THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CITY

10TH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON URBANISM (IFoU)

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Hong Kong' Entrepreneurialism; Radical Domesticity as a Condition of Interiorised Commons

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ABSTRACT

What would an interrogation of the Hong Kong interior reveal in terms of spatial appropriation? Moreover, how would these typologies of use contribute to the phenomena of urban commons (Sohn, et al, 2015) as an interiorised spatial condition?

For residents and commercial entrepreneurs alike, Hong Kong's cramped spaces represent a both a 'tactical' as well as 'collective' spatial processes. Daily attempts are made to alleviate social stagnation within a city driven by speculation. Characterized by excessive real estate prices, high-density living conditions, and dominant market forces spatial alternatives remain both inflexible and inaccessible to most. Although within a purported first world context, Hong Kong's dwellers show increasing evidence of a society that has become 'spatially locked', within interior worlds that mirror the realities of a 4th world economic order.

In this light, the question of 'spatial appropriation' or 'spatial sharing', as a merger between tactical and regulated use, remains key in defining alternatives outside conventional norms. In multiple instances, the resident, small scale entrepreneur and individual merchant apply various 'tactics' in defiance against draconian regularities. Performative 'commoning', the tactical sharing of space, eventually transforms conventional interiors, as the corridors, threshold, building foyer and alleyways, into new spatial modalities and time-based usage. The appropriation, modification, and alteration of the spaces provides material evidence of a collaborative strategy wherein the working and living relationships of the interior as urbanism process is challenged.

This paper will, first, use two empirical examples of residential units to reflect on interiors as battleground for personal entrepreneurism. And, in this light, to invoke a discussion that centres on the concept of a square foot driven society and its salient spatial culture and use as urban spatial model.

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of continued neoliberal development, and its aggressive agenda geared at the expropriation of space, one aspects remains certain; the monopolization of the city through private interests has altered all forms of space, in or exterior, weather planned or emergent. Elinor Ostrom's 1990 work - Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action – and its elaborations on the concept of the 'commons', expands on the mechanism communities' employ to co-operate, shares and manages finite resource, based on the agricultural principles. Ostrom's elaborations lays out the 8 foundational conditions. As such these conditions expand on securing the longevity of resources for future generations that has since 1990, found resonance in political activism specifically related to spatial question, under guises of housing, public self-built settlements, street traders and civic art. (cf. Satvrides, 2016).

The concepts of the commons have since then found renewed interest in the debates that pertain to civil disobedience. David Harvey's work - Rebel City 2012 - opens the question of the commons in terms of resistance mechanisms, questioning the various scalar effects at which the commons operate, elaborating on 'nested' hierarchies and the transference of specific sharing, capabilities based on the scale of each commons and their inherent organization.

According to Sohn, Kosoulas and Bruyns (2013), and specifically relevant to the city as commons entity, urban spaces and the subsequent spaces of conflict do not represent two opposing conditions but are to be seen as an alternative form of spatial production within a global neoliberal driven sphere. From vast open spaces to those pertaining the private domain, the residential spaces, spaces that fall between the normative types, or those excessively used for commerce, spaces collectively from part and parcel of a complex spatial field, each with an inherent potentiality to activate social processes. The challenged posed against current agendas and operational models, for example the public private distinction, reframes the conventional understandings of the social that exposes alternative forms of urban practices and in particular 'social subjectivity'. Moreover, the authors state, the appropriation and organisation of the commons waken concealed socio-spatial

conditions within a very fluid and sometimes volatile context. In their view, from within this perspective of commons as urban condition, the first task is to examine the specific landscape that embeds practices of the commons, in effect situating commoning as a product of ecological and relational understanding of economies. In using Maurizio Lazzarato's (2004, pp199-200) reading of late capitalism, whereby capitalism is viewed as a 'producer of worlds', commoning is a 'cooperation between minds' that impacts the public, private, the collective as well as communal property. Allowing for the 'cooperation' to be dispersed, exchange, disbursed or pooled extends the original modes of both production and social capital establishing shared interests irrespective of its modes of practice, as either a daily occurrence or as a deliberate tactical incentive.

RADICALISATION AND INTERIOR ENTREPRENEURIALISM

Although the interior has recently received attention as both a tactical and entrepreneurial mechanism in several conceptualisations, it nevertheless has received little thought compared to the economic and social forces shaping cities in times of social crisis or civil disobedience. In the wake of a worldwide reaction against those forms of development, that see the city as a growth machine (Molotch 1976), several publications and debates are re-examining the conditions of domesticity as a focus for human betterment and sharing of resources.

First, studies of social structures of 'city-ness,' in which the question of domesticity and dwelling stand as a central construct, are particularly relevant. Louis Wirth's original concept, or what he terms 'Urbanism' (1938), views settlements and its housing questions as the by-product of a collective social process underlined by three interrelated components: (1) the physical nature of the city comprised of population and forms of technologies, (2) a social system of organisation involving social structures, institutions and social relationships, (3) the formulation of a set of attitudes and registers, collectively produced norms, standards and regulations to guide behaviour processes. Harvey's Rebel City (2013), Castells' Aftermath Project (2011) and Weizman's Civil Occupation (2003) intersect into the current urbanisation problem, reclaiming domesticity within contestation strategies as a response to

financial deregulation, commodification and housing crises (Carcia Peralt, 2011). Originally viewed as a human right (Geneva Charter), housing has become a resilient mean within 21st-century urbanity. Harvey (ibid.) summarises key socio-spatial characteristics that cities face globally as counter moments to neoliberalism. The consequences of socio-spatial polarisation affect landscapes through spatial realities as territories have become fortified, fragmentary and gated. Moreover, all nuances of the public domain are being 'militarised' through access and control, whereas private property is used as an additional hegemonic instrument. Marcello (1993) takes this critique to its logical conclusion, seeing the city as a multiplicity of subdivided microstates. Against these tendencies, Harvey argues for the reconceptualisation of social movements and their inherent 'claim' by building on Lefebvre's notions on 'right to the city' (1967). This critique has led to several conceptualisations that aim to capture some of the urban activisms. For example, 'Radical Cities' (McGuirk, 2014), 'Occupancy Urbanism' (Benjamin, 2008), or, 'Pirate Modernity' (Sundaram, 2010), discuss how activists, pragmatists and social idealists are performing bold social-spatial experiments harnessing design to shape territories. Benjamin's 'Occupancy Urbanism' is valuable because of its link to domestic interiors. In his analysis, the 'urbanisation of the local' becomes an incentive for the territorialisation and politicisation of all forms of space, including land tenure processes that aim to facilitate social progress and individual mobilisation. Leveraging gradations of micro-resistance, 'occupancy urbanism' views the city as a product of contesting territories and forms of encroachment.

Secondly, in this framework the link between micro and compact living is forever linked to the aspects of contestation and encroachment. For Hernandez (2016) and Post (2014) small living is indivertibly coupled to transience and not dwelling permanence. Conchar (2016) links micro living to millennials, the homeless and the temporary residents in cities. Brenner's (2015) questioning of 'Tactical Urbanism' continues the critique of the ineffectiveness of the design professionals (architects and planners alike) to establish 'alternative urban futures' whilst looking at the repositioning of the 'design' as cooperative praxis for the production, use and governing of all forms of urban life, including

that of dwellings. Meant to critique forms and nuances of urbanisation, design sets its focus on the development of jointly shared capacities to reformulate 'co-produced' (cf. Bruyns & Low, 2011) agendas and other possible forms of socioeconomic inclusion. More specifically, the work of Rawes and Lord, entitled 'Equal by Design' (2016), highlights both the misnomer of 21st Century affordable housing and impact of housing design on societal wellbeing. According to Rawes and Lord, 'Human design' questions programmable conditions that allow users to uplift themselves from specific socio-economic conditions, promoting social mobility. In this light, both cultural and social life are collectively affected by the quality of housing, reemphasising the importance of a spatial cohesion that formulates cities from the inside out. Both the 'in' and 'exterior' or the praxis of the lived are set against the preconditions of the confined scenarios of dwelling.

INTERIOR ENTREPRENEURIALISM – THE HONG KONG SCENARIO

The 'Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong' (HKSAR) has always been an 'island of entrepreneurism' (Clinton, 2014). Historically known as a 'market city' (Ohno, 1992) with a prominent skyline and high-rise tradition, its physical and formal characteristics pertain to (1) a landscape of severe density, (2) three-dimensional hybridity in a public-private-spatial-landscape and (3) structural and social conditions of adjacency. Furthermore, Hong Kong has embraced amplifying levels of excessiveness, accepted neoliberal directives, allowing 'manic' density and hyper consumerism – all unified through the vertical stacking of urban infrastructure. In contrast, Yeh (2006) and Lin (2011) question Hong Kong's future under the 'one-country-two-system' policy, the 'emptying out' of manufacturing services and the operation of an urbanisation strategy that is (1) dependant on land-centred processes, (2) highly speculative in nature and (3) mechanised for the pursuit of revenue. Particular to Canton, the origins of the majority of existing high-rise dwelling MODELS find their spatial roots in the Tong Lau building typology (Shelton, 2011). Tong Lau typologies typify the most basic housing unit from which all other housing types have been derived, setting the minimum standards as well as the layout for subsequent housing models. As

such, Tong Lau's generic prototypes, whereby the shop house becomes the defining social-spatial model, influenced by the norms and stands of housing requirements and industrial endeavours in Southern China (Lee, 2010). Drawing from the availability of material, customs and living standards, the Tong Lau shop house standardised the space in which urban life has played out since the nineteenth century in its 700 ft^2 floor spaces, one kitchen and basic bathroom facilities. At its core, the Tong Lau type standardised a dwelling model responsible for regulating (a) social structures, (b) architectural criteria and (c) production or industrial facilities within Asian cities, as well as (d) influencing modularisation of contemporary housing stock and its spatial requirements. Ironically, the same model is credited for Hong Kong's extreme dwellings. Cage homes, subdivisions and rooftop dwellings, where beds are placed along corridors, (Shelton, 2011) and upper floors subdivided to allocate additional rental spaces, with one family per room in some instances, have become an accepted phenomenon. The Hong Kong Housing Authority (2016) states that the current domestic landscape consists of rental, private ownership, temporary dwellings and stock housing. Of these, some equate to 45 m^2 (Wilson, 2016) in size. The most recent additions – Capsule houses – are 20 ft^2, and cost HK$5100 in rent per month (Yuen, 2016). With demand exceeding supply, the present challenge is to engage in domestic contestation to counteract financial deregulation within a general housing crisis.

Against the condition of the 'confined housing models', Hong Kong's society continuously adapt limited space to suit individual needs (Lam, 2016). Considering the city as a cultural and geographic nexus, its spatial practices remain specific to a post-colonial Eurocentric derived urban model. With Hong Kong's present socio-economic diversity, a new 'ontology' of interiority and definition of 'in' and 'exterior' requires reformulation in recognition of the nuances of the everyday. In the neoliberal context, the agency afforded to customs, habits and mutual differences brings into question the use of interior space, consumerism and the retail economy as a key relational factor essential to comprehend the lived. The pressures exerted on the limits of space, usage and square foot value establishes the grounding for a 'square foot driven' society. The 'ft^2'-concept is linked to lifestyles of excess, but is

also indicative of survival. As a case in point, the destitute are forced to accept domestic possibilities such as 'cage homes', equal to 15.06 ft^2 (Soco, 2016), or makeshift sleeping quarters the size of a chair (2,5 ft^2) offered by 24 hour McDonalds outlets, which are classified as 'McRefugee's (Ngo, 2015). These examples link spatial limits to factors of choice, society and consumerism. Lam's (op cit) photo essays capturing cramped apartments, of which the smallest is 280 ft^2, presents 'an interior vernacular' among low-income families, elderly and the unemployed that conforms to a spatial-economic metric of compression. Single room dwellings are reconstructed through additions, layering, and add-ons, transforming the use of objects. Hong Kong's penal point system for housing estates (Yau, 2012) is a tell-tale sign of domestic tremors challenging the model against the needs of families. As a mechanism of control to moderate behaviour, the habitual penal code lists 28 common 'prohibited' activities, regulating behaviour and attitudes. The system documents external violations all equitable to space and size, harnessing policy as a regulatory metric. At its extreme, 'The Collateral Event, Stratagems in Architecture of Hong Kong' presented at the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale (2016), represents thirty-six 'stratagems' (三十六计) applied in wars in ancient China. The architect and artist participants attempt to develop strategies for Hong Kong's volatile housing market (Lee, 2012) urban housing and cramped spaces with inspiration from original warfare tactics. They examine daily challenges, consider solutions for an alternate urban reality, and trace the battleground drawing on their practices of intervention and adaptation. In this instance, the ft^2-concept operates in both architecture and artistry unfolding the challenges, and personal needs of the public, the commons, in a wider sense. Positioned as an 'activists-strategy', the concept situates 'difference' against the prevailing conditions, effectively rescripting the modes of radical domesticity and the socio-technical affordances of daily life (Simone, 2014). In an ethnographic sense, the ft^2-concept frames the processes of design and how it is both spatialised and used by groups, peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences (Madden, 2010).

In a recent survey of Hong Kong housing typologies, Bruyns (2016) conducted a parallel study that scrutinized spatial layouts of 21 Block

types and 78 unit types, which include traditional Tong Lau dwellings (6 typologies) (Bruyns and Lee, 2016), resettlement blocks (11 typologies), public housing (14 typologies), 'other uses of space for domestic usage' (four types), mobile homes (six typologies), unauthorized dwelling structures (four typologies) and private housing dwellings (three typologies). For Tong Lau typologies, the investigation includes specific interior characteristics beyond their spatial configurations.

With Hong Kong's Sham Sui Po region as main focus, the process of domestic radicalized becomes more explicit. In contrast to the city's Central or Island districts, and its high-end expat focus, Sham Shui Po remains a working-class region where local populous mixes with working class immigrants, from mostly China. Dwelling wise the area is demonstrative of a mix housing typologies, varying in size. As a city borough historically known for its industrial production, it remains typified as a place where small scales industry and dense social clusters meet. On the one hand, it remains a region where small electronic recycling centres, decorative industry, building supplies and fashion accessories collide, with on the other, a multi-cultural social landscape with predominately the elderly population. It is the perfect mixture of modular housing stock and a society that is gradually adapting habitual conditions to against speculative encroachment.

A more detailed survey of 30 units teases out scenarios of compressed domesticity. Meant to establish the basis of dwelling patterns in association with 'types', the survey documented; (a) identity of the inhabitants, (b) ethnic background, (c) statutory and residential status, (d) living qualities, (e) current and desired leisure. The survey additionally established characteristics at a domestic level, capturing (f) forms of sharing, (g) appropriation and (h) domestic transformation require to facilitate their ways of live.

The sharing of household possessions and spatial arrangement was a telling sign of a domestic model functioning as a framework for social incubation. Hong Kong locals and Chinese immigrants, living side-by-side, consisted out of single and double occupancies, making provisions for extended family to cohabitate rooms, spaces

and facilities. A 200% occupancy rate meant the sharing of kitchens and bathrooms placing make shift sleeping quarter or bunk beds in the living rooms, or, doubling bedroom capacity. Corridors and hallways become domestic additions. Similar to the subdivisions of existing apartments, rooftop surface areas become an extra living space, providing additional - illegal - income to landlords, burdening an already overcrowded environment. 21 from the 30 surveyed expressed a fear against the speculative powers of landlords and possibility of evictions, raising serious concern about the 'rate-per-square-foot being higher than in Hong Kong Island's expat communities.

Across the spectrum of inquiry, the presence of shared recourses was instrumental in the transformation of the interior, in either small or mid-size intervention that adapted, reprogrammed or altered an existing planned lived space. Essentially interiors functions became a context where the commons are continuously taking shape. Bathrooms were core facilities. Coordination and sharing of kitchen was shared on a discretionary basis. In both these instances the functions of bathroom and kitchen were core conditions for living, making their transformations and sharing non-negotiable. Transformations of hallways, bedrooms, cupboard spaces, additional storage spaces, hallways, landings and any residual space as additional storage, small shrines or as temporary baggage spaces became more fluid and therefore negotiable to its extent of sharing. Users had to agree on the actual means of co-living, at what time and scale. This process was deemed to set in place a collective protocol of acceptable and unacceptable boundaries of use. Although owned by one party the objects placed in a communal space were deemed usable by others if appropriate. In some instances, the interior apartments, although legally bound to legal limits of each apartment, were further extended beyond the front door absorbing the elevators circulating space as the new shared spaces, used for shoe storage, shrines and other small objects. In such cases, an agreement between the residents allowed for the sharing of spaces between residents at various times. Only in some occurrences where the penal point system implemented, whilst in others the ways of living deliberately overruled all legal requirements.

At a smaller scale, 'coffin homes' and their spatial settings represent the ultimate commons. Commons in this sense is visible in collective sharing that goes beyond space, as a condition that affects all forms and conditions of the urban interior and its domestic models (Hong (Wrong, 2016). Appropriation of the term 'coffin' is representative of the limited means of income which affords residents tenancy of a rectangular space equivalent to the size of a coffin. Totalling between 10 - 30 'coffins' per apartment, in Jordan, Causeway Bay and Sham Shui Po the cases looked at interviewed residents to clarify how and to what degree collective sharing of spaces occur. By asking 'how' and 'in what' manner, it became clear that the lived interior has become part and parcel to (a) the commons operational in different scales of use, as well as (b) establishing how the public and private as urban phenomena is mitigated through the interior (Lam, 2014). With coffin homes stacked vertically, spatial use is optimized, sharing coffin structure in terms of the coffin walls, sides, front, top and bases between the various participants. The question of commons is more pressing in the coffin home cases, due to their compressed nature and proximity of each users to one another. In addition, it exposes and inherent conditions within compressed living conditions where the management of smaller scale aspects collectively constructs territories and shared capacities amongst a diversity of inhabitants. Drying of clothes, using a basin, sharing an electrical socket or the collection of refuse become meaningful sources of communing or the commons in a dwelling sense.

Closer observation of an exterior scenario, at the larger sale, provides another dimension of the Hong Kong's urban poor and their mechanisation of the commons. A number of destitute that are forced to live on the street, have become 'curb-side dwellers', materialising another side to contestation. Not to be seen as a mere make shift scenario, but as a deliberate act of civic action, sidewalks, street curbs, pavement areas and other accessible 'public' spaces quickly become makeshift homes for the destitute, formulating urban commons that challenges the public-private dichotomist at a highly specific spatial level. Mostly chosen for their proxy to public washrooms, each of the curb side dwellers would collectively share spaces as sleeping quarters, grouping users and needs per region and available amenities. With each dweller carrying some

bedding and one sizable suitcase, the urban amenities of the street are treated as the new domestic interior gravitating processes of rest and ablution around one centrally shared core. Tactical conditions here merges with the commoning incentives where smaller scale domestic tremors produce new urban conditions that demonstrate a two-way reciprocal process of how the commons are both interior and exterior related.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, either as a collective strategy of smaller groups or of larger movements, the 'urban commons' has a direct relation with the conditions of the 'tactical' (Brenner, op cit). Sometimes viewed as 'light' contestation, these tactical processes nevertheless create opportunities of use and appropriation, drawing from local agency to exert influence and adjust immediate environments. As a concept, 'commoning' could affect housing practices by reframing explicit social alliances between individuals. Added to this, spatial appropriation redefines viable economic avenues through discursive forms of tenancy, and possible temporary ownerships.

Through the width and breadth of possibilities, the most conclusive tendencies of the interior as commons in this research are threefold. First, the commons are constituted by way of actual dwelling transformation through time, use and layout to address collectives of users and their immediate needs. Secondly, the interior as commons become operative through forms of appropriation, mostly selective, legal or illegal, for uses other than for what each interior or function was designated for, in either two and three-dimensional spatial variants. And thirdly, interior commons, in addition to the actual transformation of the spatial context, also influences the social mutations that open greater possibilities for social sharing and appropriation. This is directly linked to housing practices outside Hong Kong, where the commons have become instrumental in social conditions of 'cohabitation' (Low, 2012) and 'coproduction' (Watson, 2003). This is exemplified in how the interior commons are able to extend entrepreneurism and dwellings as habitual ecologies. This reading confirms Simone's (2014) methods of social capital by uncovering how collectives make individual and groups become more resilient. Plot encroachment and infrastructural modification are often barely

more than informal piecemeal additions to existing dwelling structures. Yet collectively they extend the assets of resource-poor individuals and gain specific importance at the lower levels of socio-economic strata.
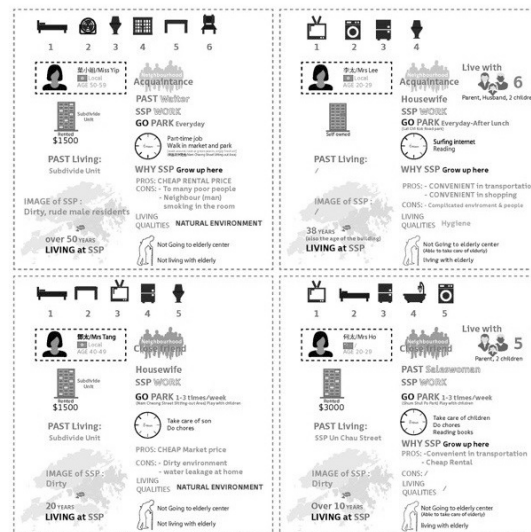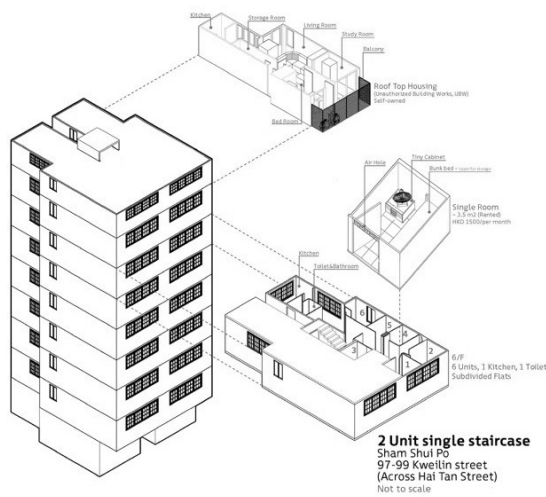
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIGURES

FIGURE 1 Chan Wan Fei, Graduation Project; Interior sharing strategies of based on the Commons, in Sham Shui Po. Graduation Project 'Cities in a City – Communality and the Interior'. Supervisor: Dr.ir. G Bruyns. Environment and Interior Design Unit, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2015.
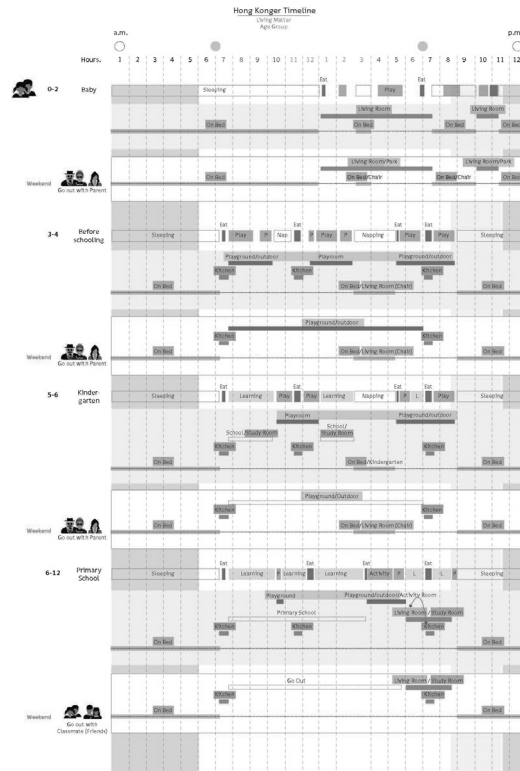
FIGURE 2 Chan Wan Fei, Graduation Project; Co-production and time management, community analysis of a part of Sham Shui Po. Graduation Project 'Cities in a City – Communality and the Interior'. (ibid)
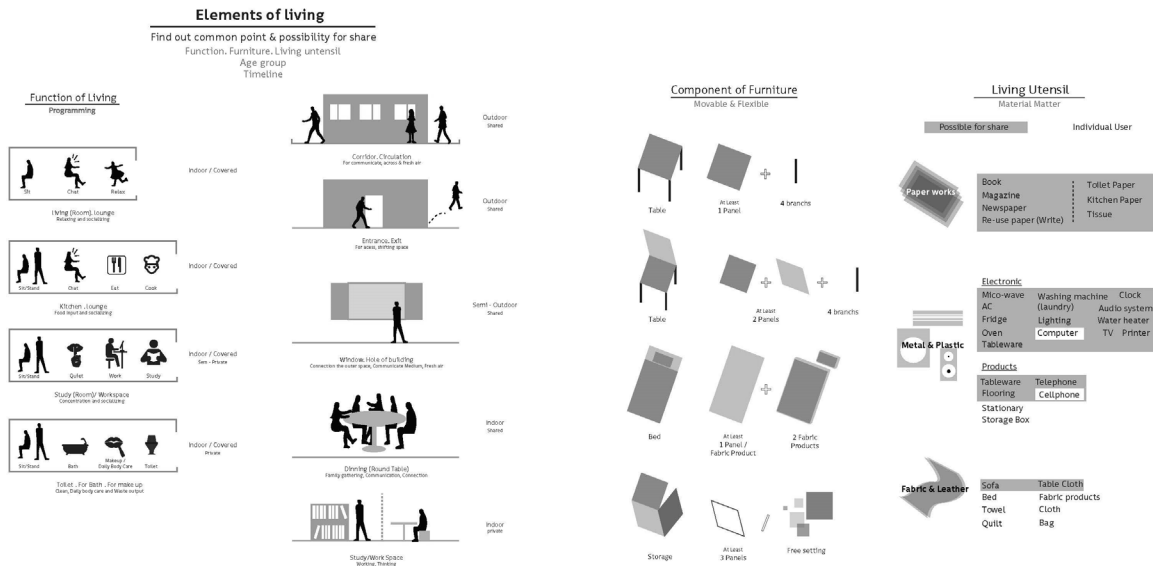
FIGURE 3 Chan Wan Fei, Graduation Project; Societal and spatial commons of the interior. Management of finite resources as documented from a number of inhabitants in Sham Shui Po. Graduation Project 'Cities in a City – Communality and the Interior'. (ibid)

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