



# Urban Design Lab Weifang City - Ledaoyuan as a Hinge

## Final Report

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## Introduction and Context

The story of *Ledaoyuan* is one of survival. World War II would set the stage for the second Sino-Japanese War where an American Presbyterian mission founded in 1882 by Robert M. Mateer would be turned into the Weixian internment camp by the Japanese in 1942, imprisoning at one time more than 1400 civilians. Ledaoyuan did not only survive the Japanese invasion, but was also rebuilt from a fire caused by the *Boxer Rebellion* in the 1900s. The perseverance of the mission since 1882 and until 1942, inherited a Church, a School, a University and a Hospital that have evolved until today, but most importantly, the story of Ledaoyuan inherited Weifang with a spirit of solidarity, friendship and peace that have transcended the borders of the city, not only as an important part of its identity, but also joining in 2021 the network of 330 International Cities of Peace.

Few interventions allow designers to translate into an urban landscape, the tragedy of the years that civilian prisoners would have had to face during the war, or the harshness of missionaries from the persecution; and at the same time, assimilate in a design concept the social work of productive people helping to build a better society. With this framework, the advisory group convened to focus on the concepts of friendship and peace, which are concepts that are able to better express the learnings from history and the memory that Ledaoyuan hopes to bring to society as a humanitarian intervention.

Weifang is well known as World Kite Capital, is geographically located at the center of the Shandong province. It is the 2nd largest metropolitan city region in Shandong, with a size of 15.859 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of around 9.36 million. Weifang's government aimed to redevelop not only the core area of Ledaoyuan that comprised 34.5 hectares, but also to integrate this intervention into a broader area of 2.43 km<sup>2</sup> that was referred to as the Control Area, surrounded by the streets of Shengli street, Wenhua Rd, Weizhou Rd and Jiankang Rd.

## Urban Design Lab - Team Work

With this in mind, and after visiting the site, the team identified that there was a spatial pattern within the remaining 7 historical buildings aligned into a possible development axis. A path to be extended into the west towards the old city and the Weifang World Kite Museum, and into the east towards the new Civic Center. Therefore, resembling a path from past to future... a path of peace.

This first concept of the ***Path of Peace***, linking the past to the future, has to deal with the concerns of the government of renewal of the city, and take into consideration that the economy of Weifang and other elements of the city's identity. The urban fringe laid out through the *Path of Peace*, needs to intertwine three different design scales in order to have an aspiration for a significant effect on the city. These scales of interventions would not only aim to boost tourism, but also that would create a new destination for Weifang's citizens, that in turn, deliver a potential for improving social dynamics and their economy.

The first scale of intervention is a 3.8 km long fringe that would travel along the west end through Xingzheng Street, and along the east through Minsheng Street, having the core area as a ***"Hinge"***



that would link both ends. The second scale of intervention is the master plan of the core area, which had to be sensitive to the requirements of the different stakeholders of the project, mainly the *Weifang's* People's Hospital, The Medical University, the Guangwen Middle School and the Weifang Department of history.

There were two spaces that were agreed to be demolished and redeveloped within certain conditions within the core area. The first one to the northeast of the plot, on the border of Shengli Street intersecting Yuanfei Road, that could hold 100,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new construction for a mixed used development. The second one, to the western center section of the core area, where a residential community is settled. The latter space, if demolished, would be turned into a park for other residents and users of the neighbor areas.

The third scale of intervention would be a building and a plaza that would stand on the north-eastern corner of the core area, that would eventually become an clear access to Ledaoyuan Park.

The intervention at the urban scale required to deliver a proposal that would change the dynamics of mobility in the center of the city, and at the same time, create a link between the western end of the Weifang Kite Museum and the Civic Center. The team thought of superblock case studies in Barcelona, Woonerfs in the Netherlands, or the pedestrian experience of Wangfujing in Beijing; where streets were turned into pedestrian spaces with limited access to cars, new public spaces were created, a rise of commercial and office spaces were achieved, just to mention some of the effects of Superblocks within the city, highlighting that gradually, it set the stage to concentrate a specific mass of population that would end transforming the place into a destination.

The *Path of Peace* of Weifang, would be supported as well with a series of facilities, existing destinations and future projects, all of which could be easily connected in innovative ways. Such case would be the abandoned factory to the south of Minsheng East Road, between Siping Road, Weizhou Road and Jiankang East Street. Incorporating to the urban realm 35 hectares of new projects and linked to the *Path of Peace* through Weizhou Road, just 240 meters to the north. The team identified more than 60 buildings and spaces that could be connected to the *Path of Peace* because of their activity, their potential to increase their density or update their land use. These spaces could be linked directly or indirectly, allowing the opportunity to be renovated or improved. The team also noted that some of these spaces would be needed for increasing the inventory of parking in the area, thinking of the potential attractiveness that the *Path of Peace* may have in the city and also the impact that would create from a tourism perspective.

A further important connection is the one linked to the green and blue systems, specially to the Bailang River to the west and the Yu River that intersects the core area. These two rivers are key to the green system of the city, where landscaping projects have given people a green space to turn to. Furthermore, these two green infrastructure corridors that intersect with the *Path of Peace*, are an opportunity to rethink the river banks as a renewed sustainable linear park that would integrate seamlessly to the *Path of Peace*. Therefore, extending the public space not only in an east – west orientation, but also with north and south axes links. The *Path of Peace* would therefore be an important node to link these two green infrastructures with a social perspective.



This proposal of superblocks could be implemented by establishing a pedestrian area through Xingzheng Street and Minsheng Street, therefore linking the north and south blocks of each side of the street without disturbing the actual mobility on the main streets that run north to south. The intervened area would allow to have an urban facelift of facades and streets, linear parks with featured landscape, leisure and tourism facilities. All of which would give a new dimension and opportunity to redefine an important area of the public space of Weifang. Recovering the streets for pedestrians would allow the people to create new activities, gather safely and increase the attractiveness of a cultural and commercial street.

Within the core area, the team decided to take the option of clearing the two designated spaces for redevelopment and deliver a proposal that would act as the *"hinge"*: linking the east and west streets that conform the *Path of Peace*. The central space next to the existing Ledaoyuan park, would extend the greenery and activities of the park, increasing its presence in the city. The northern space was decided to be framed into a *"gateway"* for the *Path of Peace*, since it borders Shengli Street as a main avenue and would create the image of an entrance that is located in the center of the *Path of Peace*.

The area given to the park, would create 5 thematic gardens that would have a close relationship of the concept of friendship and peace, these gardens embrace a central plaza that will be kept as a memorial. The gardens relate to the historical context as well as to the existing urban context and aim to link both together to create identity on this important and unique place, but also serve the needs of the city dwellers and their need for recreational space.

This was the topic of the first garden to the east: The memorial Garden, a space that would hold a monument, a space for meditation and a historical exhibition. The contiguous garden is named the Healing Garden, a space that would use the vegetation palette to grow herbs and medicinal plants, would promote a space for silence and allow the sounds of the water flow and wind to be felt. The central garden is named the Friendship garden, where art would be featured with a sense of adventure. The Friendship garden is an ideal place for having workshops and cultural events. Further to the west is the Education Garden, a garden to discover, that would advocate for having music, performances, bringing teams together or encourage education topics about nature. The westernmost garden is the Eric Liddle Sports Garden, in honor of the Olympic champion that had a great contribution to society in the Ledaoyuan complex. A garden that is linked to the school, but could be used occasionally by the citizens who would like to exercise, have a playground or sports competition with a child friendly environment.

The 5 gardens are linked to the school, the residential area and the hospital on the south. And linked to the north to the Gateway Plaza, that features the sustainable Icon of the *Path of Peace* in form of a building that rises from the south and reaches its maximum height on the northern most part, suggesting people to see the sky, with a message of hope. The Gateway Plaza is also a place that extends the link of the 5 gardens with the Yu River and creates a square in the west center as an end point of Xingzheng street that the team has named the Peace Square. The space between the building and the river also brings an opportunity to have a vibrant space to gather and have food and beverage services.



This iconic terraced building of 100,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with a maximum height of 80 meters, is organized into three functions: A hotel, office space and a tourist center. The terraced complex building, conceived with high standards of sustainability, would feature green roofs accessible to people that would in turn be an observation point looking at the gardens, the Yu River and the *Path of Peace*.

These three different urban scales of intervention in the city of Weifang, would allow to increase the awareness of the Ledaoyuan heritage of friendship and peace. Would also transform the mobility of the city by creating new thriving public spaces that would increase connectivity not only to existing buildings and to the green infrastructure of the Bailang and Yu Rivers, but would also deliver a potential of economic transformation of underperforming spaces through the theme of friendship and peace.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

As a result of this project, The *Path of Peace* is also an opportunity to construct an image that would resemble the goals of the government of Weifang to increase its GDP, achieved through diverse means in other parts of the city. It's agricultural produce, may be a topic for the commercial spaces within the *Path of Peace*, as well as the crafts to build kites or folk wood-block print, or the achievements of their Industrial and *National Demonstration Zones*. The *Path of Peace* becomes a stage for the city to showcase in an urban scale what the city is about and the future that the government is building for the citizens of Weifang.

The Ledaoyuan project, is one of this unique cases that grant us a moment to reflect that healthy development can only happen within a peaceful and friendly atmosphere. More often cities are looking into their history to develop their city through a meaningful theme, Weifang indeed has a meaningful one that would allow to restructure the core of the urban area and build a new face as the city keeps its path to growth.

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