



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

Master of Science in Architecture Construction City

Abstract

**Rethinking complexity. A new scenario for the urban
village in Shenzhen.**

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by

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Shenzhen's urban villages are many things: patches of urban density, tangled networks of narrow alleys delimited by the typical handshake buildings, access doors to the city for the migrant population, economic micro-circuits, places where conflicts of interest happen, territories of social stratification, incubators of opportunity and diversity, for someone even urban "tumors", for others potential spaces, test sites, alternative - and more sustainable - models of urban life compared to the prevailing ones of the Chinese metropolises, promoted by the top-down manias of standardization; but above all they are areas where traces of Shenzhen's past remain. While for Beijing the historical identity resides in the Hutongs, in Shenzhen it is hidden in the urban towns.

The thesis starts from an immersive analysis of the countless faces that characterize the urban village, born in Shenzhen in 1980 with the creation of the first SEZ (Special Economic Zone), and in a short time swallowed up by the Chinese urbanization process and transformed from a small rural village to what it is now the chengzhongcun ("village within the city"). During the research, various themes, related to long-standing issues of urban villages, emerged, such as the problem of affordable housing for migrant workers, the hukou issue and the consequences deriving from the density of the urban fabric. Through the observation of three selected case studies (Xiasha, Baishizhou and Gangxia), the main and recurring characteristics of urban villages have been obtained, relating not only to the morphology and physical space, very peculiar, but also to the political, economic and social dimension. In particular, the critics and potential of these places were highlighted, leading to the identification of three areas of intervention: public space, the street (and related services) and the dwellings. The aim of the thesis is the rethinking of these spaces through an "addition" project that is able to grasp the multiple possibilities of the urban village and to read its complexity, demonstrating how it can turn out to be an open-air urban laboratory.

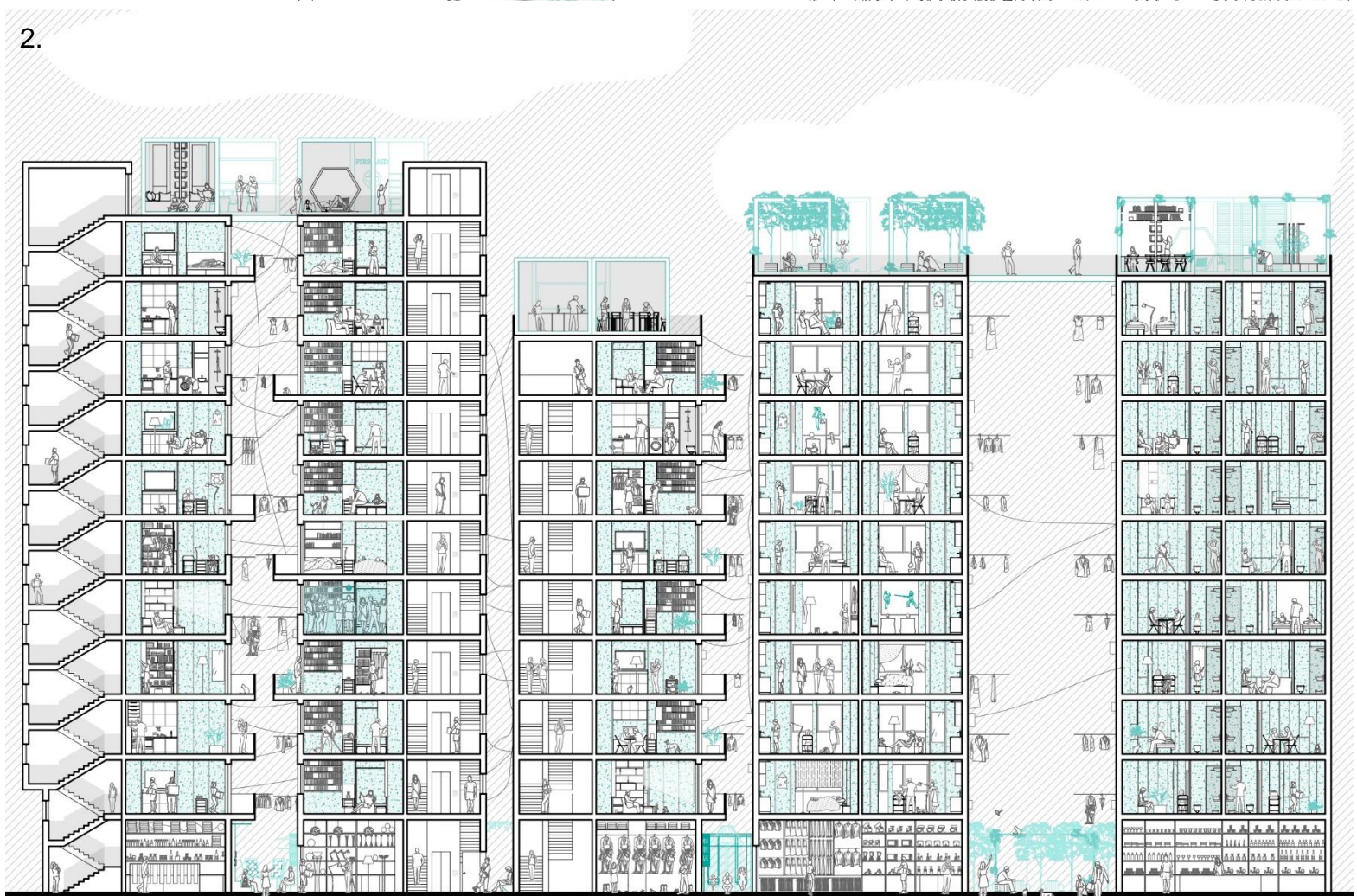
The final project does not intend, however, to propose itself as a definitive solution to the problems encountered, but as a flexible approach and an addition to an irregular construction and to the hyperdense plot of the village, without distorting its original features. Through this respectful approach to what exists, the final proposal seeks alternative and sustainable solutions, starting from the smallest unit, the housing unit, to trigger a regeneration on the urban scale.

Finally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic gave the opportunity to reflect on the concept of the city and to question the model of the urban village as a place of density. Following this thinking and the changes provoked by the pandemic, a new approach to space design was formulated, based on rules such as flexibility and resilience, which guided the development of the proposal. The SARS-CoV-2 was also decisive for the research methodology choice, which exploits multiple sources, digital and literary, in an attempt to redesign these places.

1.



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Image 1: axonometry of the project, in the village of Baishizhou, from which emerges in particular the intervention on the roofs and in the interstices.

Image 2: section of the project, in the village of Gangxia, from which the intervention in the houses particularly emerges.

Image 3: project perspective, in the village of Xiasha, from which the intervention on the road and in the interstice particularly emerges.

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