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Abstract

***Hutong Interior, merging spaces in the hutong
system, the case of Baitasi hutong, Beijing***

Tutor

Michele Bonino (DAD, Polito)
Angelo Sampieri (DIST, Polito)
Yue Zhang (School of
Architecture, Tsinghua
University)

by

Lidia Preti

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The capital city of Beijing is a thriving background for a research due to its ancient history and the related layering of urban practices that still display a role in urban morphology of the contemporary city. The aim of the thesis is to study the socio-cultural background that drove to the formation of the *hutong* system, the *siheyuan*, the courtyard houses as well as the leading forces that in the 20th century lead to dramatic changes, modifying the urban fabric in the Old City of Beijing. The research carried out focuses on a specific area of remaining *hutongs* in the inner part of the Capital city of Beijing, *Baitasi hutongs*. Due to the dynamics mentioned above, the system that used to regulate the urban space of the *hutongs* in the past changed and is not responding anymore to the new necessities expressed by the community. Indeed, reading the spaces inside the neighborhood it is clear how the traditional distinction in between spaces is blurred and dissipated. As a matter of fact, in origin the courtyard was designed as a shielded space, a common space for the families, as a bubble embraced by buildings and walls used as membrane between the indoor and outdoor spaces. However, the socio-cultural dynamics changed and lead to the dysfunction of the spaces, reason why also the way in which people use the outdoor spaces is changed. In this trend, the concept of *Hutong Interior* unhinges the traditional distinction between indoor and outdoor spaces, blurring the boundaries and opening a perspective on the “space in between”. The juxtaposition of the word *hutong*, normally referred to a street therefore to an outdoor space of the city, and the term *interior*, referring to the inner part of a space, creates an oxymoron that enhance the tendency of people of living outdoor spaces as inner ones. The way in which the external space is lived as an extension of the private one is noticeable in every corner of the area. Some of the uses of the space are not permanent, they show little and volatiles signs of communities living together, some others are more structured and permanent to denounce the new

necessities of the inhabitants in a place that lost his original archetype. Outdoor spaces designed for “something else” are molded by new practices. A plastic space with a strong potential is transformed according to the necessities of the users. Parallely, in this inspiring background of transformation *Baitasi hutong* has been the fertile ground for some urban experimentations: the Beijing design week. Nevertheless, what happen to these spaces once the exhibition is over? The courtyards appear to be turned off after the conclusion of the Beijing Design Week remaining urban suspended spaces inside the neighborhood. However, deconstructing the traditional concept of the courtyard spaces these empty courtyards could become potential spaces for the neighborhood and turned into a spatial support, for the community. The traditional typology of courtyard house is challenged toward the creation of a hybrid space that follows the appropriation practices observed in the area. The urban space of the *hutong* is conceptually absorbed into the courtyard which becomes a common space easily usable by the residents. The suspended courtyards, following the principles of the prototype proposed by the design proposal, might become a permanent rationalized support throughout small interventions, that progressively switched on again these spaces creating a solid system of common spaces inside the area.



Figure 1 Example of Hutong Interior Baitasi, photograph by Lidia Preti



Figure 2 Suspended courtyard after the Beijing Design Week, photograph and elaboration by Lidia Preti

Approach 2:
est modus in rebus

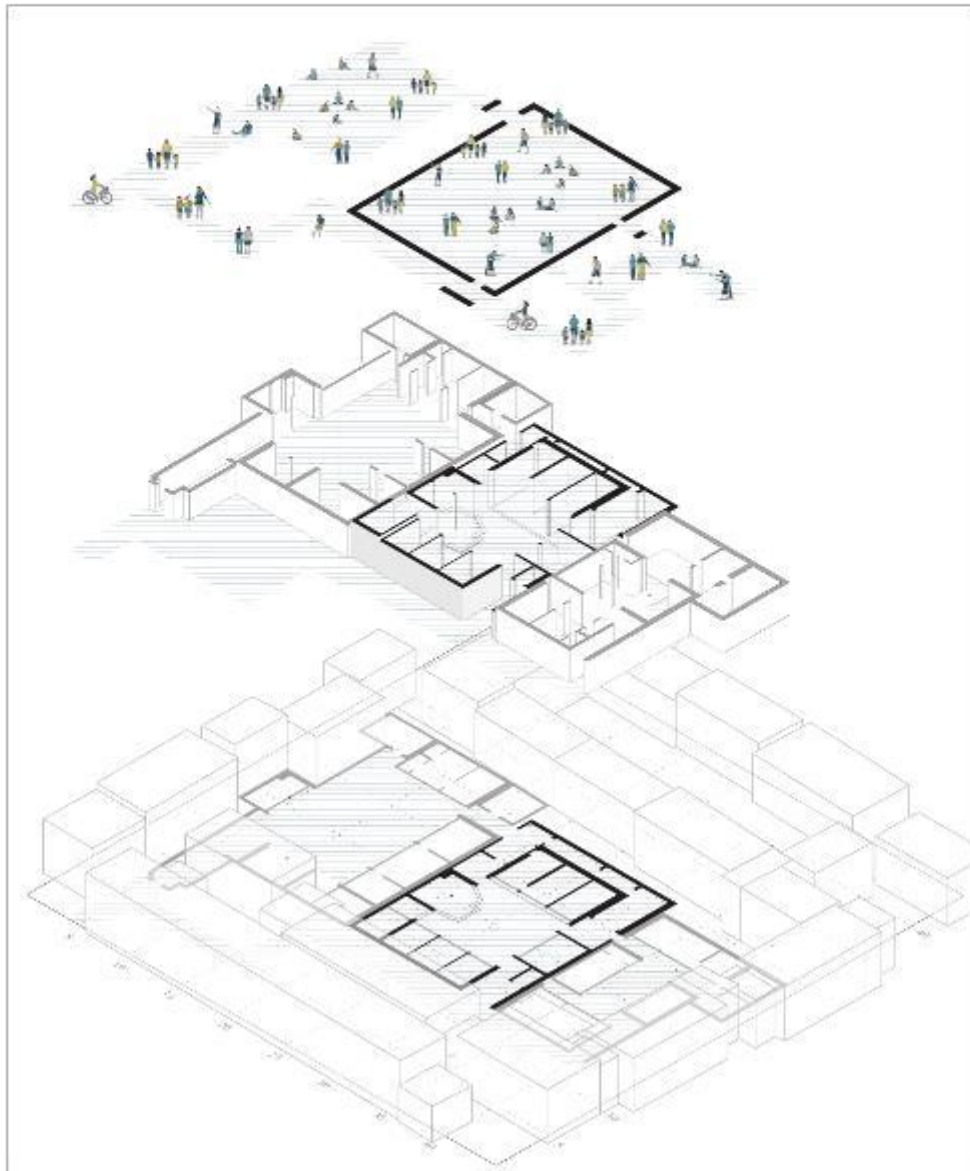


Figure 3 Design approach, drawing elaborated by Lidia Preti

For further information please contact:
Dott. Lidia Preti, preti.lidia@gmail.com