

# The Vertical Village [Housing in Kennedy Town, HK]

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## Synopsis

In Hong Kong's mass society, living is mostly reduced to basic human functions and activities. In this setting, typical residential architecture provides merely a shell, shaped according to generalized assumptions about its inhabitants and governed by strict regulations for the sake of efficiency and density. The results are often described as lifeless and rigid residential buildings that cannot be adapted by their inhabitants. Nevertheless, inhabitants attempt to transform these buildings by attaching balconies, sunscreens, and even small rooms to the facades – a practice that the Hong Kong government has prohibited for the sake of public safety.

This project aims to acknowledge the individual's desire to feel at home by facilitating individual building activities in a safe setting. The *vertical village* is initiated by the erection of a large structural framework, which provides space for individual lots with basic service provisions. Inhabitants are free and encouraged to build their individual homes within these lots, and may extend them further by adding platform attachments to the building surface. The initial structure provides a dense yet adjustable matrix, which is easily adaptable to future changes in space planning and in building methods.

To achieve an improved spatial identity and better living quality, additional attention is paid to the design of community spaces, which run through and connect three major buildings, providing community facilities and spaces for various types of activities, encounters and communication. In this sense, a single highrise structure can be transformed into a village-like community. It reflects individuals as well as a unique community even in a high-density setting and, as an ongoing process, it is open to needs, desires and plannings of the future.



## Key Planning Experiences

- Planning for tight spaces requires functional integration: one room may fulfil several functions (e.g. a kitchen might be integrated into the dining room)
- In dense living environments, neighbourhood relationships should be valued and respected in architectural planning to create environments that feel safe and friendly to their inhabitants.
- Wherever the inhabitants of a structure are free to build extensions, coordination with adjoining neighbours is needed, either by set of rules or individual negotiation. Solutions should benefit both parties.
- Dense living environments require careful consideration of public and private area relationships: private elements like doors and windows may also be considered semi-public elements.

Occasionally, private elements may extend into the public areas if they make an acceptable contribution – e.g. little gardens, benches etc.

- Hong Kong planning regulations do not leave much freedom to integrate spatial functions. However, I suggest to challenge conventional planning to achieve new kinds of functional spaces – while maintaining safety and comfort for the inhabitants. Regulations may well be changed in the future!



## Background and Reading

Reading on some existing architectural approaches and theories has been very helpful during this project:

- Boudon, Philippe: *Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier's Pessac revisited*. London, Lund Humphries 1972 (on the changing of a Corbusier-planned settlement by its inhabitants)
- Data provided by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department at: <http://www.info.gov.hk/censtatd/home.html>
- Forrest, Ray; La Grange, Adrienne; Yip Ngai-ming: *Neighbourhood in a High Rise, High Density City: Some Observations on Contemporary Hong Kong*. ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research, Feb 2002. 26pp. Webpage at: <http://www.neighbourhoodcentre.org.uk>
- Habraken, John N.: open building approach (several books on support and infill structures) See for example: <http://www.hut.fi/Yksikot/Osastot/A/AR/eng/index.htm>
- Kendall, Stephen and Teicher, Jonathan: *Residential Open Building*, 301 p., Ill., E & FN Spon, London and New York, 2000
- Wojtowicz, Jerzy: *Illegal Facades – Architecture Hong Kong Made*. Hong Kong, 1984

Built projects worth looking at include:

- The NEXT21 project: experimental residential building in Osaka/Japan.
- Open Building housing projects (most are structure & infill systems), see for example: Pelgromhof in Zeevenaar, Netherlands 1999 by Frans van der Werf
- Campus of the UCL Medical Faculties in Woluwe / Belgium by Lucien Kroll
- Illegal structures built by residents all over Hong Kong