

Capturing from Human Activities: the Multiscale Dynamisms of Dwelt Environment

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Abstract

Focusing on South Asian colonial cities as frontiers of hybridization of modern elements and local elements, the author has made a study on historical transformation of their dwelt environment for getting a better understanding on contemporary dwelt environment. Colombo, Sri Lanka's major city and at the same time the Indian Ocean's hub city, has been the major target of the study since 2004. In recent years, the author has participated as an architect in a project to find a local tutoring school in the historic area of Colombo to regenerate its local dwelt environment. A chat with a local dweller and the author at a teashop on the street during a field study spans off the project.

Establishment of an effective method for local dwelt environment consists of three phases as 1. Understanding of the present local dwelt environment and its development path through dwelt environment formation history, 2. Abstraction of possibility and problem of concrete and micro local dwelt environment based on the understanding of dwelt environment formation history, and 3. Co-design and co-creation of a new dwelt environment which copes with the possibilities and problems of local dweller, is the final objective of this study.

This paper especially has relation to the phase 3 of the above mentioned three phases. Based on the experience on practices of local tutoring school foundation project in Colombo, this paper ①analyzes dwelt environment as a complex system consisting of places, network of places and “縁 En” with attention to human activities, ②considers transition process of dwelt environment through design activities, and ③finally presents an idea on Dwelt Environment Model as a tool for management of transition process of dwelt environment.

Keywords: place, network of places, 縁 En, Dwelt Environment Model, science for design

1. Local Tutoring School in Historic Area of Colombo

Local tutoring school is a local cultural center that aims to hand down local history and support children's elementary learning. Regeneration of local dwelt environment which was devastated under the civil war that ended in 2009 is an urgent problem in Sri Lanka.

Historic areas of Colombo experienced conflicts between youth groups under disordered situation caused by the civil war. Lives of many youths were lost, and many dwellers fled to avoid the conflicts. Youth groups called “team” came to suppress dwellers by force, and day to day communications between dwellers were broken up. Teams were dismantled by the police with the end of the civil war. But relation between the families whose youth members' lives were lost in the conflicts and the families whose youth members deprived of lives of others are not restored until today, and this makes regeneration of devastated local dwelt environment of the historic area difficult. Education of children who carry the future of the area at the local cultur-

al center became a rare practice that people who opposed each other during the civil war can share.

2. Dwelt Environment

Dwelt environment, the environment that people formed around their body through their dwelling activities, is the basis of the life of people. The significance of dwelt environment was accepted during the late 1960s through practice and writing of Turner and came to be received globally (Turner et.al. 1969). In the 1960s, physical developments of cities by uniform and top-down ways which were globally carried for the sake of the internationally shared objectives and economic developments at that time, somewhat led to destruction of the lives of local dwellers. Through this experience, awareness of that there is a concrete dwelt environment with distinctive historical trail and culture as the

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basis of people's lives became popular.

Turner showed dwelt environment as a complex of physical and social elements. But in the 1970s, it became clear that if people do not care about natural environment, sustainability of dwelt environment will be undermined by dwelling activities themselves (村松, 深見, 山田, 内山, 2016). It is necessary to understand physical, social and natural environmental aspects of dwelt environment at the same time as of today.

More importantly, Turner did not show the way dwellers and elements of dwelt environment interact. To approach interaction between dwellers and elements of dwelt environment, this paper defines dwelt environment in reference to ideas of human – environment relations which have their basis on human activities. This paper treats environment of a person as a complex of humans, things and words (or symbols) as Varela et.al.(1992), Latour (1999) or Krippendorff (2005) mentioned.

A Human has a body that acts, senses and recognizes (or connects). Through the experiences of happenings, humans, things and words, a connected progress of actions, senses and recognition of the body is interlinked. Environment of a person is a system that humans, things and words are interlinked. The Interlink between humans, things and words, can be named as the environment of a person, where changes that occur due to new happenings would bring changes in person's actions, senses or recognitions.

Dwelt Environment is a part of human environment which came to be organized through dwelling activities. Many dwelling activities are not activities that are completed by one person but are activities that involve many other people. Interactions between people through words occur during dwelling activities. Interactions between people through words also bring changes in peoples' actions, senses or recognitions that lead to changes of personal environment and then to the changes of the dwelt environment.

Dwelt environment is fluctuating through both the personal experiences that are happening through one's body and through interactions between people and words.

3. History and Locality of Dwelt Environment and Its Dynamic nature

Dwelt environment has a specific order that has been formed through local situations and historical trails, as already mentioned. From the observation

of transformation of dwelt environment in historic areas of Colombo, following components which spread over different spatiotemporal scales come out as sources of history and locality of dwelt environment and its dynamism.

① A set of places that covers major activities of everyday life

In historic areas of Colombo, one can observe specific spatial hotspots where people gather and movements concentrate (hereinafter called “places”). One can observe places of work (Wholesale markets), places of beliefs and prayers (Mosques), places of dwelling (Lanes), or places of adjustment of various activities (Teashops and Sets that are shaped around teashops). Characteristics of places are different from one to another. Each place has its own historical trail, criterion and function. Dwelt environment includes one set of places that covers major activities of everyday life. Dwellers' everyday lives are maintained through this set of places. A set of places falls into special extent of several blocks.

②places as centers of gathering and conversation

At some places, many people gather and bring many topics on current events from various places as converse topics with each other. Topics that people bring and converse differ owing to historical trails, criteria or functions of different places. Through a conversation on a certain topic between people, different recognitions are exchanged and coordinated. Socialized recognitions appear from conversation, and then those socialized recognitions are brought out to other places. Conversation itself is one happening that comes to connect people at places.

③Network of places arises from visits of people

People come and go between places. Each person spends one's own time of the day as a succession of staying at different places and movements from one place to another.

A set of places come to be neatly interconnected through peoples' constant movements and accompanying movements of topics and things, and form a stable network of places. The extent of the network of places corresponds to the extent of the dwelt environment. Among places that get categorized in to one set such as, wholesale markets, mosques and teashops, where non-dwellers can freely visit and join conversations are entrances for dwelt environment which are situating in the space.

④Network of teashops that connects several neighboring dwelt environments.

A network of one set of places forms a dwelt environment. Another set of places also exists around this dwelt environment and forms other neighboring dwelt environments. Among that set of places, teashops have remarkably higher number of visits by people. Additionally, different from other places, all kinds of topics are brought into highlight in them. These topics are conversed along different criteria that a set of different places have. And then different topics and their social recognitions are brought out through the movements of people of other places relevant to both the inside and the outside of the dwelt environment. Through this movement between one teashop and another teashop situated in another dwelt environment, a network of teashops is set up and that connects several neighboring dwelt environments. The topics and their recognition differ from one neighborhood to another and they become stable by other topics involved and their recognition is brought into teashops of other dwelt environments.

◎「縁 En」: historically formed human relationships that are accumulated inside a person or a family

In addition to short-term connections of people intermediated by places, there are also more stable networks of human relationships that arise from personal or family based long-term accumulations, selection and enhancement of short-term connections of people intermediated by places. We call this long-term network of human relationships that accumulated inside a person or a family as, “縁 En”. “En” is not bonded to particular places but is rather free from the spatial order. Spatial extent of “En” as a network does not fall into that of dwelt environment and has a wider expand. The expanse of “En” is usually wider than that of gatherings of neighboring dwelt environments and often is wide as South Asia, Indian Ocean, or the globe. “En” is another route of visits of topics and recognitions rather than a physical network of adjoining places.

Frequently intermediated by cell phones, topics and their recognitions brought in and brought out from distant places, which are parts of the dwelt environments, ones’ “En” is connected to acquaintances of the dwell. From person to person the connection which forms a certain part of “En” has its own historical trail, criterion and function. Topics and those recognitions formed at certain dwelt environment changes through other topics and those recognitions are brought from distant through other people or families’ “En”.

These places, network of places, and “En” con-

figure dwelt environment as a spatiotemporal system which has a loose structure and behavioral characteristics.

Places, network of places, and “En” can be observed at any place on the earth as primal bases of peoples’ lives according to the author’s observation.

4. Dwelt environment shift through integration of a new place

Dwelt environment, as a basis of lives of dwellers, is a network of a set of places. If one new place is added to the existing set of places and integrated into existing network of places, the former network of places as a whole becomes a new system. Through this process, existing dwelt environments shift to new dwelt environments that offer a new basis of lives for dwellers. This section discusses the methods of dwelt environment transition from existing ones to new ones through addition of new places to existing set of places and integration of a place into an existing network of places, as one practical way for local dwelt environment formations in architectural projects.

This section first refers to the experiences of local tutoring school project that is ongoing in historic area of Colombo, and then shows the temporary prospect on the process of shift of existing dwelt environment into a new one, based on comprehensions on the process of the local tutoring school project. Lastly, a means for the transition process management is discussed.

It was several interested people who started the local tutoring school foundation.

After drawing a draft program for the local tutoring school, those interested people visited places in and around their dwelt environment. They used plans, sketches and management concepts brought with them as communication mediums and conversed with people at other places about tentative ideas and programs. From conversations, new recognitions possibilities and problems were identified among the participants. New plans, sketches and management concepts were made to reflect outcome of the conversations. Ideas, programs and recognitions on the local tutoring school circulated around the dwelt environment as participants moved to other places.

Through conversations at places, the local tutoring school project, though it was still ongoing and not yet recognized, was gradually accepted by dwellers as an emerging event that might be

acknowledged in the future. As the local tutoring school project got accepted, dwellers brought new requests and showed will of joining. The local tutoring school was still not materialized but came to be an imagined new place where dwellers gather and enjoy new activities.

Based on the observations on the process of the local tutoring school project, the author is provisionally assuming that an addition of a new place to the existing set of places and integration of the places into existing network of places would progress through the following five phases.

1. Wish and concept on new activities and facilities for the activities of a few dwellers would arise as the first step.

2. As the concept and recognition on the new activities and facilities come to be accepted by the dwellers, the new activities and facilities, though still not been materialized, come to be an imagined quasi-existing place and that is added to the existing set of places that consist the dwelt environment.

3. The concept and recognition on the new activities and facilities are revised and updated to adjust themselves to various lives, social and natural environmental elements. Dwellers deepen their recognition on the new activities and facilities, and the degree of substantiality increases at every revise and update.

4. Through institutionalized procedures for starting the actual activities and materialization of a building through construction, the concept which got substantiality among dwellers proceeds to anchor into the dwelt environment as a new substantial place.

5. Once the actual activities start and the building is materialized, new problems and possibilities in relation to the interaction between the activities, the buildings and the dwellers would start to emerge. Coping with these problems and possibilities, the new substantial place should be firmly integrated into the dwelt environment. At present, the local tutoring school project is going to pass phase 1.-3 and is proceeding into phase 4.

Management of transition process of dwelt environment from phase 1 to phase 5 is critical to form a new dwelt environment through addition of a new place to existing set of places and integration of the place into existing network of places.

At phase 1 the new dwelt environment formation project collapses when the link between the

concept on new activities, institutions and dwellers broke. At phase 2 and 3 the project collapses when the link between the new imagined place and the existing places broke. At phase 4 and 5 the project may collapse when the link between the actual activities, materialized institutions and the dwellers breaks.

As long as the link between the elements appearing in each phase keeps connected, the new dwelt environment formation project can progress into substantiation.

5. Dwelt Environment Model: tool for management of transition process of dwelt environment

If there is a tool that enables designers and dwellers to grasp dynamism and state of dwelt environment, it would be helpful to manage the link between the elements that appear in each phase to be controlled in transition process of dwelt environment. As this tool, the author is trying to compose a visual model of dwelt environment (Dwelt Environment Model) as a system of places, linkages between places aroused from personal activities, and “En” namely linkages between people. Dwelt Environment Model is expected to have effects on discovery of risks of breaking up the links which may lead to the collapse of the project, and on the discovery of transition pass which can avoid these risks.

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