Portable City – For Central Beijing Hutong Area

By Dan Xie

The traditional Hutong area in Beijing faces many problem now days. Usually many families (four or five) will share one courtyard, and since the Hutong was built long time ago, the structure is lacking of facilities for example toilet, showering etc. At the same time, following by the urban development, many Hutong was tore down, people are moved to the outskirt of Beijing starting the commute life. How to protect the traditional culture while improving the quality of life in the Hutong area has became an important topic for Beijing.

The Portable City idea I had, it’s to create portable unit, which could plug into the exiting Hutong structure and system. The portable unit could be toilet, reading room, community garden, or guest room.

Consider the narrow walk way in the Hutong area, the portable unit need to be designed with the narrow shape and with light materials. It is inspired by the current scene in Hutong that there are many street furniture unconsciously put outside in the walk way in the Hutong area and shared by the community. The portable unit will also has the movable feature, and could be modified and shared by the local community. It could also provide a space for young people who want to stay in the inner city but couldn’t afford the high rent.

The realization of this idea will need the support from the government, who should consider more the value of the traditional structure of the city and protect it in their city planning. It also needs architects studio and materials companies who will design the practical form of the unit. And important, it needs the participation of local community to utilize the unit and come up with their own creative uses of this unit based on their needs.

Step by step this idea may create a more sustainable future of Hutong area in Beijing city.
Current shared toilet in Hutong area

Street furniture in the Hutong area

“City as living room”- street furniture spread out in the Hutong area, create semi-public space
Concept of portable unit

- could be community garden, reading room, living room etc

Current practice by Chinese architect for Hutong area in Beijing - MAD, Hutong Bubble
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