

Public Policy Dialogue Series



Development vs. Environment: An Irreconcilable Dilemma?

The Public Policy Dialogue Series on 3 December 2022 invited Professor Anthony Cheung, Professor Tak-lok Lui, and Professor Christine Loh to share their views and insights from different angles on the topic of “Development vs. Environment-An Irreconcilable Dilemma?” and gave constructive suggestions for policy making regarding land use, sustainable development, and urban planning.



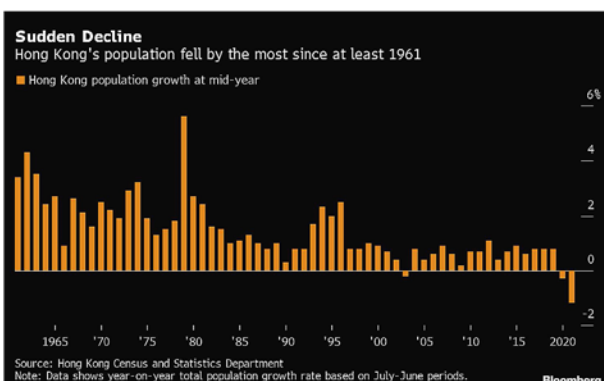
“It is strange to let “development vs. environment” continue as a non-death discourse, he argued that it should not be an either/or question.”

It was raised by Prof. Cheung that development without damaging the resources of the environment exists only in an ideal sense, but in reality, there are a lot of conflicts involved because of diverse interests, priorities, and power politics, taking the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as an example, Prof. Cheung pointed out that some of the Goals may be conflicting each other during implementation while taking environmental protection and country park conservation into consideration in land use and urban planning fulfills the goal of sustainability, the current situation of having only 7% of Hong Kong’s land for residential development resulting in inadequate living is not sustainable. He further pointed out that the present land use may not be entirely fair and efficient and that land use is a political issue. Then, Prof. Cheung touched on some myths about urban development in Hong Kong, for instance, it is commonly believed that reclamation is not necessary, and idle brownfield and private agricultural land can be used for housing, the reality is clearance of brownfield and agricultural lands also take time, and reclamation is unavoidable. 2nd, the small-house policy in the New Territories is blamed for land shortage, the reality is the application for small-house land use is confined to Village Environments & Village Type Development and is not suitable for large-scale residential development. He also questioned the notion that “Fanling Golf Club cannot be touched”. Drawing on Singapore’s Garden City story, Prof. Cheung suggested that authoritarian environmentalism still needs to face a lot of trade-offs and dilemmas. Looking forward to the Northern Metropolis that will

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eventually accommodate 2.5 million residents and create 650,000 jobs, Prof. Cheung remarked it will be a big test case considering ecological conservation and urban development.

Prof. Lui approached the topic from a different angle. He pointed out that sustainability can no longer be seen as a matter of secondary importance, and that it is strange to let “development vs. environment” continue as a non-death discourse, he argued that it should not be an either/or question, our impacts on the environment cannot be contained by technology, or left to our neighboring regions/countries – the negative outcomes will come back and hit us, but he admitted that the reality is this discourse still serves as a policy strawman pushing us to make a choice. Instead, Prof. Lui suggested the discussion should move to the next level, such as accessibility and effectiveness of regulations and measures to embed sustainability in all planning and development matters. From Prof. Lui’s point of view, Norther Metropolis can serve as a test case in a way that prohibition of cutting corner behavior (e.g. dumping inconvenient facilities in spaces of “lower opportunity cost”, there should be short-term tacit measures to compromise longer-term development. He concluded that there will inevitably be debates and



disagreements and there is no perfect planning but a planning mindset should be adopted instead of dwelling on the “development vs. environment” argument.

Fusing the former two speakers, Prof. Loh compared the case in Singapore and Hong Kong, such as Singapore has 25% of its land reclaimed, while Hong Kong has only 6%, Hong Kong has its unique landscape of having extreme density, large elevated green areas, and extreme engineering on



slopes, that the policymakers should give a second thought on which areas should be protected vs. which are developed when concerning the country park land. She also touched on the issue of small houses, the gold course controversy, and the quantity-led vs quality-led issue regarding Northern Metropolis Development Strategy. Taking that Hong Kong's population growth fell and even became negative since 2020, and Shenzhen's GDP has become more or less the same as Hong Kong's, Prof. Loh recommended Hong Kong policymakers

rescale the perspective by not just looking at Hong Kong as a small unit but by imagining other possibilities and scenarios that Hong Kong can embrace through regional collaboration in the Greater Bay Area, such as learning from the solutions of Singapore and Shanghai to move their container ports further outward.

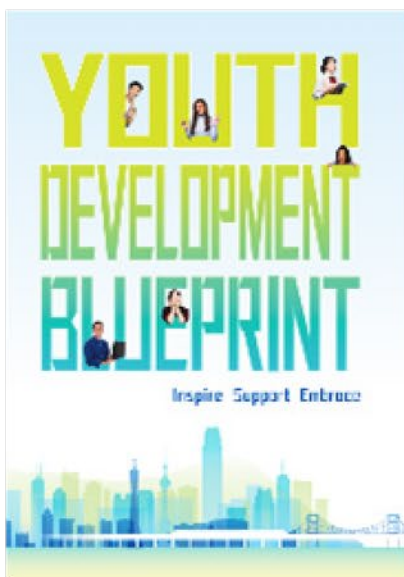
In the final section, all speakers agreed that the planning parameters in the future should not be confined to Hong Kong but Hong Kong within the Greater Bay Area region. The government should also consider other factors while planning. Still, due to One Country, Two Systems, policymakers should not assume Hong Kong would be entirely the same as the mainland in terms of mobility, the flow of people, and institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, the new parameters would give us a new way of thinking.



Public Policy Dialogue Series

Giving Hope to Young People: What Matters and How?

The Public Policy Dialogue Series on 7 January 2023, jointly organized by the Department of Asian and Policy Studies, the Academy of Hong Kong Studies in the Education University of Hong Kong, and the Division of Public Policy at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, invited Prof. Anthony B.L. CHEUNG, Prof. Tai-lok LUI, and Mr. Brian WONG to discuss whether the Hong Kong government's initiative on boosting the morale of Hong Kong youth is a promising policy.



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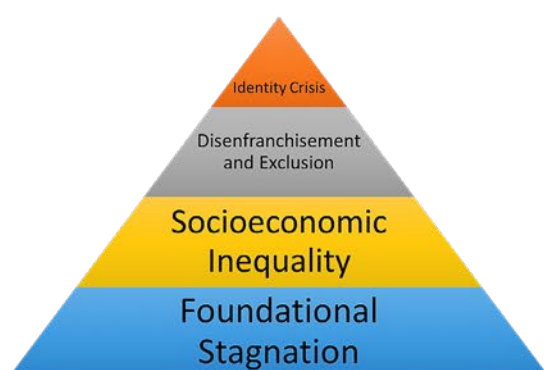
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Prof. Cheung started the topic “Giving Hope to Young People: What Matters and How?” by quoting President Xi Jinping in his major address on the HKSAR’s 25th Anniversary “We must pay special attention to and care for young people. Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive!” and the Hong Kong Government’s good intention to “provide young people with an enabling environment to cherish hope for the future, to strive for continuous growth, so that they can unleash their full potential in society and contribute to Hong Kong, the country and the world.” In the Youth Development Blueprint, Prof. Cheung pointed out that to address youth issues well, we should first understand youth issues well. Recalling how radical youth in 2019’s extradition protest forced the government’s hand and 40% of the arrested were students (with 20% of the arrested below the age of 18), Prof. Cheung remarked the youth of Hong Kong belong to “3D” generation, i.e. dispossessed, disenfranchised, disillusioned, the reality we are facing is a generation of youth torn between idealism and fatalism, that is having a great passion for Hong Kong, but pessimistic about the city’s future, acknowledging that the youth in Hong Kong care not only about material achievement and success in terms of study, employment, entrepreneurship, and home ownership, but they also have a vision in building a fair and progressive society that they can be proud of. By referring to Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory, Prof. Cheung elaborated that the youth need not just hygiene factors in material terms, but also need motivating factors in the forms of a sense of self-worth and self-actualization.



Prof. Lui then looked at the issue from an education perspective, pinpointing the value system and definition of “success” that has shaped the youth’s self-worth, irrationally thinking that getting a university degree is a must while rationally recognizing that a university degree is indeed a way to secure higher return in the long run make the youth and their parents stuck in a mono-track. He remarked that the topic is a tall agenda covering a lot of areas that we are not ready to go into.

Mr. Brian suggested that the fundamental problem that Hong Kong is its agency that the youth cannot get access to and have their voice heard. The structural problems Hong Kong confronts today are numerous that include foundational stagnation, growing socioeconomic inequalities, and deep uncertainty over the political future as a city. Despite the closer integration



with the mainland, the actual sense of proximity and closeness with the mainland has not increased over the past decade. There remains a deep-rooted sense of skepticism and weariness of the mainland, even though it is our country and we are



part of China. He presented a pyramid that can capture the problems and challenges that the youth face today, and outline some prospective solutions as to what could be done.

During the discussion session of this public policy dialogue series, the speakers addressed concerns and questions raised by different age groups of the audience and represented different prospects of the issues related to youth in Hong Kong, ranging from education to employment and development space of youth in an increasingly divisive complex society.