

HONG KONG

AS A LARGE CITY STUDY

Timothy Kelleher,
International School Hong Kong

Introduction

Hong Kong presents as an excellent choice for a large city in the developed world study. Although located in China, a rapidly developing or BRIC country, Hong Kong developed its world city economy, status and characteristics under British rule, justifying its inclusion as a large city in the developed world. Its strategic position within Asia is well documented so too its meteoric rise courtesy of a burgeoning economy. Like other world cities, Hong Kong is seeking to exert itself globally resulting in changes that are as rapid as they are varied. The urban dynamics of change are easily visible throughout this city and make for an exciting investigation. With limited room when compared to other world cities Hong Kong is centered very much on urban renewal and consolidation to ensure continued development. What is evident is the wonderful mix of the old and the new and a genuine attempt to utilise the land in an ecologically sound way.

An excellent starting point for studying Hong Kong is an investigation of the land use patterns. Figure 1 illustrates the small proportion of land currently under residential, commercial and industrial usage (less than 10%). Interestingly, 2/3 of the current land use is woodland/shrub land/grassland/wetlands – a fact that few people would believe prior to exploring Hong Kong.

Urban dynamics of change

Social structure and spatial patterns of advantage and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, ethnicity

When considering this dynamic it is important to understand that Hong Kong is a city almost completely urbanised. Its urban sprawl is unlike other cities. With an average population density (as at mid-2014) of 6 690 persons per square kilometer, and Kwun Tong, with 57 250 persons per square kilometer, the city is contrasted with extreme variations of advantage and disadvantage (Census and Statistics Department 2015). Space, distance from the CBD and services, access to hospitals and schools together with the income disparities all need to be considered in this point.

The New Territories area contains 52% of Hong Kong's population and makes up 86% of its territory. This area underwent urban development in the 1960's when the government realised the need for more residential districts to meet the growing housing demand. According to Hill, NG & Wan (1989) the New Territories was designed to house 3 million people. The advantages and disadvantages of this development and the on-going urban development in the New Territories can be explored through the income levels of residents

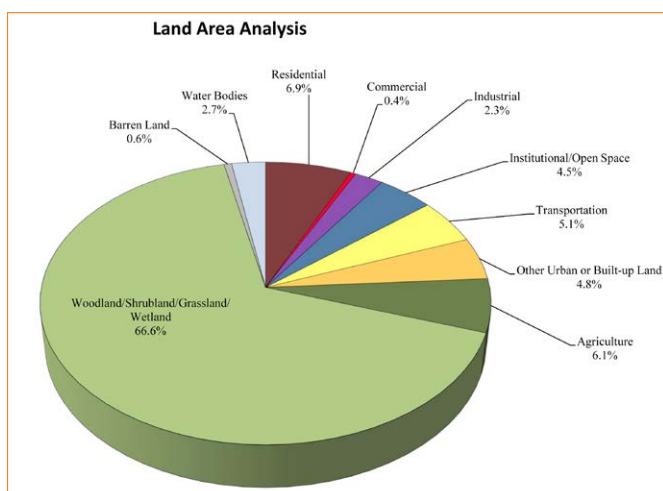


Figure 1: Land use of Hong Kong. Surprisingly more than half of the available land in Hong Kong is natural vegetation. With less than 7% of land designated residential the presence of high rise urban living is evident throughout the three urban areas of the city.

Source: <http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-world-landuse-maps.htm>

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compared to those living in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. Dwelling sizes, access to schools and universities, hospitals and places of employment are easily compared.

According to the Home Affairs Department (2015), Hong Kong is a largely homogenous society, with about 94% of its people being Chinese (ethnically speaking, Han Chinese). Results from the 2011 Population Census revealed (by way of self-identification) that there were about 451,000 non-Chinese people in Hong Kong, or about 6% of the population. Figure 2 illustrates the composition of this group. Despite the largely Han population the cultural variations within the city are quite pronounced. Here students could look at the expatriate communities that exist throughout Hong Kong, so to the remnants of the British colonial era. Further, the plight of the more than 300 000 foreign domestic helpers is worthy of consideration.



Figure 4: Thousands of school children cross between China and Hong Kong each day for school. The border is considered a necessity as school places become more difficult to obtain in Chinese schools offering English medium instruction.

(2011 Population By-census)	
Ethnicity (Self-identification)	Total number
Indonesian	133 377
Filipino	133 018
White	55 236
Indian	28 616
Pakistani	18 042
Nepalese	16 518
Japanese	12 580
Thai	11 213
Other Asian	12 247
Others	30 336

Figure 2: Illustrates the ethnic diversity for the non-Chinese portion (6%) of Hong Kong's population.

Changing economic character, nature and location of residential land, commercial and industrial development

Hong Kong is a city constantly undergoing change. This topic is well covered through a study of the industrial and deindustrialised periods of the past 70 years. The opening of China to the world's business markets in 1979 saw the emergence of Shenzhen city (Figure 3) and the subsequent decline (urban decay) of manufacturing in Hong Kong as the lure of cheap land and labour was too great for local companies. What was once made *in* Hong Kong quickly became made *for* Hong Kong. Such was the size of this industrial decline the Hong Kong government set about redefining the city as the premier financial and logistics centre within Asia. Urban renewal has been at the forefront of the governments planning since the 1980s. Former industrial areas like Kwun Tong, Kennedy Town and East Kowloon are excellent examples of such renewal (refer Figure 5).

When investigating the changing economic character of Hong Kong one must consider the relevance of the city in relation to China. Hong Kong was ceded back to China in 1997 following 150 years of British rule. At this time trade between China and the traditional western countries was in its infancy paving the way for Hong Kong to emerge as a conduit between China and direct foreign investment. The cities robust business reputation, British legal system and 'lack of red tape' were the hallmarks of its growth during the last two decades and continue to underscore its current position within the global city rankings.



Figure 3: Shenzhen Special economic Zone (SEZ). Formerly a farming district, Shenzhen was chosen as the site for one of China's Special Economic Zones. The city has developed in the last thirty years is now home to an astonishing 59 buildings over 200m tall and is considered the manufacturing heart of China. Hong Kong is situated within 30km of the Chinese border. Shenzhen is easily accessible by road, ferry or rail. Many Hong Kong workers commute to and from Shenzhen. The border crossing sees in excess of 50,000 workers crossing each day. Source: www.chinadaily.com.cn

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Figure 5 New territories development Hong Kong's urban areas can be divided into three distinct areas: Hong Kong Island which contains the CBD, Kowloon and the New Territories. Lantau Island contains Chek Lap Kok airport that replaced the old airport in Kowloon and was built completely on reclaimed land. . Source: www4.comp.polyu.edu.hk

The residential land component would best be studied through both urban consolidation and suburbanisation. The government passed legislation requiring the renewal of all buildings once they reach fifty years of age. An in-depth look at the 'mid-levels' area of Hong Kong Island highlights the constant desire to build higher. Located on the edge of the CBD, the mid-levels district is within walking distance of the financial centre of the city as well as the strongly patronised nightlife district of Lan Kwai Fong. As a result demand is high and the rents exorbitant. Conversely those living in the outskirts of the city (districts within the New Territories) compromise location for cheaper rent and more space.

Culture of place as expressed in the architecture, streetscape, heritage architecture, noise, colour, street life, energy, vitality and lifestyles

Despite its modernity Hong Kong has a rich heritage that is evident in the nightlife, architecture, food, religion and lifestyles of its residents. Traditional villages are juxtaposed with the growing number of gated communities that represent the grandeur and prestige afforded to the very wealthy. (refer to Figure 8). This is an excellent example of the spatial exclusion that exists within the city. With 1/3 of Hong Kong's population living within government provided housing it is clear that the availability of resources is very much in favor of the wealthy minority.

Notwithstanding an insatiable appetite for urban renewal, the HKSAR government recognises the need

to preserve the heritage architecture that identifies with the rich past of the city. Hong Kong contains numerous examples of colonial architecture that tells a narrative of the 150 years of British rule. Examples include the PMQ (Police Married Quarters) located in the CBD. A renewal program has seen the low-rise quarters redeveloped into a modern retail space with concept stores and designers whilst maintaining the integrity of the buildings façade and open spaces.



PMQ shopping precinct Source: Wikimedia Commons

The Western Market dwelling (built 1904) is a further example of preservation. Formerly a bustling centre for tailors and cloth merchants, the building fell into disrepair in the 1980's and was subsequently renewed in 2003. The Edwardian style building was targeted by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) to be refurbished with the aim of adaptive-reuse, the building has been brought back to their useful economic life by accommodating theme restaurant and boutique shops that turning the building and the vicinity into a place for lifestyle shopping and leisure activities.



Western Market Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Figure 6: The general view of Pokfulam squatter village. What is not evident from this photograph is the proximity of the village to modern residential dwellings that serve as a stark reminder of where Hong Kong has been and the progress it has made.

Pokfulam village (Figure 6) is an excellent case study for students as it represents a squatter settlement that has resisted urban renewal and attempts to use the land for residential and commercial expansion. The village has recently been placed on the UNESCO watch list and is home to a mere few hundred residents. The streetscape and architecture of the village appears cramped and dilapidated. This uniqueness adds to the energy of this very special place.

Other worthy examples when considering culture of place include the various markets that exist within the city. The Pottinger Street markets (Figure 7), Ladies markets and Stanley markets are all examples of the distinctly Asian nature of this city. Residents and tourists alike frequent these markets for fresh produce and items at greatly reduced prices. Often cramped and noisy, these markets provide the city with vitality and colour not found in the traditional business district. The recent closure of the 160-year-old Peel Street markets in the centre of the city illustrates the pressure of urban renewal.



Figure 7: Pottinger Street in the CBD is a reminder of Hong Kong's past. The photograph on the left is an example of a Pai Dong or 'little green shop'. Small sole traders operate from these small green tin shops. The photograph on the right shows the vibrancy, colour and streetscape of the Pottinger Street markets. A popular spot sandwiched between the tall commercial buildings of the CBD.

Understanding culture of place requires also a study of the various festivals that are observed within Hong Kong. During Chinese New Year the city is alive with celebration, fireworks displays and family occasions. "It is impossible to not be caught up in the energy as you squeeze into crowded temples to pray for good fortune, browse festive markets selling auspicious foods and blooms and photograph the shock-red lanterns that adorn the city" (Discover Hong Kong 2015).

Given the cramped nature of residential space in Hong Kong people are drawn to entertaining outdoors. Eating out is commonplace for residents adding to its richness of streetscape. It is common to see people eating in the Dai Pai Dong's (open air food stalls) well into the night.



Figure 8: Walk up apartments known as Tong Lau's are a reminder of the post war period of urban development in Hong Kong. As a space deprived city there is pressure to demolish the old Tong Lau's and build taller residential towers. In this case the Tong Lau has been renewed and is considered a boutique residential space commanding \$80,000hkd/month (AUD \$13,000) for a two bedroom apartment.

Growth, development, future trends and ecological sustainability

The high-density urban environment of Hong Kong is characterised by mixed land uses, a growing and ageing population, housing diversity, an efficient mass transit system together with cheap public transport, and easy access to most facilities, all typical of a compact city-state. Hong Kong presents an obverse urban layout to the more traditional sprawling cities such as Sydney, London and New York. Urban consolidation has and will continue to lie at the centre of the governments housing strategy. Limited space and growing discontent towards land reclamation projects leave little choice other than to grow vertically. Currently Hong Kong boasts 311 buildings that reach or exceed 150m. New York is a distant second with 64 fewer such dwellings. The obvious advantage yet equally its biggest challenge for the growth and development of Hong Kong is its ability to meet demand for commercial and residential space.

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The future of residential space in Hong Kong is a trend towards smaller apartments. A recent development (as reported by the Wall Street Journal 2015) of 180 foot square apartments have been given the moniker “mosquito-sized units.” The units (called high space) all furniture essentially has to be made to order and described the window sill as a potential area for “entertainment.” The price tag – a staggering \$US516,000. Providing affordable housing for the growing population is a challenge that has the potential to stifle Hong Kong’s urban growth. Already 1/3 of the city’s population is living in government housing, a further 250,000 await housing and some 200,000 people live in caged homes or subdivided flats. With demand outstripping supply the future directions of the city are driven by its current and looming housing crises.

The preservation of Hong Kong’s cultural heritage (pre-colonial and colonial) is yet another challenge that must be considered within the confines of the growth and development of the city (Figure 8). The 50 year urban renewal ordinance requiring buildings to undergo refurbishment (often resulting in demolition and complete redevelopment) has seen older industrial areas gentrified. A trend that is set to continue as industry is all but phased out of the city. Prime locations such as Kennedy Town and the former Kai Tak Airport are ‘lighthouse examples’ of the successes associated with this development. Contrarily the closure of the 157 year of Graham Street markets highlights the price of modernity. The noise, vitality, colour and streetscape associated with the markets sat juxtaposed to the enormity of the cityscape surrounds. Nonetheless the removal of these markets has resulted in a disruption in the daily routines of locals and a loss of a major tourism draw card for the city.



Figure 9: Gated communities like Bel Air pictured above, offer residents an array of private facilities including clubhouses, gymnasiums, swimming pools, cinemas and beauty salons. The lifestyle supplements the lack of space and aims to provide residents with a unique culture within the confines of the estate.

Hong Kong has long considered itself the Asia’s world city. As an entrepôt for China, and a hub for the dissemination of goods, information and financial flows, the city acts as a nodal point within Asia. Decentralisation (a government policy which attempts to reduce the concentration of businesses, services and population in major city centres) has seen a second CBD project undertaken at Kowloon East and the creation of an IT creative digital community (occupying a 24-hectare reclaimed swamp site at Telegraph Bay on Hong Kong Island). The creative digital community comprises over 338 companies engaged in information and communications technology, digital content creation and mobile apps development.

Accompanying this digital community is the gated community of Bel Air which houses 10,000 residents. For Hong Kong to continue to grow it must look for new opportunities to harness the growing demands of a highly specialist region. Moving away from a traditional CBD city structure has ensured adequate and affordable space is made available for commercial ventures. Gated communities (often associated with spatial exclusion) are a bi-product of Hong Kong’s growth and development and look set to continue as new developments follow this urban model. Middle-High income residents recognise the space deprived nature of the city and seek residential offerings that provide a range of private facilities (sporting and recreational) all within a secured environment. (Figure 9)

Hong Kong’s resource consumption is equally globalised. With an ecological footprint 150 times greater than its carrying capacity, it is essentially living off the natural resources of other countries. Hong Kong’s departure from its agriculture roots has been startling. Agriculture land has gone from 13,000 hectares in 1961 to 5,100 hectares in 2011, or 5 percent of total land area. Unusually for a Chinese city, Hong Kong has had no policy to promote the local production of food since the handover in 1997. Instead it relies heavily on production bases in China that supply fresh produce exclusively to it.

In Hong Kong on the other hand, agricultural land is often seen as a reserve to be developed by private developers. Over 4000 hectares of agricultural land are now in the hand of developers and are therefore left barren, leaving less than 800 hectares actually in use for cultivation. The question that must be answered is whether Hong Kong is moving in the right direction. At a time when sustainability and food security have become pressing issues, the controversial North East New Territories New Development Areas will result in the closure of 10 percent of the remaining vegetable

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farms in Hong Kong, most of which have been in cultivation for over a century. Meeting the increasing demand for space has seen every conceivable land plot either taken or slated for development. The success of the 320ha development at the former Kai Tak airport (Kowloon East) is evidence that urban renewal has a future in Hong Kong (Figure 10). With increased green space (1 km boardwalk and accompanying parks) the area has undertaken a significant metamorphosis. On the other hand, the loss of agricultural land serves only to heighten the reliance of residents on imported goods.

The government has addressed the need for more housing and employment opportunities in its planning for future development. The “Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy” (the HK2030 Study), completed in 2007, has revisited the need for strategic development areas in the New Territories (including Fanling North and Kwu Tung North), and recommended proceeding with some of the NDA developments to address the long-term housing demand and provide employment opportunities. Whilst this ensures much needed growth such developments will diminish the urban villages that dot the upper reaches of the New Territories. Villages that support rural lifestyles for a diminishing populous. Over 8,400 people will be displaced in the two areas, Fanling North and Kwu Tung North. Most of these are non-indigenous villagers with no land rights. These farmers will lose their livelihoods along with the farmland. Doubtless these people will be compensated and relocated but one must consider the loss of cultural authenticity when these villages are replaced by urban developments.

Hong Kong is committed to ecological sustainable living. With a highly efficient and expanding public transport system a move towards ERP (electronic road pricing) is seen as one way of reducing road congestion and improving air quality in high volume areas. In Hong Kong there are less than 50 private cars vehicles per 1,000 population, compared to more than 100 in Singapore and Seoul, more than 200 in Jakarta and over 300 in Bangkok. Only about 11 per cent of daily person trips are made by private cars vehicles while 89 per cent use public transport. ERP would see the adoption of a “user-pays” principle and would offer a more efficient, equitable and flexible means of managing the road space particularly in congested areas during busy hours.

Sustainable Development means “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” [“Our Common Future”, 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development] The



Figure 10: The first photograph shows the construction phase of the Second CBD urban renewal project in East Kowloon. The now disused Kai Tak airport has been transformed into commercial, residential and public space. This project is the largest urban renewal project ever undertaken in the city of Hong Kong. Photograph 2 is an artists impression of the finished project. Source: www.prc-magazine.com

goal of sustainable development is to strike a balance between the needs of the environment, society and economy in order to maintain a quality standard of life for both present and future generations. The Council for Sustainable Development was established in March 2003 to promote sustainable development in Hong Kong and a Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) was established to provide financial support for initiatives that will help to develop a strong public awareness of the principles of sustainable development and to encourage sustainable practices in Hong Kong.

Nature conservation is a central feature of the Government's plans for the future of Hong Kong. Currently the city boasts 24 country parks and 22 special conservation areas. The country parks and special areas cover a total area of 44 300 hectares. The country parks comprise scenic hills, woodlands,

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reservoirs and coastline in all parts of Hong Kong. Further, Hong Kong has five marine parks which cover a total area of 2 430 hectares and comprise scenic coastal areas, seascapes and important marine habitats. With urban growth reaching the very limits of available space there is an increasing need to protect the endemic species and their habitats.

The growth, development, future directions and ecological sustainability of Hong Kong is closely aligned to the urban dynamics of change. Space deprivation is met with high demand and the need for creative responses. With the full reversion to Chinese rule to occur in 2047 one can only speculate on the full impact of this.



Kennedy Town shop. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Additional resources

Hong Kong factsheets – <http://www.gov.hk/en/about/about/hk/factsheets/docs/population.pdf>

Urbanization – http://www.hko.gov.hk/climate_change/urbanization_e.htm and <http://lib.hku.hk/Press/0856560049.pdf>

Evolving urban form – <http://www.newgeography.com/content/002708-the-evolving-urban-form-hong-kong>

Hong Kong Housing Authority – <https://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/hdw/ihc/pdf/cswcs.pdf>

Urban Problems Hong Kong – http://acad.wyk.edu.hk/~pyng/7SS%202006-07/The%20Urban%20Problems%20of%20Hong%20Kong_wong_wing_chun.doc

SDS Strategy – <http://www.susdev.org.hk/susdevorg/archive2004/en/pdf/1stSDStrategyE.pdf>

Timeout: Reclaiming Hong Kong – <http://www.timeout.com.hk/big-smog/features/68418/reclaiming-hong-kong.html>

Slums Return to Hong Kong – <http://hongwrong.com/slums-return-to-hk/>

Graham Street Markets – <http://m.hk-magazine.com/article/11533/future-graham-street-market>

Ditching Mid Levels – <http://m.hk-magazine.com/article/4000/ditching-mid-levels>

Kennedy Town – <http://travel.cnn.com/hong-kong/visit/5-things-we-love-about-kennedy-town-855458/>

Country Parks and Conservation – http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/country/cou_lea/the_facts.html

Urban Regeneration – <http://ssweb.cityu.edu.hk/download/RS/E-Journal/journal6.pdf>

Urban Renewal Authority – http://www.legislation.gov.hk/blis_pdf.nsf/6799165D2FEE3FA94825755E0033E532/9BA494475B1AC8E8482575EF001B97BF?OpenDocument&bt=0

Energising Kowloon East – <http://www.ekeo.gov.hk/en/home/index.html>

Cross-border Communities – <http://journalism.hkbu.edu.hk/feed/?p=3034>

Suburbanisation of Rural Villages in the New Territories HK – <http://ebook.lib.hku.hk/CADAL/B38632111.pdf>

Hong Kong's Disappearing Communities: Pokfulam Village – <http://www.hk-magazine.com/article/10634/hong-kong%E2%80%99s-disappearing-communities-pokfulam-village>

World Monuments Fund: Pokfulam Village – <https://www.wmf.org/project/pokfulam-village>

AGTA CONFERENCE 2017



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Details will be available on the AGTA website including an invitation to present a workshop or lead a fieldwork trip, sponsorship options, conference accommodation, details of the pre-conference tour and conference program, earlybird registrations and conference newsletter are available at <http://www.agta.asn.au/>