

The Production of URT public space: People, occupation, and practice in the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway

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Abstract: The URT (Urban Railway Transit) space is currently becoming the main city space. It permeates into people's daily life and becomes part of people's everyday life. What elements construct the URT life? How the URT space work and how the URT space is produced become meaningful questions in the modern time. This study adopts qualitative research method. By setting the Hong Kong MTR(Mass Transit Railway) as a case study, this research defined the occupations of the MTR space, classified the people in this space, and observed people's practice. An alive MTR space is introduced in a logical mind. The research findings show that the MTR space is produced by people's everyday life through the interactions between people and people, people and facilities and people and environment. The current MTR public space is also constructed by both reality space and virtual reality space. Through the analysis of the production of the MTR space, the research findings provide a profound statement of URT life for both the researchers and designers who design the URT space.

Keywords: Public space, URT(urban railway transit), everyday life(EDL), public design.

Introduction

Space is a product (Lefebvre, 2010, p. 26). Lefebvre (2010) said that, 'Man does not live by words alone, all "subjects" are situated in a space in which they must either recognise themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy or modify'. Space plays a significant role in society, whether in physical, mental' or social forms. It embodies social relationships, social development, urban politics, administrative systems and public life (Gottdiener, 1985).

A URT system, as the meridian of a city-body, occupies significant city space. URT life happens in the space around its stations, the space in its stations and the space inside its compartments. A URT system develops gradually from a link to a space, then from a space to a place, gradually obtained its own characteristics. (Siu & Zhao, 2013). It currently became a significant part of people's everyday life.

In this research, we focused on the world famous URT system—The Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway as a case study. By analysing the MTR system, we aim to obtain a systematic understanding of how the URT life (space) is produced.

In Yeung's article, he mentioned that the MTR space shapes us as we shape it (Yeung, 2004). The MTR system affects people's lives, values and societal cultures. People change and produce the space through their behaviour, thoughts and interactions with the space. People in the MTR space demonstrates different characteristics and belongs to different groups. It also categorized the people in the MTR everyday space into different groups through a great amount of observations. Finally, how people

practice in the space is analyzed at the end. From the analysis of what space MTR life happened, what kinds of people participate into the MTR life, and how people practice in the MTR space, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of people's practices in the MTR space. This research set the definition of the MTR everyday space where everyday life happens.

Research Method

Case study

Merriam (1988) pointed out that the case study design is 'an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of social phenomena' (p. 2). According to the Population Census Summary Result for Hong Kong in 2011, 9.1% (78, 229) of Hong Kong's young adults live in Sha Tin and this is a larger than the residents in other region. Sha Tin station is on the east rail line, which goes through three universities in Hong Kong. This line also goes through several shopping malls. As this line occupies residential, shopping, and education areas, young adults found in this line have diverse travel purposes. The station of Tsim Sha Tsui, Central, Admiralty, and Wan Chai stations are also selected as cases. 20.8% of Hong Kong residents work in Hong Kong Island and young adults occupy a large amount. By observing young adults in these areas, we can better understand their situation during rush hour in the URT. Figure 1 is the map of the Hong Kong MTR. The selected cases are marked with red colour in the figure.

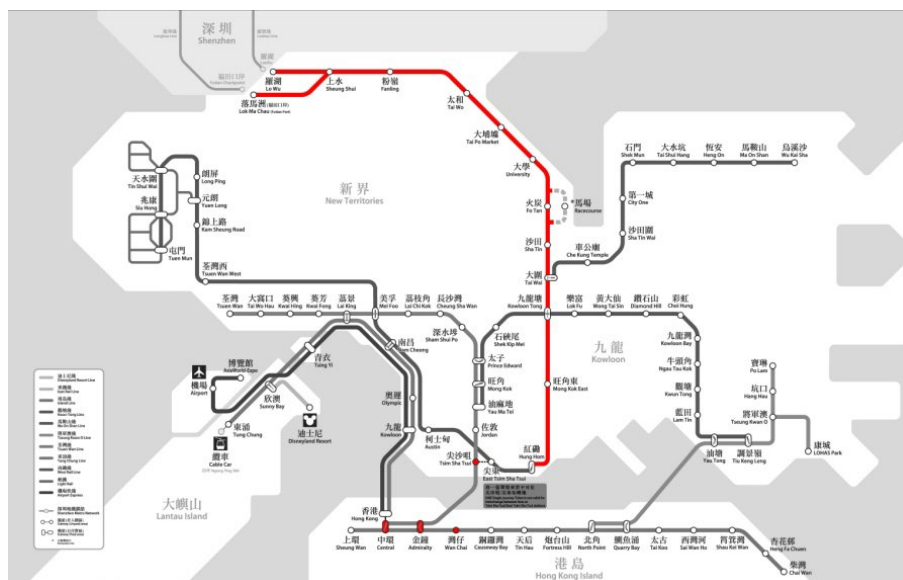


Figure 1 Map of Mass Transit Railway (Selected cases is marked with red color).

Field observation

Field observations were conducted to gain insights into the lives and behaviour of people in the MTR space. It is meaningful to observe the real requirements from people's everyday life (Shields, 1999). Across the whole year, the observations are divided into weekday (Monday to Friday), weekend and holiday observations. Across

each day, the observations are divided into early morning, rush hour, noon, afternoon, rush hour, evening and night observations. Thousands of people in the MTR are observed and their behaviour is recorded through camera.

Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews were conducted to obtain first-hand information from subway users. To obtain detailed information from the subway users, the interview is conducted in both the research office and the subway. 7 people including 5 young man and 2 older people are interviewed.

Part I: The occupation of the MTR space

During the subway construction process, almost all URT systems begin by joining several main points. The points are gradually transformed into links, until the system becomes a large web covering the city (Siu & Zhao, 2013). Similarly to a spider's web, woven out from a single point, a subway system's influence increases as it fans out to connect more points. People are fluent in this large web, entering and exiting the web every day.

No matter the distance a person travels on the URT system, they remain within the URT space as long as they are inside or around its stations. Unlike other city public spaces, the URT space is not a point but a continuous web connected by subways. Connections happen between each station. Simultaneously, as the URT runs on an exclusive right of way, it separates its passengers from the city. Unlike the most attractive public space, the street, URT space deprives its travellers of the opportunity to interact with the city space during their journeys. In *Public Art in MRT*, Yang (2005) mentioned the 'alienation feature' of the MRT space in Taiwan. He stressed that as the MRT has become the main transport tool for Taiwanese citizens, the citizens' lives have been simplified to 'point to point' lives without purpose, process or unexpected changes. The image of the city has been weakened, as its citizens have developed three-point lives: they move between their dwellings, workplaces and the dark MRT tube (p. 7).

The MTR space is different from other public spaces (such as shopping malls, parks, schools and even bus systems) due to its short history, unique location, broad objective users, significant commercial value and its privately owned public space characteristics. Privately owned public space is a new form of space, combining private investment and space allocated by government. Although the URT space is shared by different people, it is not an open space as it is not open to people without payment. The MTR space can be seen as the privately owned space. These kind of space has its own characters. The boundary between private owned space and public space is usually blurry. According to the occupation of the space and people's behaviour, the URT space can be divided into the free space around the stations, the pay-to-enter areas in the stations and the

compartments (tube), as depicted in Figure 2.

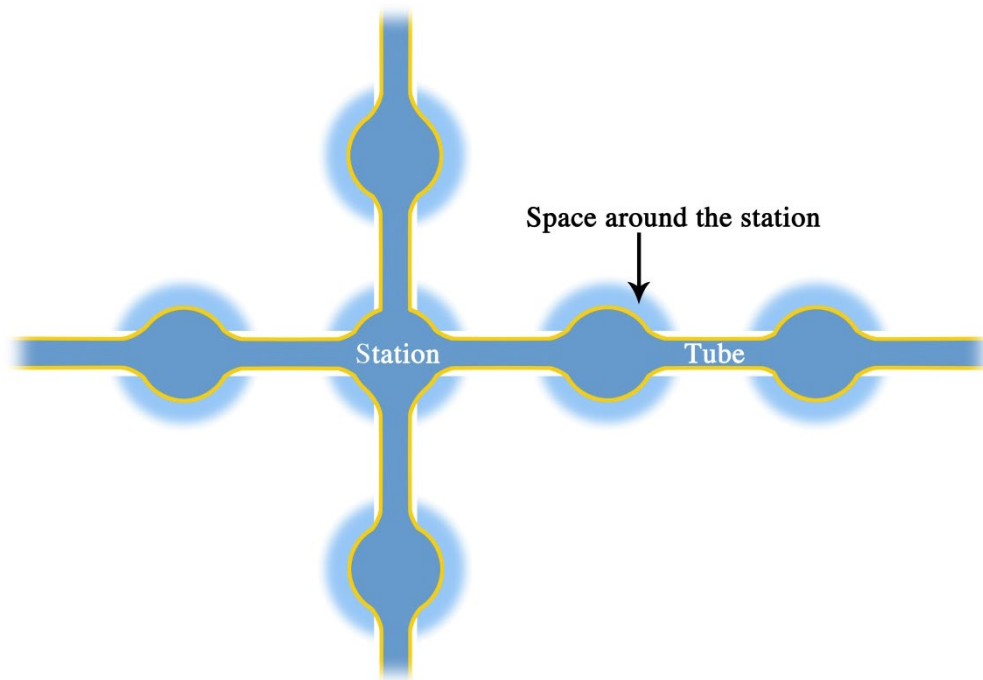


Figure 2 The URT space

The subway space is like a carbon molecule, in which each station is a carbon atom and the tube is the carbon bonds between them. The paid access areas and the free areas are distinguished by yellow lines in Figure 2-3. The closer that travellers get to that boundary, the more they connect with the city space. The free area around the station is portrayed with blurry boundaries. Before entering a station, travellers sometimes gather in this free space. Interesting social issues and URT-related activities often happen here.

Through the observation in the MTR, we have selected several stations as the case study. By analyzing people's MTR journal life everyday, in each station, the MTR space can be analyzed as figure 3.

Figure 2 shows a specific categorize of the MTR space. According the function of the area, these places are defined with a name. All these area together construct the MTR space. This shows how the MTR space is produced from occupation aspect.

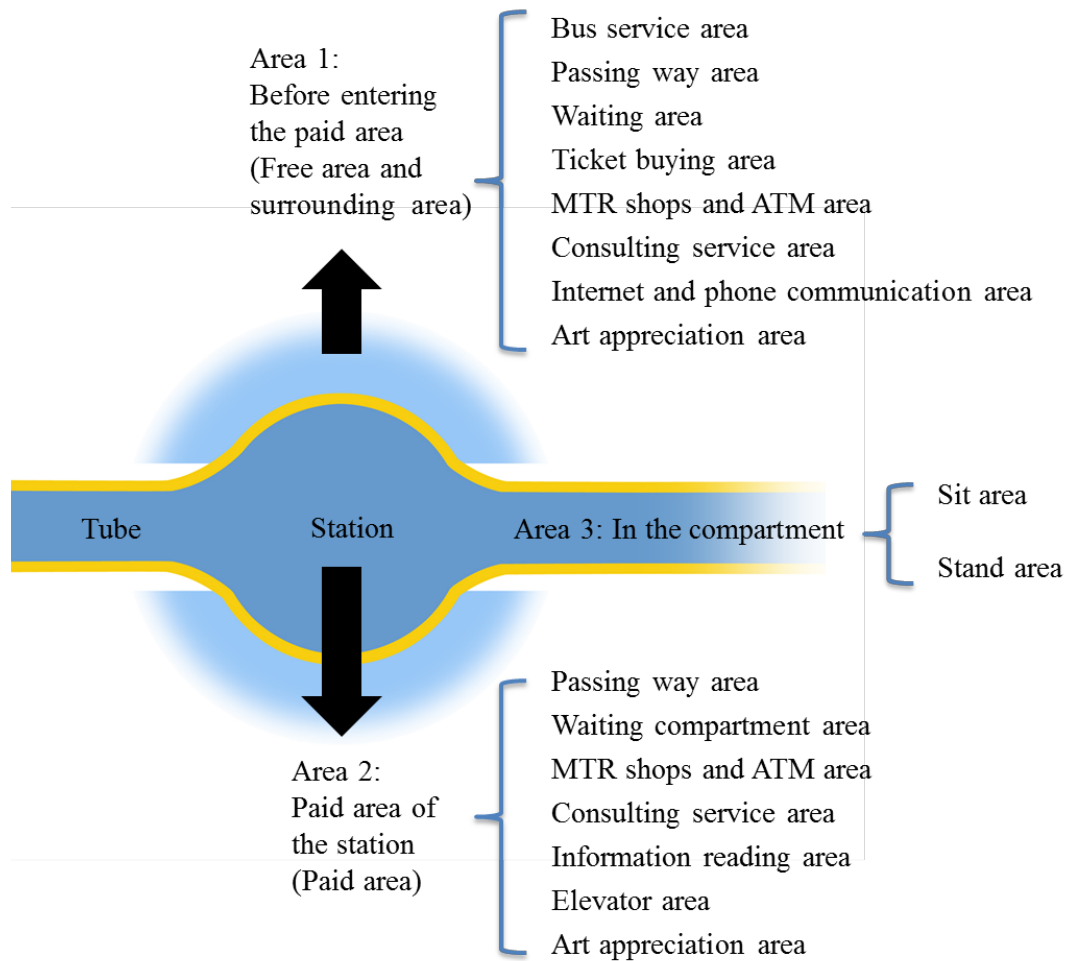


Figure 3 The locations of the observations

Part II: The people in the MTR space

Due to the continuous character of the URT space, people can enter stations freely and exit at any station. The URT is a switching element in the city system and is a manifestation of the city's flow. People do not consider the URT space to be a destination, but a space interface (Yang, 2005). People go to work, go shopping, see friends or perform other daily activities using the URT system. No matter their purpose for travelling, the travellers are all going out. The Chinese consider food, clothing, shelter (housing) and transportation to be the basic necessities of life. As the public transportation system of a city, almost all of the city's citizens can use the URT system. Another significant factor of the URT space is the diversity of its space users.

The main users of the public space in shopping areas are female. The main users of public community parks are the neighbouring residents. The main users of the public area of a campus are students. However, the users of a URT system are not so easily

summarised. Every day, many people pour into URT stations, from children who take the URT to school, to those over 70 years old travelling to elderly people's centres; from the poor migrant worker, to the white collar worker in an elegant suit; from the local who has lived in the city his whole life, to the tourist on his first trip in a new city. URT users may be of different education levels, cultures, age and genders, but they share this space. The URT space is a melting pot, used, shared and produced by different people.

Each day, millions of users with different backgrounds use the MTR together. The people in the MTR space are also categorised into several groups. Francis (1989) divided people in a public space into users and non-users. He stated that users are those who frequent public places and rely on them for passive and active engagement. Non-users are another important and often neglected public space group: many people pass by parks, plazas and atriums on foot, in buses and in cars without using these spaces. Although the MTR space is a transportation space, it has many non-travelling users due to the diversity of users and density of the environment. According to people's purposes in the MTR space, they are divided into users and non-users, with some sub-classifications.

a) Users

Users are always the core part of a public space. Without users, the space cannot be defined as a public space. The majority of the people in a public space are users. By definition, users are the people who have the right to make use of a space and who that public space provides services to. They use the public space according to the functions for which it was designed. They are an independent group and do not aim to obtain benefits from other groups of people. Their behaviour and thoughts should be widely considered by designers, policymakers and managers. As the MTR space is a social public space that provides public transportation, its users can be divided into travelling users and non-travelling users.

Travelling users

The URT space is a continuous space. Figure 3 showed that the scope of the URT space includes the pay-to-enter area and the nearby spaces. Users within the pay-to-enter area are travelling users, as they have paid money to use the MTR's travel facilities. The fee that they pay is used to carry them from one place to another. They can also use the other facilities and services provided in the MTR space. Travelling users pay their ticket fees first, go to the appropriate platforms, get into compartments and get off at their destinations.

Travelling users move between MTR stations every day. They walk quickly, do not spend time stopping and watching and do not participate in other activities. They do not stay in the pay-to-enter area for long after they finish their journeys, unless they have a

problem. Travelling users have the right to use the facilities inside the pay-to-enter area, such as the elevators, dustbins, instruction information, seats, security facilities and TVs. The whole environment is designed for these travelling users. The MTR's facilities are designed to assist the mobility of its users and to make their mobility more convenient and interesting. Unlike public space such as parks and streets, people in the MTR space, especially in the pay-to-enter area, have clear objectives and needs. The main benefit they get from the MTR space is mobility.

Non-travelling users

As the MTR space also includes the space around the stations, many people use the free area inside the stations and the area around the stations, which are part of the MTR space. The MTR space in Hong Kong is not a separate space, but is a complex space that connects with passageways, shopping malls and platform bridges. The special structure of the space attracts people to use it for purposes other than mobility.

People in Hong Kong often meet at MTR stations. The MTR is highly accessible, so can bring people to almost any place in Hong Kong. People consider MTR stations to be landmarks and it is easy for them to meet each other and pick up friends at a station. Figure 4 shows the entrance/exit of Hung Hom Station. Many people wait or gather at stations. Regardless of whether they plan to travel by MTR later, they use the MTR space as a meeting point.



Figure 4 People standing in front of the free area of an MTR station

The MTR space is also used as a passageway. For instance, the shortest route from the student halls of residence of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to the university campus uses the Hung Hom MTR Station passage. This is also the shortest route to the main bus stations nearby. Every morning, people whose route to work includes the station passage and those who travel to work by bus walk through the passage together. However, these people do not travel on the MTR and merely pass through the space. They can be considered non-travelling users.

The same occurs in the passage between East Tsim Sha Tsui and Tsim Sha Tsui

Stations. The underground passage, which is designed for transferring between stations, is used by people during rainy weather and the hot summer. The passage space provides a cool, close environment and elevators to save time and labour.

The MTR shops and public facilities in the Hong Kong MTR are distributed in both the pay-to-enter and free areas. Users thus sometimes go to the stations to shop, eat food, use the ATM machines, use the public toilets and post mail using the post boxes. Figure 5 shows an advertisement for a restaurant in Hung Hom Station. People who work near to the station have become its main customers. These persons are also non-travelling MTR users.



Figure 5 Advertisement for a restaurant in Hung Hom Station

Non-travelling MTR users use the MTR resources and facilities as they are convenient. Although they do not pay to enter the MTR space, they benefit from using the space.

b) Non-users

MTR workers

Non-users are also found in the MTR every day, the MTR workers. Unlike other public spaces, as the MTR is functional space, many workers and managers are required in the space to guarantee the normal running of the whole system, deal with emergencies, clean the environment, instruct users' behaviour and keep order. These people generally belong to authority organisations.

Shop workers

Commercial MTR shops are now found in most stations, such as food stores, flower stores, laundries, cobblers and locksmiths. MTR shops are found almost everywhere in the stations, inside the pay-to-enter and free areas. MTR shop workers are a changeless group of people inside the MTR space. They do not represent a particular organisation. They just aim to make money from MTR users. The MTR also makes money from them.

Hawkers

The *Mass Transit Rail By-laws* (MTR, 2012) clearly stress that ‘hawking is prohibited’:

No person, unless authorised in writing by the corporation, shall sell or expose or offer for sale any goods, wares or services in or upon any railway premises.

Hawking in Hong Kong has been prohibited in public space since the 1990s. Hawkers and the hawker control team have clashed since then. Siu (2001) analysed hawkers’ tactics and found that hawkers have always had methods for surviving in public space and escaping from control strategies. Similarly, hawkers have continued to operate in the MTR space.

In the MTR free area and the surrounding areas, hawkers emerge during bad weather or on weekends. It appears as if they are informed of suitable days to avoid the hawker control team. Although hawking can be punished by a fine of HKD5000 and six months imprisonment, hawkers continue to sell basic necessities, such as socks, belts, earphones and umbrellas, in the passageways of the MTR space (Figure 6).

Hawkers often stay together in the ‘blurred area’ between the MTR-managed space and the platform bridges, which is public space around the stations. They put their goods on a box in a small handcart. The goods on the box are easy to put away if the control team comes. Although the passageways are crowded and noisy, many people stop and flick through the goods, which can cause traffic jams. However, passengers seldom complain about hawkers, as they bring the MTR space alive. Hawkers do not operate in the MTR space every day and they are always prepared to escape. However, like the shop workers, they produce the MTR space, affect users’ lives and have become a significant group of people in the space.



Figure 6 Hawkers in the MTR space

Buskers

Buskers in the MTR space play instruments or sing. They stay in corners of the 'blurred area'. Although they occupy small spaces and there are few of them, their spatial influence is strong and wide, as music plays an amazing role in people's everyday life. People can usually hear the buskers from far away from the MTR space. Some people stop and appreciate the shows, some slow down as they pass by and others discuss the shows with their companions as they pass by. Of course, many people pass the buskers without paying them any attention. Buskers use their performance to produce the space. One of the interviewees said:

Every day I go back home late from office. I always see an old man playing violin and harmonica together at the entrance of the Hung Hom MTR station. His music is not that beautiful but it is lively and simple. His music has accompanied with me so many lonely nights and I really feel moved by the lovely songs, which made me relax[ed], happy and forget the lonely feeling.

Buskers earn money in the public space through their performance in that space. In a noisy public space, the performance creates a separate space with musical boundaries. The public space provides the buskers with both a stage and a job. Figure 7 shows buskers giving a performance in the connection space between an MTR entrance and platform bridge. Some people have stopped to listen. From the observed result, it is found that the It place is just like a small public concert.



Figure 7 Buskers in the MTR space

Newspapers distributors and collectors

Newspapers are distributed for free in Hong Kong during rush hour, as shown in Figure 8. People read newspapers to pass the time on their way to work in the mornings. They can collect the newspapers either from boxes provided by the MTR or from newspaper distributors. There are also people who collect the used newspapers. According to their needs, people collect or give away newspapers. These people in the MTR space create a circulation. MTR users are helped by these non-users' work. In return, the newspaper distributors and collectors get jobs and obtain some of the benefits of the MTR space.



Figure 8 People collecting newspapers at the entrance of an MTR station

Propaganda people

As the MTR space is always crowded with people, it is used by organisations to obtain benefits or conduct propaganda to the public. Salesmen, publicly spirited people and politicians occasionally use the free area and surrounding areas. They target the MTR space due to the diversity and density of its users. This group of people always stay in the blurred area, which does not belong to the MTR but is used by the MTR users around the stations (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Propaganda people in the MTR space

Thus, the people in the MTR space can be classified according to their purposes in and their relationships with the space. Different groups of people share and produce the space. A systematic organisation is developing in the MTR space and it is running well. All of these people have become a part of the space, regardless of whether their behaviour is legal or illegal, regular or occasional, deliberate or unaware. People interact with the environment and with other groups of people in the space, and search for their own positions in the space. People play significant role in producing the MTR space.

Part III: People's Practice in the MTR space

In this research, both the people and the space are analyzed and classified. People stay in the MTR space, and at the same time they do some practice. What activities happened in the MTR space? What is people's everyday life in the MTR space? How the MTR space is produced with these practices? With these questions, we have done a field observation in the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway for One year. East Rail, Kwun Tong, Ma On Shan and Tsuen Wan line are selected as the case lines. Observations are conducted in these stations including Hung Hom, Mong Kok East, Kowloon Tong, Tai Wai, Sha Tin, Che Kung Temple, East Tsim Shat Tsui, Tsim Shat Tsui, Monkok and Shek Kip Mei. Thousands of people's behaviour are analysed.

People’s behavior happened in the MTR space. Although the boundary of the surrounding area is blurry, collected activities in the surrounding areas all have similar relationships with the stations and the travelling users. Different groups of people stay in their own spaces and sometimes flow between different areas. Figure 10 shows the physical areas of the MTR space and where each group of people is localised.

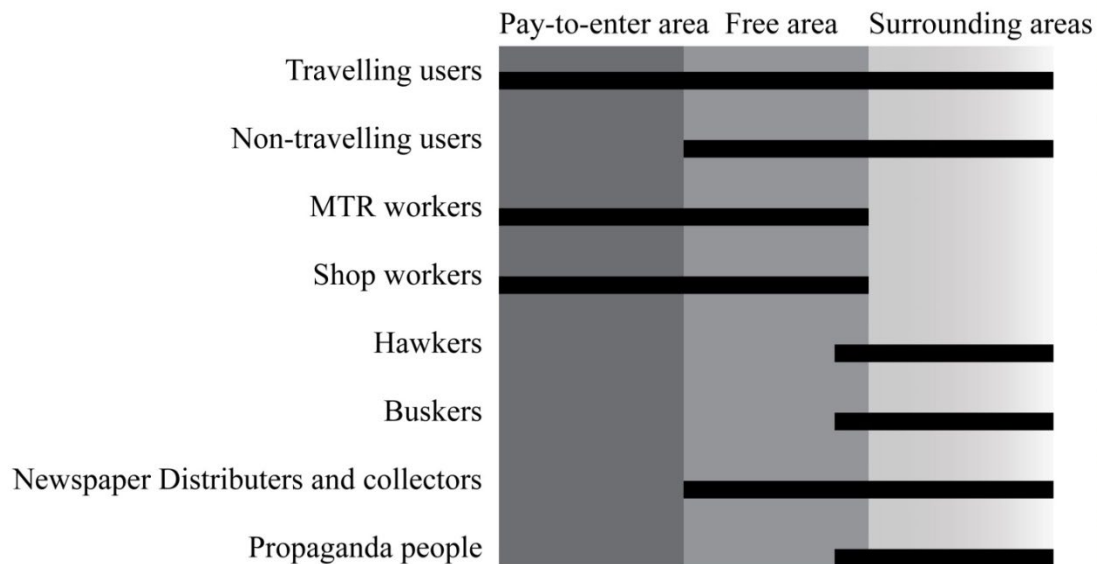


Figure 10 Location descriptions of the groups of people in the MTR space

When we collected people’s behaviours, it is found that a significant concept should be mentioned which is “interaction”. It is found that all the practices are interactive activities. People walk in the MTR space, buy things from the MTR shops, swipe their Octopus card on the pay-to-enter machine, play the mobile phone, sit on the seat, receive a newspaper from the propaganda people, pause to appreciate the advertisement on the wall, and etc. All the behaviors in the MTR space include interbehavior. To obtain a systematical understanding of the practice in the MTR space, we defined the interbehavior into three parts, which are people, facilities and environment. The practice is concluded as interactions between people and people, people and facilities and people and environment.

a) People and people

There are relationships between these people in the MTR space. They are not independent groups but depend on each other. Gehl (2011) stated that where there are people, there are activities. People attract other people in a public area. When people are surrounded by others, activities happen. Human relationships form a web over the MTR space, as in Figure 11.

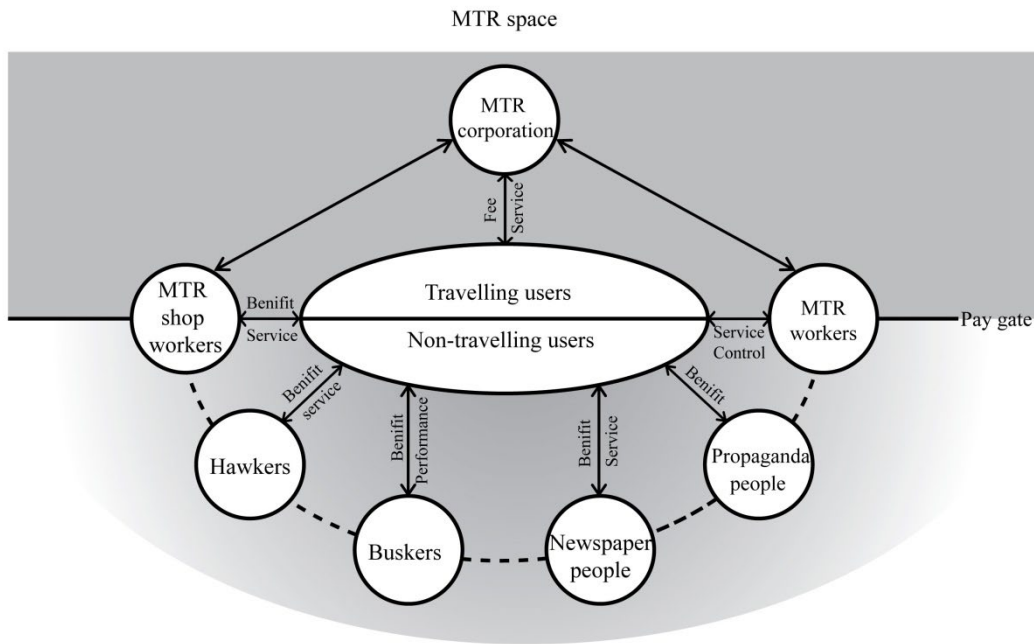


Figure 11 The relationships between the groups of people in the MTR space

The pay gate as a boundary divides the travelling users and the non-travelling users from the geographical position. However, this boundary cannot prevent the interactions between different groups of peoples. As the travelling users are main person in this environment, almost all the non-users play a role of serving service for them. At the same time, the non-users obtain benefit from the users. Without the users, the non-users exist with no meaning. The interaction between user and user can be eye touch, body touch and language communication. The interaction between newspaper people and users is with the help of newspapers. The interaction between busker and users demonstrates as appreciate and payment. Interactions happen between different kinds of people and activities are produced during the interaction. These activities become part of the everyday life in the MTR.

b) People and facilities

In the physical MTR space, almost all the facilities are used to serve people in their MTR journey. Facilities in the public space can be divided into Guiding facility, service facilities, security facilities and culture facilities.

During the process of using these facilities, people are interacting with them. When people buy the ticket, they are interacting with the ticket machine. When people have a rest on the seat, they interact with the seat. To produce a comfortable and suitable MTR space becomes the subject of dealing with the interbehaviors in the MTR space. Interbehavior occurs throughout people's MTR journey. A wonderful user experience during interaction with facilities would bring great experience in the MTR space. The

interactions between people and facilities are also part of people's MTR life.

c) People and environment

People's activities happen inside the MTR space. The interaction between people and environment is also important. The air condition, light condition, humidity condition are all factors affecting people's behavior. People stay in this environment, breath the air here, they certain interact with the whole environment.

From the above discussion, it is found that intebehavior happen everywhere in the MTR space. The interbehavior between people and people, people and facilities and people and environment produce the MTR space together. They are what we see in the MTR space, what we comprehend in the MTR space and what we experience in the MTR space.

In our research, we also found a phenomenon that people's behaviour does not happen in the physical world only. From the statistic in the case stations, it is found that 65% people practice in the physical space, they chat, they sleep, they read books, they walk, and etc. At the same time, 35% people focus on their virtual equipment in the MTR space including playing with mobile phone, ipad and other electronic equipment. The statistic result is shown in table 1 and figure 12.

Table 1 Collected data of people's activities in the case stations

People's activities	Number
Do nothing	425
Chat with others	293
Sleep	33
Play	3
Read newspapers	15
Read books	26
Listen to music	106
Watch TV	34
Chat by phone	60
Play on mobile phone	212
Play on tablet	15
Others	13
Total	1235

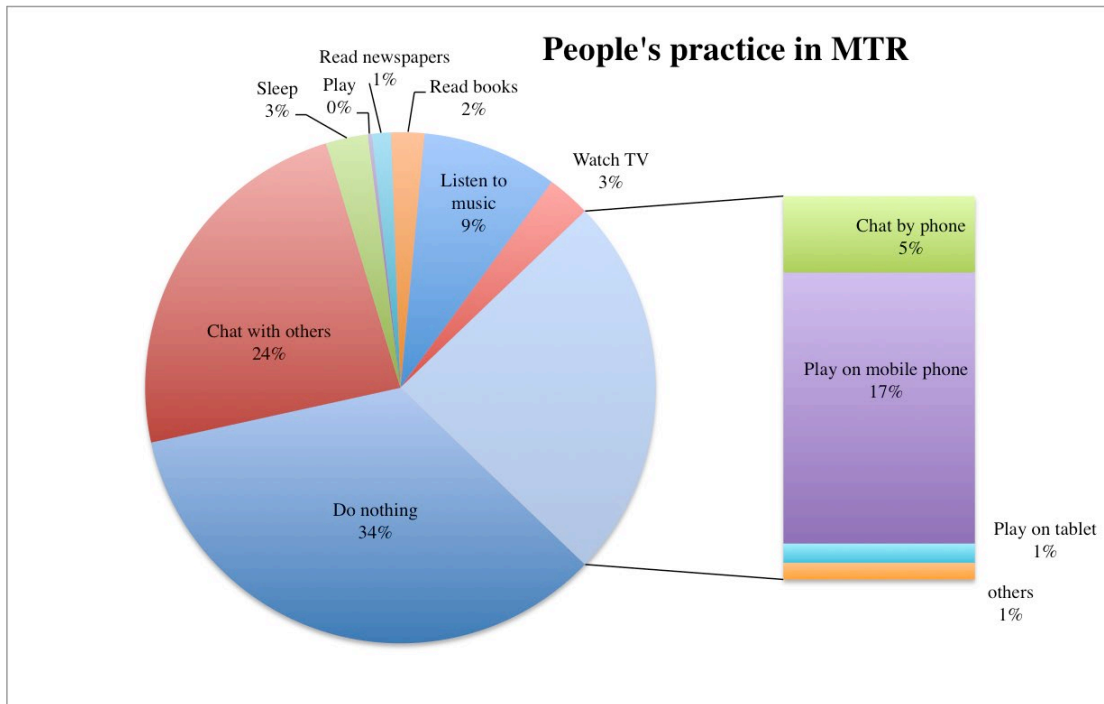


Figure 12: The proportion of People's activities in the MTR space.

These behaviors generally exist in the MTR space. Based on our observation result, we defined the MTR space into two levels, which are reality space and virtual reality space. With the development of the technology, the virtual reality space becomes part of the public space. People stay in the physical space, at the same time, they interacted with the virtual reality space. People's behavior (practice) changed between these two spaces freely in the MTR. Figure 13 shows how the space is constructed.



Figure 13 Interactions in reality space and virtual reality space

Findings

In this research, we have analysis the MTR space from the aspect of occupation, people and people's practice. The MTR life (space) is portrayed in a comprehensive way.

Through the analysis of the occupation, people and people's behavior, some findings can be obtained as following.

- The MTR space is produced by people's everyday life. What we observed are the most basic everyday life of the people in the MTR space. EDL(everyday life) is a collection of things and activities that are repetitive and banal. EDL is so routine that people seldom see the value of it and sometimes ignore it. However, EDL can tell us about most of the agents and relationships in a society. As Lefebvre mentioned, the direct way of obtaining users' needs and understanding human relationships in a space is to discover users' daily lives. EDL can illustrate the most common and basic situations in people's lives in a specific environment (Lefebvre, 1984). EDL can enrich sociological knowledge, fleshing out general ideas and theories. The people, occupation, and practice of the people demonstrate to us what happened in the space and how the space is worked. They work together to produce the MTR space. All these are the everyday life in the MTR space.
- People's everyday life exists in both the reality space and the virtual reality space. It becomes a common phenomenon that current public space is a mixture of the two. Interbehavior happens in these two kinds of spaces. People flow freely from one to another. Both the reality space and virtual reality space produce the MTR space together. People are the connection of them. To produce a quality MTR life, we should not only focus on the interactions in the physical space, but also the virtual reality space.

Conclusions

The URT space possesses its own characters and nature. The production of the URT space is different from other city public spaces. Like telling a story, people, location and practice are all promoted in this study. These three elements together made a complete story about the MTR life. It demonstrates who stays in the space, what occupations construct the space and how people practice here. The story including these three elements shows the content of MTR everyday life, which produces the MTR space.

The definition for the MTR space provides a clear explanation of the whole environment and defines the boundary of MTR life. The interactions between people and people, people and facilities and people and environment create activities, which become the main issues of the MTR space. Meanwhile, the interbehavior both happened in the reality space and virtual reality space produces the space together.

In the future, the URT space will play a more significant role in the city. To construct a quality URT life and space is a meaningful city issue. The analysis of the space in this study reminds the space planner to discover design opportunities through the EDL in the public space. It also demonstrates to the strategy maker to consider

different people's benefit in making the strategy. The analysis of people behavior also provides to the designers that it is necessary to design the MTR life from both virtual space and reality space level. This study provides prior user and Using scenes analysis for the future practice study.

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