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Contextualism and Sustainability: A Community Renewal in Old City of Beijing

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Abstract: The conception of contextualism in community planning emphasizes the integrity of architecture and its surroundings. It also implies the sustainability of landscape meaning within a community. In as much as planning theories have not mentioned how extensive the background of a community should be considered by a community planner, this paper will seek to answer this question. It considers Nanluoguxiang (NLGX), a community in the old city of Beijing, as the study area. Based on government documents, interviews of residents and also landscape observations in NLGX, this paper identifies the contextual practices in three renovation stages from the perspective of place uniqueness. The planners considered the background of NLGX at three different scales in its three renovation stages. In the last stage, they considered the entire country within the context of planning. NLGX has a unique image in Beijing, even within China. The image of it is the main market at the north end of the Grand Canal. The Grand Canal shows the spatial organization power of the ancient empire because it was the key food supply route for the capital. This is not only the cultural heritage of local residents of NLGX, but is also identified by other citizens in China. We conclude that an historical community can be preserved better by national funds if it has found a unique meaning of its landscape within a broader background.

Keywords: contextualism; community renewal; Nanluoguxiang in Beijing

1. Introduction

Within the context of renewal of old quarters or historic districts in Chinese cities, contextualism provides a useful concept for discussing the preservation of traditional landscapes. Contextualism in urban planning implies the sustainability of landscape meaning. So it is regarded as an approach counter to modernized landscape design. The new buildings should fit into its background. Contextualism in urban planning not only emphasizes the link between a new architecture and its background, but also emphasizes an architecture link between the past and present. The second link relates to a sense of sustainable development within a community. However, contextualism is not sufficient in itself to guide urban planning and design. Many critics and debates of contextualism discuss that scholars need to seriously consider using other spatial ethics to evaluate the merits of urban regeneration. Cultural geography offers a spatial perspective on the background scale in study contextualism.

1.1. Origin and Practices of Contextualism

Context stems from the Latin verb *contexere*, which means, “to weave together, interweave, join together, compose” [1]. This definition of context has its origins in linguistics, which stresses the partial-whole relationship [2]. In early twentieth century architecture expressed their environmental ethic through the design concept of contextualism. The goal of contextual architecture is to preserve the natural beauty of the site through careful design that relates to its surroundings [3]. The term of contextualism in urban design and urban planning was first defined in 1960s. Colin Rowe was among the first to openly denounce the failures of modernist urban planning and its destructive effects on the historic city. Many of his most important contributions are in fact more concerned with urban form than with architectural language. His early work, which led to the contextualism school of thought, criticizes modern urban design and architectural theory of design in which modern building types are harmonized with urban forms that are commonly associated with a traditional city [4]. Later in the twentieth century, contextualism saw a revival in the UK and the USA. Some structures built at that time show the revival [5]. The New Urbanism movement in the USA expressed its version of contextualism that originated in the earlier design doctrines of Rob and Leon Krier and the Italian morphologists in neo-traditional planning of its co-founders’ exemplary projects on the Atlantic coast [6,7]. The New Urbanism’s contextualism is manifested in its revival of premodern architectural forms and its traditional design ideals [8]. Now contextualism is applied widely in urban planning and design.

Contextualism in architecture emphasizes the integrity of architecture to its surroundings as well as to the intangible culture, history and tradition of a place [9]. It could be regarded as a sustainability element within a landscape. Contextualism has much in common with Confucianism in China since both are philosophical thinking ways and valuing traditions [10]. They also both stress the distinctiveness of a region [11]. Contextualists emphasize PLACE, which is reflected by its spatial and historical features and relationships within a building’s elements. People like to retain the elements because those keep them aware of where they live [12]. Contextualist planners design new constructions by taking ideas from old buildings and their elements. Confucius in this regard also emphasized the relationship between old and new knowledge, even though he was not an architect. For example, one of his famous phrases is

“If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, he would be acquiring new knowledge continually” [13]. It means that new knowledge comes from the old.

A proper contextual practice of historic districts has both economic and social benefits. In this regard Punter pointed out that: “As local identity and a sense of place are obliterated by global culture, as the palette of building types, styles and materials are widened infinitely, so local communities search for regulatory frameworks that help retain local character, make the most of existing assets in the built and natural environments, and create developments that are safe, attractive and user-friendly. There is increasing recognition by the local and national government that high quality redevelopment and the retention of a sense of place can do much to foster economic regeneration and community well-being” [14].

This article provides a geographical perspective to the preservation of an historic district sustainability effort. Some urban planners gave their perspective to it. For instance, Young gave the concept of stewardship of built environment in cities, which emerges as a valuable approach to increasing sustainability. It does not only seek new landscapes, but in having new eyes [15]. Economists consider economic equality when a historic district is created. For instance, Heintzelman and Altieri suggested to use different tax policies for the residents who live in/out an historic district [16]. The study of contextualism in geography began with Yi-Fu Tuan. He analyzed the relationship between architectures and their surroundings from a phenomenological perspective [17]. The analytical logic of phenomenology comes from Husserl’s definition of “phenomena”, which refers to the essences of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view; this kind of essence often appears to be prelogical and precasual. Phenomenology is a methodology, which depicts things with “direct awareness”. The phenomenon is neither the appearance of objective, nor the pure objective empirical fact or “sense-data” associated with Machism. It is associated with pure consciousness, which is different from other mental perceptions. Martin Heidegger emphasized the essential role that particular places play in how we experience our existence on earth by pointing out that spaces receives their character through places [18]. Another author, Christian Norberg-Schulz laid out his thinking in his phenomenologically grounded book—*Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* [19]. In his thinking, the spirit of place generates a special uniqueness, character and identity of a place, and is a mixture of function, art and architecture where people’s activities in public space often create a genius loci. While Tomas Valena [20] contrasts the understanding of the genius loci as pre-existing inert entity, to which contextual architecture must conform by including the idea of change in its constituent elements. According to Valena, the quality of a place is characterized by its natural elements, its atmospheric values, its history, its buildings, the presence of humans, and an “unconceivable” component [21]. This dialogic approach between architecture and its context is used metaphorically to describe contrasting views as well as mental bridges of changing and stable elements of the past. Colin Rowe regarded contextualism as a consideration of an old urban fabric in a new development: He viewed the collage city as prescription for that [22].

Tuan discussed the relationship between individual consciousness and the society as a whole in his *Segregated World and Self* [17]. Although he did not mention contextualism directly, he illustrated the strong link between an individual and the society which s/he is in. Tuan analyzed this association using four different kinds of links—food and manners, house and household, threat and society, ambiance and sight. These connections are based on individual experience, which relate to people’s awareness and their necessary connection with others. The link between the individual and society sometimes leads to

a better life. He wrote that, “The isolated, critical and self-conscious individual is a cultural artifact” whose development “is closely tied to the evolution of a world that is progressively more complex, specialized, and segmented” [17]. Tuan’s work inspires us to search for the direct or indirect experiences of local residents in this case from whom they construct the “pure consciousness” of the relationships among the various architectures in their community and of the relations between the individual and community. Those experiences are prelogical and precisian. They are exactly the kinds of rational thinking that are the results of “being” or “phenomena”. Lang [23] summarized that many scholars have comprehended a contextualist urban design from the view of phenomenology since the mid 1970s. Lynch, for instance, showed us how to understand the image of a city composed by the reality of architecture in his famous work *The Image of the City* [24]. In his later work, *Managing the Sense of a Region*, he places more emphasis on the relations between people and architectures [25].

An example of a typical contextualist practice is observed in the renovation of Byker, a community in Newcastle upon Tyne, England. The chief designer was Ralph Erskine (1914–2005). He is a well-known contextualist architect whose work garnered much praise within Europe. “His designs blend proposed and existing structures in an informal organic arrangement that seems to grow out of the local and regional vernacular” [26]. Founded in the 1880s, Byker was a working class neighborhood composed mostly of town houses. During the period of economic difficulty in the middle of the 20th century in UK, there was a lack of outdoor space. The crowded living condition created a strong sense of community and close relations among the residents. Erskine embodied his contextualist concepts into his design in three distinct ways. The first is by preserving the traditional architectural elements or meaningful old spatial fragments. For example, he considered the church as an important spatial node. It is a people’s social space. The second effort concerned the relationships of newly-built constructions and their surroundings. The design of Byker Wall, which is external wall of local residential buildings, is an example. It was intended to avoid wind and traffic noise. The third proposal was to retain the residents’ cultural identity and involve residents directly in the process of community regeneration. During the regeneration process, all the families were informed of the location of their new house, as well as their relatives and friends. The original social network was carefully preserved in this way. After the renovation, almost the whole community was rebuilt. The context of Byker as a community was thus preserved as a harmonious complex of the new and old. Thus this urban space became a representation and example of local social organization and involvement.

The redevelopment of waterfronts in the historic city of Amsterdam, Netherlands, is another example. It balanced development and preservation. People can learn lessons from these redevelopment projects. There is a cultural meaning that is shown in both old and the new landscapes. “The planning and design should not be a reflection of nostalgia of the old character or replication of the older forms but an attempt at recapturing the essence of it and finding new expression in the best of the modern design. Contextualism, in this sense, is not about the reproduction of the old but about the ability of the new to make relationships with the old. The new can make us aware of the old in new and exciting ways” [27].

1.2. Critics on Contextualism

Preserving the context of a place means copying or imitating the styles around which can make contextualism debatable as a successful method in urban regeneration. Jane Jacobs emphasized this point

in her urban ideal of nostalgia, which retained the old urban fabric of a city. This is a major point in her important, yet controversial book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* [28]. She claimed that proportional old architectures should be preserved. This will provide a diversity of places in a city. But a blind imitation of some old building would likely lead to the destruction of diversity. So new contextualist designs do not want to be a simple copy of old building. This is a response of the critics. *The Culture of Cities* by Lewis Mumford [29] who said that the imitation of the past creates a boring future. Direct imitation of construction features is simply protecting things that existed, which may not be able to survive themselves. Therefore, a direct imitation would weaken the characters or quality of a preserved area. At the same time, Freeman [30] believed that although people need to retain the context of historical districts, “poor copy equals giving up the possibility of creating new designs to promote the community’s value; and unfortunately, it would also ruin the spatial structure around”. Similarly, Yan [10] debated that some developers tend to offer a “Disney approach” and leave a rather phony impression. As some critics have pointed out, direct imitation is “a modern body with an old hat,” which means a contemporary building with a traditional-looking roof. Such mediocre contextual designs often become major reasons for rejecting contextualism.

Contextual unification could also degenerate into a kind of unpromising “fake thing”, which is merely a superficial copy of traditions. Phony architectures distinguish their styles from the spatial structures where they are located. It results in a lack of integrity in an architectural sense. Robert Hewison [31] stated that artifact itself corresponds to emotional nostalgia as it tries to improve its image with fake memory. It is a kind of weird and weak emotion as well as sweet sorrow, which is restricted to the notion that the past cannot be reconstructed. Actually, such restoration is never possible. This kind of design blurs the boundary between reality and fake history, which makes people appreciate and understand reality in a distorted context.

Indeed, some scholars looking at restoration tend to offer a “Disney approach” leaving a rather phony impression. They are, as some critics have pointed out, “a modern body with an old hat,” meaning a contemporary building with a traditional-looking roof. These mediocre contextual designs often become reasons for rejecting contextualism [10]. Facing these debates, a new approach of contextualist urban design was created. It is a design that juxtaposes a mixture of the old and the new. And at the same time, it tries to maintain a balance between the two. Renovation of an urban neighborhood in Beijing is discussed below.

2. Study Area and Methodology

2.1. Study Area

In order to apply the contextualist approach in a community planning, we targeted an old neighborhood in the old city of Beijing. We selected Nanluoguxiang (NLGX) as the research community. It is located in Central Beijing (the deep green shaded part in Figure 1). The red square area on the map shows the location of the city walls remain of Dadu, the capital of Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). NLGX was a community in the central part of Yuan Empire’s capital and has a long history and many historical artifacts. Figure 2 is a map of Dadu with the red square identifying the area of

NLGX. The administrative organization of Beijing is shown along with the patterns for districts, roads and residences.



Figure 1. Location of the Great Capital (Dadu) of Yuan Dynasty in Beijing.

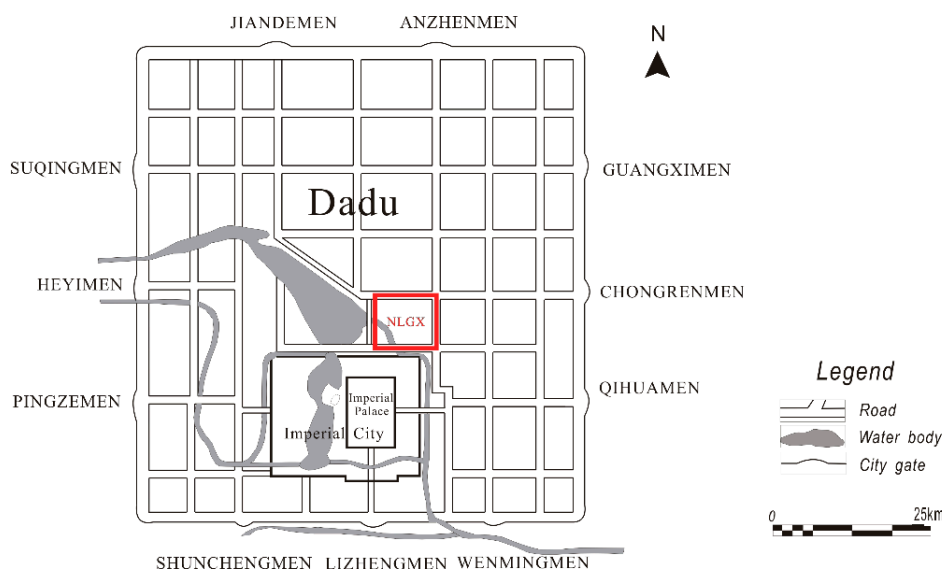


Figure 2. The spatial pattern of roads and water bodies in Dadu.

As an historical capital, Beijing's functional districts, especially the commercial spaces, were constructed during the Yuan Dynasty according to the spatial pattern for capitals mentioned in *Zhou Li (Rites)*, a famous classic book in ancient China. Based on the principles outlined in the book, the main market or commercial district should be located at the backside of the Forbidden City. NLGX is located just inside the main commercial district.

The distinctive spatial pattern of the streets and roads in the old city of Beijing is in a chessboard-shaped layout organized in a very neat order. Hutongs (alleys) are sub level roads which are in each grid cell of

Dadu; but they are not shown on Figure 2. The larger hutongs run in an east-west direction, while small hutongs run north-south, because the gate of Siheyuan (traditional courtyard) opens towards the south and on the north side of a hutong (Figure 3). That pattern follows the Fengshui theory for residences.

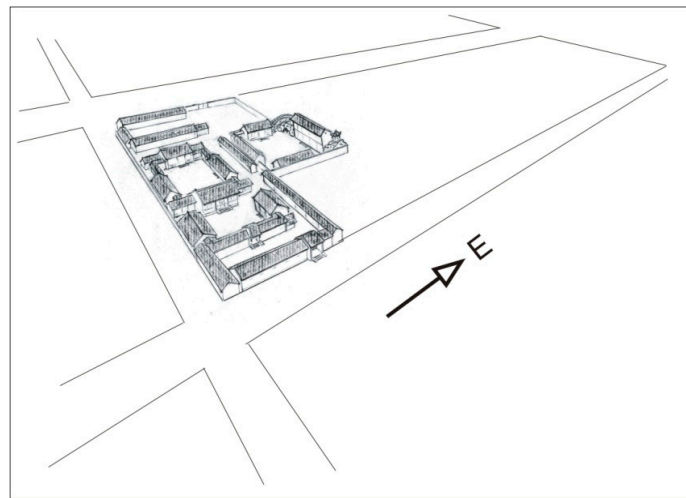


Figure 3. Gate of Siheyuan at north side of hutong.

The traditional residential spatial patterns in old Beijing developed public spaces in the core as the face-to-face society considered hutongs as public spaces for people's daily life. Neighbors chatting, children playing and vendors' businesses were associated with hutongs. Wu [32] described the road system in the old city of Beijing as having large main roads and hutongs. They had different functions. The roads were for commuting while the hutongs were for communication. Secondly, hutongs are both residential and commercially mixed-used neighborhoods. Sicheng Liang [33], the famous architect, pointed out that the old road system could be well adapted to modern transportation; the main streets are for vehicles while the hutongs are the semi-private spaces of residents.

2.2. Methodology

Figure 4 shows the methodological framework of our research.

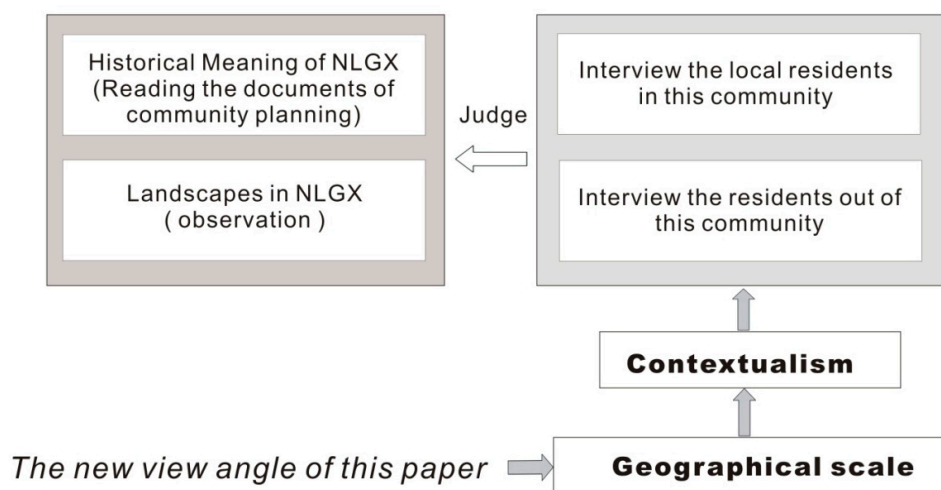


Figure 4. The framework of the methodology.

The first step calls for reading the documents of NLGX's community planning. We obtained the community's plans for regeneration, which identify the goals of both the local and the municipal government. We got know the historical meaning or image of NLGX, which the government emphasized in each plan.

The second step involves observing of the landscapes in NLGX. From this step, we discovered the ways the planners designed architectures using contextualism.

The third step calls for interviewing the local residents (47 interviewees) and those not living in this community (35 interviewees). All the interviewees were selected randomly. From this step we know the landscape identity of the local residents in NLGX and those who do not live there. We also know the change in social capital of local people in the process of regeneration.

The fourth step is evaluating the image of three regeneration stages according to contextualism. The most important step is to evaluate the images at different geographical scales. In our viewpoint, thinking the image value of NLGX will increase the meanings of NLGX when placed in a larger context. This is a new view angle of this paper. It is different from other research related to contextualism in community planning.

Steps 1, 2 and 3 are empirical methods. The last step is a normative method. We also consider "social justice" in our decision. Preservation funds should be paid to the historical community where the historical image is identified by more people, whether the funding is from the local municipal or the central government.

3. The Three Scale Backgrounds of the Renewal

We identify three stages in NLGX's renewal. In some respects we observe that the designers of each regeneration considered contextualism as their guide. But we want to find out how they used these different approaches in a study of neighborhood renewal.

The first stage of NLGX renovation, from the late 1980s to early 1990s, focused on courtyards (see Figure 5). Liangyong Wu, the chief designer of the project, used contextualism as his guiding theory. Renovation was addressed in three ways (1) maintaining the valuable Siheyuan; (2) rebuilding the shabby Siheyuan and (3) repairing the ones generally used. For the shabby courtyards, he designed a model of rebuilding that is keeping the traditional courtyard shape and changing a one-story dwelling to a two-story building. It maintained both the public space of the residents in the courtyard and enlarged the living area of each family. Wu said the model met the need of modern life and but did not destroy the original context [34]. The context scale of his model is the traditional courtyard. His model received a World Habitat Award from United Nations.

The second stage of NLGX's renewal, from 2005–2010, emphasizes the road system. More reconstruction was done on the central commercial main street of this area. Unlike the previous endeavor, which focused on the preservation of traditional public space and the appearance of old dwellings, the local government, which was in charge of the regeneration, highlighted the commercial potential of it for finance gain. *The Conservation and Development Planning of Nanluoguxiang* was prepared in 2006, which meant that the government emphasized cultural-creative industries, including cultural-tourism industries and modern commercial services. NLGX was positioned as the central axis for community development [35]. The renewal designer devised an image-symbol of renewed NLGX as fish-bone

shaped road system (see Figure 6). He hoped the spine bone would play an important role in the local economy. In his mind the context scale was the community or the neighborhood.



Figure 5. The new Siheyuan in Juer Hutong.



Figure 6. Map at the entrance of NLGX that shows the spatial structure of the roads.

The third stage (2010–2012) focused on rebuilding the bank of the Yuhe Canal, which runs through the area (Figures 2 and 7). The main market area of Dadu in Yuan Dynasty flourished with the use of this canal. Yuhe Canal is the terminus of the Grand Canal. Boats carrying grain and other commodities from South China could reach the main market of the capital city; NLGX served as the harbor. The third

renewal phrase emphasized the function of market harbor in the ancient capital so the landscape design took on the appearance of the “market harbor”. Some new bridges have been built over the canal, such as Yuer Bridge and Fuxiang Bridge [36]. The project was completed at the end of 2010. The background scale of this regeneration is the whole city or all of China because this regeneration put NLGX into the ancient commercial structure of Yuan Dadu or China. The Grand Canal was the key transportation route in the Yuan Dynasty.



Figure 7. The canal passing through NLGX (Nanluoguxiang).

4. Survey of the Landscapes in NLGX

In our study we sought to find out if the new landscapes fit into the traditional landscape contexts by recording and observing both the old and new landscapes in NLGX. Of the three types of contextualist practices used by scholars [37,38] to investigate community renovation, we observed renewal processes in NLGX in two of them.



Figure 8. A shop with local style.

The first type is *contextual unification*, which means copying and imitating the styles around the new architectures. The building shown in Figure 8 was changed from a residence to a shop. It was designed following the Ming and Qing Dynasty's architectural characteristics, that is, gray brick walls and a wooden framed gate and decorated with red lanterns. We observed many requirements in the renewal plan based on contextual unification (see Table 1).

Table 1. The requirements in the renewal plan [39].

(1)	The air-conditioning outdoor machine on the façade should be covered with grid or other cover measures that conform to the design of the façade.
(2)	Make an effort to preserve the roof contour. Proper adjustments should be made according to the rhythm. It is necessary to replace the wooden roof with terracotta ones to embody the old city's style. If there is a flat roof, we can increase the cornice slope. In addition, specific constructional elements can be torn down if they do not suit the basic style.
(3)	The signs of stores are too brilliant and they should incorporate in the landscape of the NLGX region.
(4)	The tablet size on the street is 0.2 square meters and the maximum allowable size is two square meters.
(5)	Advertisements and tablets should not be allowed to cover the eaves.
(6)	Gray is the major color of the walls. Bricks and similar articles of bricks should be made of primary materials. Polished stone surface, ceramic tile, mosaic tile, metals, low-class coatings, granitic plaster, and axed stone or other decorated materials and crafts are not permitted.
(7)	Concrete pavement and steps are replaced by cyan stones.
(8)	The designs of doorplates are not to be too showy. They should be redesigned and fit into the building context.
(9)	The color of the downspouts should be grey.
(10)	Be sure that the doors open under the gables and also control the size of existing doors.



Figure 9. A preserved old gate of a pawnshop.

The second type is *contextual continuance*, which places more emphasis on interpretation and the transformation of traditional contexts rather than blindly copying something from the past. Many examples of this type exist in the neighborhood. For example, an entrance of an old pawnshop is chosen among many old buildings that are designed for preservation (Figure 9) because of its link to the “market harbor”. While it does not function as an entrance, it does represent a symbolic decoration along the alley.

The third type of practice is called *contextual juxtapose*. It emphasizes examples where old and new architectures are juxtaposed to make sharp contrasts and which seek to create a good balance. This practice could provide a new representation within a local context. However, it would be harmful to the local context if it is not handled in a proper way. There are fewer examples of this practice in NLGX’s regeneration. Figure 10 shows a round corner of a building in NLGX. The design is in contrast with right angle corners. It does not provide a new way illustrating the cultural meaning of NLGX’s context.



Figure 10. A shop that made remarkable change of traditional architectural style.

5. Assessment of the Renewal in Three Stages

5.1. Improves the Unique Meaning of This Place or Not

One essential aim of contextualist practice is to improve the unique meaning of a place that is, the unique meaning of a place is in its cultural value or cultural capital. Zukin [40] correctly acknowledged that regional cultural value cannot get promoted overnight. She pointed out that, “Without a blanket classification of the central city, historic preservation is a piecemeal process. Each landmark designation of a district or building is proposed, justified, and selected individually. Thus each proposed designation incites both a strategic and a tactical battle, with people arguing over the validity of a mode of development that privileges sights as well as the merits of preserving individual sites”. Zukin illustrated this point in a case study of the SoHo district in New York. It was a small manufacturing clustered region in the 1970s. Along with the deindustrialization process, the spacious, cheap, 19th Italian renaissance flavored lofts attracted many artists to live and work. Soon the art-filled atmosphere became the local cultural icon and loft living became the cultural image of the district in the early of 1970s. Because of the pressure from the Historic Preservation Movement and the interests of property owners, this district became a historical landmark. The appeal of such a cultural image and the nostalgia of industrial age

formed a symbolic economy, which led to an increasing demand for loft living. People thought that such a way of living reflected a fashionable and elegant taste. The direct effect was doubling the price of land at that time [41]. Later in 2000, it has become a famous landmark in downtown. In summary, the SoHo district was a manufacturing clustered region at early times and then became a mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhood for artists. Later, it became an art-filled neighborhood as well as a well-known landmark. In the process, the cultural value was resurrected and received public recognition. At the same time, the regional cultural entities themselves were promoted because of the effect of the symbolic economy that emerged. The unique meaning of the SoHo district as a place emerged.

In the renewal process of NLGX, the cultural meaning of the neighborhood also was promoted. In 1992 Siheyuan was the only cultural icon of NLGX region, however, it was not peculiar because Siheyuan is a general residential courtyard in Beijing. Around 2005 the fishbone street pattern of NLGX assumed its unique character. The fishbone is a north-south spine with small east-west symmetrical alleys. Beijing inner city itself has a chessboard road pattern. Other quarters in the inner city also have a fishbone road system. So the renovation in this period that occurred did not promote the cultural uniqueness of NLGX. After 2007, however, scholars found another historic cultural icon in the area, viz., the Yuhe Canal. The ancient Yuhe Canal connected the main market and the old canal dock; it was, as noted above, an essential part of commercial pattern in the ancient capital. As the old saying goes that: “the more a place has its own functional meaning, the more it could be embedded into Beijing’s cultural spatial structure,” which means that there are a number of spatial nodes unique in the whole city, but also that the more historical and cultural associations one discovers in NLGX, the more they are like other parts of the city. It is with a sense of justice that local government financed NLGX’s renewal, which has a shared cultural meaning for all Beijing citizens. It is better than financing the rebuilding one courtyard among many shabby courtyards.

5.2. *The Social Capital Increased or Not*

Although Zukin [42] argues that space structures people’s “perceptions, interactions, and sense of well-being or despair, belonging or alienation”, local identities are constructed socially rather than just being defined with a locality just because they is there. Yet the cultural identity of a place is not simply the product of the moment, but of the evolution and adaptability of time [43]. Despite physical environmental renewal and conservation, social capital needs to be preserved carefully to maintain local identities. If not, cultural-led projects “can be difficult to sustain unless it is part of a wider renewal and unless it is formally rooted within the community” [44]. We explored whether the renewal of NLGX maintained the social structure and capital or not.

Our research regards local people as carriers of place meaning and emphasizes individuals’ social network to be part of the “meaning”. We follow Bourdieu’s definition of social capital: the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition [45], we observed the social capital change within the NLGX community. Social capital is not just a precondition, but also a result of networking and that accumulates through interaction [46,47]. A common measurement method is to ask questions about the frequency of contact with significant others [48]. And in this case, we focused on bonding social capital that includes neighbors. Everyday social interactions between residents may

produce social capital without necessarily being a member of each other's network, which usually remain weak [49]. And speaking of weak ties, they appeared to be more likely to occur and be significant for support in a feeling at home and providing a sense of security [50].

Another aim of contextualist practices is to promote or maintain local social capital. In Byker's renovation, Erskine insisted on carrying out the historic tradition of the community and maintaining social networks as well as relative spatial forms. "We would endeavor to maintain, as far as possible, valued traditions and its relationships with the surrounding areas and the center of Newcastle. The main concern will be with those who are already resident in Byker, and the need to rehouse them without breaking family ties and other valued associations or patterns of life. We would endeavor to exploit the physical character of the site, more especially the slope towards the south, its views and sunny aspect" [51]. In another study of New York City the authors concluded that historic district designation fosters neighborhood pride and other attributes and "serves to strengthen both property values and social fabric" [52,53]. Just like ODPM, [54] states that "Renewal is not simply about bricks and mortar. It's about the physical, social and economic well-being of an area; it is about the quality of life in our neighborhoods. In relation to the physical, this is as much about the quality of public realm as it is about the buildings themselves".

Our survey was conducted within a neighborhood of NLGX community. There are three kinds of people getting involved: local people who have lived in the community for more than 10 years; people who rented here for less than five years; and tourists. They were chosen randomly, and in each group, four to six people participated in in-depth interviews. In our interviews with local residents in NLGX, bonding social capital among neighbors was lost some in the renewal process [55]. This results from three reasons. The first one should be the change of public space function. Besides personal attitudes and behaviors, attachment to neighborhood depends on social participation of individual resident, as well as characteristics of the place itself [56]. In NLGX case, it corresponded to formal and informal participation existed in the local area, such as communications in hutongs, or in grocery stores. However, along with the function change into a commercial space, such kind of participation and characteristics were lost. One remarkable example is that former communication spaces for locals were replaced by commercial space for tourists. For example, Shajing Grocery (Figure 11) used to be local residents communication space. But now, it was replaced by a craft store, which is mainly for tourists. The original dwellers told us that, "It is chaotic outside, I don't want to go there and chat with neighbors there" (Interviewee1); "People don't want to gather around, it's too crowded" (Interviewee 2); "I never shop there (in NLGX), it's too expensive and products are mostly for tourists" (Interviewee2). The second reason is the fragmentation of existing social network results from newcomers' involvement and original residents' leaving: "I do not have any acquaintances now because some locals moved out NLGX after its commercialization" (Interviewee6). There is also a crisis of trust: "Things get lost in the neighborhood" (Interviewee3). The third reason is different perception of interest. People who inhabit spaces divided by social class or culture, may be unable to agree on shared priorities, perception of need, and common interest [52]. If residents' dwellings were not facing hutong and were located "too deep" in courtyard houses, the area conservation "had little relevance" to their families [57]. In the case of NLGX, it faced with a division of the sense of community. Previously, regardless of residents' income, all residents we interviewed felt an attachment to the neighborhood and devoted themselves creating a harmonious environment. Nowadays, many of them do not consider NLGX their own community; many

see it to be a place to reside, not to dwell. No longer did it “become an extension of the home for social purposes and hence extremely important in identity terms: ‘location matters’ and...becomes part of our statement about who we are” [58]. Their social network is collapsing.



Figure 11. (a) Shajing Grocery in NLGX, 2008; (b) Shajing Grocery in NLGX, 2013.

Maybe in the future, the owners of the tourist shops and stores will regard NLGX as their own community. The small-middle size shops are the main economic entities in NLGX. They provide the possibility for original residents to contribute as employees [59]. Local administrators also hope the residents become involved in local commercial activities. Local community involvement and the sense of their own “space” are expected to suggest in the everyday lived cultural practices and experiences through primarily social and community-based projects [60]. Wenyu Cheese Shop is a successful case, which is a free-rent house to a local resident by the community office since 2009. And the Community Workshop of NLGX has a public space for local residents to exhibit and sell their handicrafts. To date there are more than 30 residents who are participating in selling handicrafts [61]. With these examples, we observed where the original social ties among residents will be preserved.

6. Conclusions

The renewal of NLGX went through long and difficult processes, which are contextual practices. We review the basic conception of contextualism briefly in the first part of this article. Although it originated in linguistics, contextualism has been applied in architecture and urban planning. Contextualism was used to denounce the modernist urban planning failure in the post-war period and stressed the integrity of architecture and its surrounding. Byker, with a typical contextualist renewal practice, was proposed as an example to demonstrate how both the physical and social context in time and space should be and can be preserved along with the contextual instructions. Indeed, contextual practices are controversial for being less innovative; the shallow understanding of contextualism led to mediocre or even poor design. Such debates led to the thoughts on a new approach towards contextualism, with which we discussed using the NLGX neighborhood of Beijing inner city. As geographers, we use contextualism to assess an urban renewal from the spatial scale against its spatial background.

The first conclusion is that the renewal of NLGX community can be regarded as one within the contextual perspective. Being one of the twenty-five historic conservation areas in the old city in Beijing, NLGX is a traditional residential community. Faced with a high demand of commercial space in the old

city, this community became a tourist place gradually. NLGX's renewal was conducted from the late 1980s to the early 2010s and divided into three stages. We assessed the renewal in this community using landscape observations and interviews. The renewal of this community fit the requirements of contextualist planning.

The second conclusion is that the third stage of the community renewal identified the acceptable historical image to preserve. In the past two decades, the designers and planners have tried in vain to find a unique meaning about this historical community. At the first renewal stage, Siheyuan (a traditional courtyard) was chosen to be among the core elements or features in this area. But the same feature can be seen in many residential communities in the old city of Beijing. At the second renewal stage, the fishbone road pattern was chosen as the image of this historical area. It also can be seen in the other parts of the old city of Beijing. And at the final stage, the major market at end of the Grand Canal was chosen as the image of this historical community. The designers gave a name to this place: Yuhe Canal Harbor. So NLGX community now has a shared cultural image with all citizens in Beijing, even in China. That is because all Chinese regard the Grand Canal is one of the historical heritages of China. Preserving NLGX as a part of the Grand Canal is appreciated by more people than just as a traditional courtyard. The most important conclusion of this article that geographers recognize that the background and importance of contextualist planning at country's level, not city's level or community's level.

The third conclusion is that local social capital cannot be maintained as before. It is partly because of the changing nature of public space in this community. Based on the interviews with locals, we found that there are no squares, temples, or churches serving as important public spaces in this community. The former grocery was a major public space in this community, but now is a souvenir shop. The local residents have fewer chances to meet and chat there. It reduces the social capital by breaking up the social network. The current effort by community leaders is establishing a Community Workshop for local residents. It is obvious that fewer people have a reason to go there than to a grocery. Contextualist planning should consider not only the physical context, but also social context. Local residences are irreplaceable carriers of cultural meaning. Preserving local people's social network is the way to preserve their shared understanding of the place they live in, thus making local meaning sustainable within the context of the whole city. The old quarters of many cities are facing the similar phenomenon that they have changed their residential function into a commercial function or tourist function. The original residents have more chances to communicate with tourists and people outside and fewer changes to communicate with neighbors. The social capital lost cannot be replaced by the social capital gained from people outside the community. How to keep the social capital remains still a question in the contextualist practice of urban renewal. Contextualist planning needs to consider the sustainability of local society, while also considering the contextual continuity of architectures.

This case study provides a geographical perspective of the use and merits of a background scale when planners use contextualism at a neighborhood level. If they discover or uncover a unique meaning of the landscape and place it with a larger background of a community's historical development, they will obtain more financial support from higher levels government. Also the meaning of landscape itself will likely be identified by the people in the larger area as well and the landscape itself is able to be preserved better.

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Author Contributions

Shangyi Zhou made the framework and methodology of this project. The two authors did survey and writing together. The photos were taken by the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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