

OUTCOME DOCUMENT FOR HKSAR GOVERNMENT 2030+ PROCESS

Introduction

The Urban Thinkers Campus is an initiative of the World Urban Campaign (WUC), an advocacy and partnership platform coordinated by the United Nations Human Settlement Programmes (UN-Habitat), to allow its many partners and networks around the world to raise awareness in developing sustainable cities. This year WUC has approved 74 Urban Thinkers Campuses around the world including the one organised by the Urban Studies Programme (URSP) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) on 1 April 2017 (Programme in Appendix I). This was the second time CUHK organised an Urban Thinkers Campus, and the focus of this Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0 (UTC2.0) was “**Global Vision, Local Action: Aligning Hong Kong’s 2030+ with the UN New Urban Agenda**”¹. One of the main objectives of the UTC2.0 was to provide a platform for different stakeholders to discuss Hong Kong’s urban future and to identify areas of linkages and synergies between the HK2030+ study and the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador last October as a global framework to mobilise cities and regions to intentionally develop in a more sustainable, equitable and inclusive manner over the next 20 years.

On 1 April 2017, more than 120 participants, including students, academics, professionals, advocates and activists from green groups and other NGOs gathered at CUHK to discuss the urban future of Hong Kong. In addition to the introduction of the HK2030+ Study by Ms Phyllis Li, JP, as well as Prof Mee Kam Ng’s presentation on the key principles of the New Urban Agenda, the participants took part in a number of intense and rewarding discussions on the integration and alignment of the HK2030+ study and the New Urban Agenda. This report is a synthesised outcome of the inter-disciplinary discussions that took place during the Urban Thinkers breakout sessions, as well as the individual response from the participants who completed our online questionnaire or physically pinned up their comments on the different discussion boards set up at the venue.

The following first identify the gaps between the two documents, followed by discussions on the synthesised planning principles considered to be significant by the participants. Unlike HK2030+, the New Urban Agenda focus a lot on implementation mechanisms. Hence UTC2.0 had also devoted a lot of energy to discuss the implementation and action items, as well as commitments required from the public and private sectors as well as the citizens.

¹ See website: <http://web5.arch.cuhk.edu.hk/urbandesign/urbanthinkers2017.html>.

Gaps in HK2030+

By studying the Government's HK2030+ strategic plan in detail and cross-examining it with the United Nations New Urban Agenda, a number of major gaps in the HK2030+ study were identified by the participants at the Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0.

Lack of a long-term vision and regional perspective

One of the gaps in the HK2030+ is the lack of a clear long-term vision for the future of Hong Kong, especially in relation to its neighbours in the region and the world. For Hong Kong to become a truly global city, the government needs to recognise the global challenges that we are likely to face and situate the future development of Hong Kong within the global and regional context. It is also important to explore the potential of working with the neighbouring cities in our region, including the possibility of cross-border planning. Moreover, despite the government's emphasis on developing sustainable and smart cities, there is no real discussion in the document on what a sustainable and smart Hong Kong would be like, and how it can be achieved.

Missing historical perspective

While the HK2030+ study has a strong focus on new developments and master plans, our participants call for a much needed historical perspective in the document in order to fully understand the history and legacy of Hong Kong, and to clearly identify its character and strengths. The participants believe it is also critical to review the existing planning processes and to learn from our previous failures before pressing forward with the different new developments as proposed in the HK2030+ study.

No socio-economic agenda to leave no one behind

Another major gap in the document is the lack of a clear socio-economic agenda. Whereas the New Urban Agenda insists on "Leaving No One Behind", certain socio-economic groups including youth, elderly, poor, women, ethnic minorities and the disabled are perceived to be excluded in the current HK2030+ discussions. More emphasis should be put on existing land and community needs by utilising existing industrial buildings to provide affordable housing, tackle the aging population, improve the public realm and public amenities of old neighbourhoods. Moreover, the study does not include any plans and strategies to promote a more just and inclusive economy and ways to alleviate the increasing income and wealth inequalities. Addressing the trend of socio-economic polarisation and promoting affordable living are regarded by the participants as two of the most pressing issues in the urban development process of Hong Kong. It is therefore important for the government to ensure that no one is being left behind in any of its strategic plans for Hong Kong such as the HK2030+.

Alternatives? Scant discussion on implementation, monitoring and meaning of terms

Lastly, our participants are disappointed by the fact that the document does not include any alternative plans or proposals that the public can choose from. There is also very little discussion in the HK2030+ study on how the proposed strategies and plans can be implemented, especially the coordination of bureaucratic actions and the mode of governance required, or the implications they will have on the social and economic developments of Hong Kong. The document also lacks any concrete measuring mechanisms, targets and indicators, and fails to provide clear definitions of the different jargons used such as vulnerability, resilience, sustainability, carrying capacity and liveability, and their meaning in the local context of Hong Kong.

Planning Principles

The participants of the UTC2.0 have come up with the following keywords to represent their visions of HK2030+:

- Inclusiveness, affordability, equal accessibility, integrated public space
- Social justice, equality, social mix, ending poverty, age friendly, humanising urbanism, people-centric, respecting minorities
- Sharing economy, anti-monopoly/duopoly, strengthening traditional industries
- Resilient, sustainable, green, diversity, adaptable, flexible, responsible
- Smart, creative, innovative
- Liveability, self-sufficiency (water, food), healthy
- Empowering, opportunities, fairness
- Happiness

The participants of the UTC2.0 also set out a number of planning principles that should be included in the HK2030+ study and any future plans of Hong Kong.

Inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental coordination for regional planning

UTC2.0 participants aspire that the study will benefit greatly from more macro-level planning that takes into account Hong Kong's role in the greater region and how we can work with our neighbours. The implementation of such plans will also require more inter-disciplinary planning and inter-departmental coordination in the government. However, they also remind that, instead of producing a blue-print, master planning should be an ongoing process that aims to develop communities.

Small is beautiful: localised planning and building guidelines with early involvement of urban designers to promote diverse neighbourhoods

The master plans proposed in HK2030+ should be complemented with localised planning and building guidelines that can improve both the physical as well as the socio-economic conditions of specific neighbourhoods. In order to have a more holistic vision of planning, the UTC2.0 participants believe it is important for the government to involve urban designers and architects in the early stages of the planning process, and to take into account the different aspects of urban design issues including connectivity, accessibility, context and liveability. The government can also create more vibrant and diverse neighbourhoods by developing smaller plots, involving smaller developers and designers, and breaking up the ownership of the street front.

People-centric approach

The participants also argue for a more people-centric approach in the HK2030+ study by seeing the public as the main driver of the plan instead of just a means to legitimise it. Instead of focusing on the economic returns and financial gains, the government should put people first by encouraging more public engagement and civic participation to help develop a liveable city with a high quality of life, urban inclusiveness and equal opportunities. It is also important for the government to have a more holistic view of urban development and take into account other issues such as the re-commoning of space and resources, socio-economic justice, affordability, local identity, preserving the integrity of cultural and built heritage in any future developments.

Environmental friendliness, sustainability and resilience

We should also ensure that the proposed plans in the HK2030+ study are both environmentally friendly and sustainable. Not only do we need to recognise and accept the planetary boundaries and the impact urban developments can have on the environment, urban development should adhere to environmental principles such as designing with nature, cutting down carbon emission, and building more green buildings that meet the BEAM standard. In light of the different challenges Hong Kong is facing, the UTC2.0 participants recognise the importance for Hong Kong to become a socially and environmentally resilient city that can quickly respond and recover from any potential crisis. The government should always think in opportunities rather than constraints.

Implementation and Actions for HK2030+

- ***Regional planning:*** Some of the UTC2.0 participants consider that HK2030+ should explore how to integrate better with the region and collaborate with other cities.
- ***Happy and resilient communities:*** The city can develop key performance indicators for government to seek improvement in health, environment, happiness and resilience etc.
- ***No East Lantau Metropolis:*** There is also a clear objection among the participants against the current plan of developing the CBD3 at the proposed East Lantau Metropolis site. The UTC2.0 participants believe that the CBD3 should either be abandoned or relocated to the Hung Shui Kiu area in West New Territories to utilise the existing infrastructure and resources, and to satisfy the current demand for jobs in the area. It is also suggested by some of the UTC2.0 participants that the government should take the lead and move at least some of the government offices to the proposed CBD3 to demonstrate its commitment and to instil more confidence among the private sector regarding the CBD3's potential and success.
- ***Refurbishing not redeveloping neighbourhoods:*** The participants also consider the need for a clear vision on how to redevelop existing neighbourhoods through pilot projects, through refurbishing rather than demolishing old buildings to minimise displacement.
- ***Low carbon and barrier free urban fabric:*** According to the participants, the government is currently not taking enough actions to protect the environment and to ensure ecological sustainability in Hong Kong. The government needs to develop better waste- and water-management system, promote biodiversity and lower Hong Kong's carbon footprint by improving the walkability of the urban area, encouraging cycling as a means of transport and reducing the number of private vehicles. It is also important to develop a comprehensive low-carbon city plan by developing a smart grid and a long-term water supply plan, as well as using more renewable energy and smart technologies. All in all, new developments should be green, barrier free and elderly friendly.
- ***An inclusive, affordable and sustainable urban form:*** The UTC2.0 participants believe that physical space and the urban form is a crucial component in the urban development of Hong Kong. A well-designed public realm and adequate living space with essential residential or pedestrian amenities can greatly enhance the liveability and well-being of the local communities. The participants argue that quality assessments and design competitions are crucial for improving the standard of our public housing and public space. Moreover, in order to meet the housing demand, different innovative housing and development models should be explored, and hopefully the current "podium + towers" model can be replaced with something more inclusive, affordable and sustainable.

- ***Inclusive economic development:***
 - The government should promote inclusive economic development and create more job opportunities by diversifying the types and scales of businesses and by providing more resources for SME development and green industries
 - It should also encourage more community economic development by relaxing the use of public open space for small scale business activities, food trucks, hawkers and different local projects. The UTC2.0 participants believe that it is crucial for the government to be able to see opportunities in challenges. For instance, although the aging population in Hong Kong will require more resources for elderly healthcare, it can also represent a good opportunity to promote and establish healthcare tourism in Hong Kong.
 - The UTC2.0 participants also call for policies that promote economic diversities and equality, such as pro-low income regulations, the breakup of monopoly and duopoly of corporate chains, provide micro-credit to assist small companies and address social security, as well as medical benefits and pensions for the informal economies.
 - In addition, the government should also set regulations and standards for companies to hire a certain percentage of ethnic minorities to promote cultural diversity and to encourage interactions and engagement of ethnic minorities. It is important to address socio-economic issues from different ethnic groups of all classes.
 - Lastly, the government should explore the possibilities to devolve power and resources to local districts for making planning decisions and creating localised district plans adapted to each local neighbourhood.
- ***Reform the land sale system:*** One of the main policy recommendations the UTC2.0 participants have is the reformation of the land sale and auction system. Instead of the current bidding process that aims to maximise revenue, they argue that the land sale system should also incorporate benchmarks for measuring social and financial outcomes in order to encourage more social purposes that will be beneficial to the public and the community.
- ***Affordable housing options:*** It is also important to maintain the affordability of housing by protecting land tenure and preventing land speculation, and limiting the plot size to involve smaller developers and designers. Other measures suggested for creating more affordable housing include rent control that links to the living wage, innovative mixed housing models, remodelling vacated schools and industrial buildings for temporary housing and elderly homes, and exploring and utilising any leftover space in the urban area etc.
- ***Engagement in a more transparent planning and development process:*** In order to successfully deliver the HK2030+ plan, it is essential that the government continues to engage with different stakeholders from all disciplines, and try to establish a long-term trusting partnership with the various communities involved. The public, on the other hand, will have to participate more and keep the government in check by being proactive and vigilant of what is going on. A more transparent planning system and more open data access will also be able to help engendering genuine two-way communications between the government and the public. Meanwhile, the government should undertake a thorough review of each plan and provide its total economic and environmental costs.
- ***Re-commoning practices:*** The government should also create more policies that encourage the re-commoning of the public resources to ensure the vitality of local community businesses and spaces for social capital accumulation. Public spaces should be liberalised for all to participate, and the relaxation of regulations and land use zoning for street level stores can help the development of informal and community economic activities such as open flea markets and urban farms. Local communities and NGOs should be allowed to manage public space according to a set of guiding principles for public space design and use that make boundaries between public and

private spaces more synergetic and attractive, and provide more seats and fewer railings. The government should also consider ecologising existing urban areas by encouraging vegetable farming, community gardening, green building, preserving historic buildings and local heritage, and preventing the displacement of residents.

Tripartite commitments

The Public Sector:

The UTC2.0 participants believe that, on the one hand, the government should have more leadership and responsibility, take up more initiatives, and have more courage to implement the policies that are for the betterment of Hong Kong. On the other hand, the government need to engage and empower the public, and be willing to listen to different opinions, especially those from the majority grassroots and the youths. The government should be committed to rethinking the long-term development of Hong Kong by exploring potential plans and strategies that will help make Hong Kong more self-sufficient and sustainable, while planning and cooperating with other cities in the region and around the world.

In terms of the economy, it is critical to address the current distributional inequity of economic development in Hong Kong and diversify the economy by creating micro-economic opportunities, fostering community economic development and social enterprises, and liberating the use of public realm to promote shared use such as street vending. It will hopefully allow for inclusive and organic developments that create a more equal, trusting and harmonious society. The government should also identify and provide the necessary support to people who are currently being left behind, strive to ensure spatial, social and economic justice, and commit to provide housing to all, including different marginalised groups like the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers.

Instead of focusing on land reclamation for new developments, the government should ensure that the capacity of existing land use is being optimised by renewing old urban areas and fully utilising existing neighbourhood resources. However, the urban renewal process should not be driven by financial returns and the government should try its hardest to prevent the displacement of residents and to preserve the existing social capital, community networks and human resources. The government should also have better guidelines and regulations for the private sector in urban development and urban renewal to prevent them from becoming merely money making exercises.

The UTC2.0 participants agree that it is crucial for the government to create more participatory spaces for all the stakeholders to shape and contribute to the implementation of HK2030+ from the early stages of the planning process. This can be done by setting up town halls and public forums, participating in more interactive brainstorm sessions, creating an official space for continual and institutionalised participation for stakeholders such as professionals and academics, engaging with minority and marginalised groups such as migrant workers and ethnic minorities, and creating formal participatory space for youth to engage in the planning process. Moreover, the government need to prove that it is open to different ideas and ways of doing things, to provide options and alternatives for the public to choose from, and to create better mechanisms for the public to give feedback. There should also be a more democratic process for the public to elect the Town Planning Board members.

Private Sector:

The participants of the UTC2.0 call for more corporate social responsibility from the private sector. Every company should have a clear and long-term vision for a more sustainable future by reducing carbon footprint and promoting recycling. Restaurants and markets should support local farms and produce. The private sector should also play a more proactive role in employing ethnic minorities.

Civil Society:

The civil society should be committed to actively participate in the HK2030+ planning process, and be willing to voice out their concerns and hold the government accountable whenever necessary. The public can also help come up with different solutions and suggestions for their local communities, or even draw up local and district plans that can at least stimulate conversations and idea exchange.

The public also have to take up the responsibility to communicate our vision and principles and suggested actions effectively to the government by organising and participating in public forums and seizing every opportunity to educate and share with others. One can also join labour unions, trade associations and professional institutes or associations to have a stronger voice to influence decision making within the establishment by soliciting the government and legislators and by seeking cooperation with decision makers. It may also require taking part in direct actions, social movements and other bottom-up initiatives to advocate for a more holistic, interdisciplinary, participatory and interchangeable implementation mechanism. The public should engage and work with different professionals and stakeholders to create alternative proposals that are truly visionary and can generate more public awareness. Lastly, it is important to keep the government in check by asking sensible questions and by demanding regular assessments and reporting by the government.

Conclusion

UTC2.0 participants have tried to align HK2030+ with the three fundamental principles of the New Urban Agenda: leaving no one behind, inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability, as well as the document's emphases on governance mechanisms and implementation measures. This report may differ from the conventional responses expected for the Planning Department's official consultation process in terms of its format and content. However, we truly believe that the discussion outcomes from the UTC2.0 are invaluable to Hong Kong's urban development beyond 2030 and will help shape the HK2030+ planning process.

CUHK Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0

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United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth

United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network