions.

New Asian urban networks are often more flexible, hybrid, and heterogeneous than their

imperial or European colonial predecessors, while operating at a similar scale of megablocks. This widely distributed urbanism, now facilitated by satellites and handheld personal communication devices, motorbikes, and micro-busses, supports the formation of new, large-scale, high-density nodes at key intersections. Here, following earlier Tokyo and Hong Kong models, a new, multilayered hybrid public space system has emerged: metablocks – highly connected, informational urban nodes with a distinctive Asian accent whether in Shanghai or Mumbai, New Delhi or Beijing, Bangkok or Singapore.

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Biography

Urban design historian David Grahame Shane teaches Graduate Urban Design at Columbia University and undergraduate students at Cooper Union in New York. He also lectures for the Bartlett School of Architecture's Graduate Urban Design Programme, University of London and at the Polytechnic in Milan, as well as participating in master classes at the University of Venice. He has lectured widely and published in architecture journals in Europe, the USA and Asia. He co-edited with Brian McGrath the *Architectural Design* publication 'Sensing the 21st Century City: Close-Up and Remote' (November 2005). He is the author of *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design and City Theory* (2005) and *Urban Design Since 1945: A Global Perspective* (2011).

