Baiwan Jiayuan social housing

Background and Objective

Baiwan Jiayuan is located in the city centre to help promote social integration among low-income groups through more dignified living. The project aims to build high-quality social housing on a large scale via the joint efforts of government, enterprise and society based on the concepts of open neighbourhoods, three-dimensional communities and access to adequate sunlight. This enables people who would be challenged to find affordable housing to rent property in decent living conditions and dignity, whilst facilitating their contribution to sustainable development in the city and society on the basis of community integration. Ma Yansong, the main designer of the social housing and an internationally renowned architect, focuses on ‘people’ in the course of her design, attaching importance to efficiency and functionality. Interviews were conducted with local communities to understand their needs, and the overall aesthetics of the buildings were also taking into account when planning for public activity spaces so as to increase the connection between the community and the city. The social housing project is managed by the Beijing Municipal Affordable Housing Construction Investment Centre, a state-owned enterprise established by the Beijing State Government in 2011. It is a representative and exemplary project among more than 100 social housing projects in operation across Beijing. Unlike other social housing which is located in remote areas where transportation is inconvenient, Baiwan Jiayuan is just outside the East Fourth Ring Road – a controlled-access expressway – and is also situated close to a metro station. The project covers an area of 93,900 m² with a total floor area of 473,300 m² and a capacity of 4,000 tenants. In 2014, the Beijing Municipal Affordable Housing Construction Investment Centre invited MAD Architects to be involved in the design process. The construction of the housing was completed by the end of 2019, and the first allocation of rental places were initiated in the second half of 2020. By the end of 2021, the occupancy rate had reached 70 per cent with approximately 3,000 tenants. To strengthen urban connections, MAD Architects promoted integration of the Baiwan Jiayuan community to the rest of the city using strategic design, with roads passing by the six internal blocks ensuring connection with external urban roads. This has enabled cars to pass through the community and strengthened communication and connection between people inside and outside the social housing area. In terms of community building, MAD Architects has made Baiwan Jiayuan three-dimensional, integrated a raised second floor above ground to increase the green area and provided valuable community space for tenants to interact and for recreation. In regard to architectural appearance, Baiwan Jiayuan is composed of 6 small blocks surrounded by 12 residential buildings, each of which contains a ‘Y’ shaped structure with between 6 to 27 stories to maximize sunlight into residential units. Social housing has operated as a global welfare practice since World War II, and cities such as Paris and London have pioneered social housing concepts and projects. However, there have been unexpected side effects as a result. Confronting these lessons, the social housing in Beijing aims to solve the key challenges in order to increase success in the delivery of innovative social housing. Isolation in remote areas is a chronic problem for social housing, and tends to lead to informal settlement development. Extensive social housing built in France during the second wave of nationalization in the 20th century is a typical example. In 1938, with the surge in demand for short-term housing caused by the post-war baby boom and the influx of immigrants, the French government was urgently needed to create a balance between residents and urban space, and relieve the pressure caused by traffic and crowding in urban centres. Large numbers of social houses were built on the fringes of the city in the 1980s, envisioned to accommodate new arrivals and effectively integrate them into the urban economy. Residents in downtown Paris today know little about these densely distributed houses on the city fringes, with a large number of them having fallen into disrepair due to a lack of attention from the government. The entire social housing area appears desolate externally, hosting communities with a number of aggravated social problems. Where residential segregation often sparks social segregation, it is frequently associated with the operation of social housing. Social housing has not yet been able to effectively promote the communication and integration of different social groups in respect to design and operation, and hence social welfare policy has become an accelerator for social disintegration to a certain extent. The apartment complex in Marseille designed by Le Corbusier is a programmatic example among the mass-built social housing projects in France in the last century. The designer hoped to provide housing for more people from the working class and diversify public spaces through modern construction technology. However, settlements in remote areas failed to operate as successful places for people to connect to the urban economic system, and thus became desolate. This led to a split in the population with some individuals moving closer to Paris’s city centre and...
through an equal rights approach, providing equal opportunity for both tenants and homeowners. The design and functionality of social housing reflect this by serving for the collective good, and constitutes a core part of the social welfare system. Cities must ensure that both rental properties and those for sale are promoted as a fundamental right in the city, it is essential that all tenants are afforded the right to adequate housing. Social housing reflects this by serving for the collective good, and constitutes a core part of the social welfare system. Cities must ensure that both rental properties and those for sale are promoted through equal rights approach, providing equal opportunity for both tenants and homeowners. The design and functionality of social housing

In the development of the social housing in Baiwan Jiayuan, efforts have sought to optimize the project site selection, residential design, community planning and operations management, addressing social challenges. The project manager has stated that Ma Yansong was invited to design the social rental housing not for the design itself but for setting the benchmark in this regard. Social challenges were addressed through bold and innovative means, and were targeted through architectural design as opposed to solely tackling issues of spatial relationships. The project has also targeted the issue of housing exclusion caused by inflated housing prices. In 2014, Ma Yansong’s team initiated a research project on the ‘sociality of social housing’, investigating the development history and design concepts of social housing in various countries. During the design of Baiwan Jiayuan, designers aimed to reconfigure the impression of social housing among the general population, challenging the common notion that social housing offers no further benefit than simply just living. Where the project has sought to ensure all residential units are afforded adequate levels of light, this could have been difficult for them to maintain their social relations. The delivery of a fixed and formal residence therefore helps the seniors maintain tighter-knit social circles.

In the development of the social housing in Baiwan Jiayuan, attempts have been made to address the key problems as highlighted. Efforts have sought to optimize the project site selection, residential design, community planning and operations management, addressing social challenges. The project manager has stated that Ma Yansong was invited to design the social rental housing not for the design itself but for setting the benchmark in this regard. Social challenges were addressed through bold and innovative means, and were targeted through architectural design as opposed to solely tackling issues of spatial relationships. The project has also targeted the issue of housing exclusion caused by inflated housing prices. In 2014, Ma Yansong’s team initiated a research project on the ‘sociality of social housing’, investigating the development history and design concepts of social housing in various countries. During the design of Baiwan Jiayuan, designers aimed to reconfigure the impression of social housing among the general population, challenging the common notion that social housing offers no further benefit than simply just living. Where the project has sought to ensure all residential units are afforded adequate levels of light, this could have been difficult for them to maintain their social relations. The delivery of a fixed and formal residence therefore helps the seniors maintain tighter-knit social circles.

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development must be of a high-quality and work for those residents. Through the project design process, field research and consultations should be conducted with local residents to ensure their needs are understood. The production of space in urban areas has long been characterized by commercial properties based on land rent with the centres of cities typically occupied by expensive houses. Only in terms of social attributes can public housing be located in the city centre, whereby people not only want a lower cost of living but also higher-quality living conditions and convenient transportation. The social housing delivered in Baiwan Jiayuan has achieved a balance among various needs such as site selection, cost and living quality, and has crucially realized the sociality of public housing. In pursuit of security, privacy and private claims to public space, most residential buildings in China are situated within gated communities. When discussing the value of open communities, Ma Yansong says that gated communities create ‘black holes’ within cities where walled barriers create areas void of social interaction and instead produce enclosed spaces that are socially isolated from the rest of the city. Eliminating the barriers between housing and individual urban communities, and promoting connection and integration between different communities thus generates significant social value to create more cohesive and inter-connected urban societies. It is important that cities facilitate housing developments that maintain compatibility and ensure fluid transitions between inter-linked communities so as to encourage social stability, connectivity and prosperity. Promoting self-organization among tenants is important within shared living environments built upon common interests or through voluntary organizations formed for mutual support. Regardless of the motivation for its formation, self-organization can enhance the connection and trust among community members and become an important part of the social support network for individuals in the community. In addition, well-developed mobilization-action patterns created by various self-organizations in daily operation can enable self-organizations to respond quickly to external shocks. As a result, tenants’ self-organizations can help enhance the resilience and stability of their communities against crises.