Executive summary

The Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0 was organised by the Urban Studies Programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on 1 April 2017. The theme was “Global Vision, Local Action: Aligning Hong Kong’s 2030+ with the UN New Urban Agenda”. Hong Kong 2030+ is a kind of strategic spatial plan that provides a framework to plan and guide land and infrastructure development, as well as the shaping of the built environment. More than 120 participants from diverse background gathered together to discuss around four topics: Urban Inclusion and Leaving No One Behind, Urban Prosperity and Inclusive Economic Development, Urban Resilience and Environmental
Sustainability and Urban Design and Public Space. Besides joining individual Urban Thinkers’ sessions, participants also give their general views and opinions through an online survey or post their views on the discussion boards.

Introduction of the Campus

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”. 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.

More than 120 participants, who came from various backgrounds such as planning, architecture, social work and economics, gathered to take part in the inter-disciplinary discussions on the urban future of Hong Kong. The Campus started off with the Urban Labs in the morning, which include an introduction of the Government’s HK2030+ Study by Ms Phyllis Li JP, the Deputy Director of the Planning Department, as well as Prof Mee Kam Ng’s presentation on the key principles of the New Urban Agenda. The Urban Labs were then followed by four Urban Thinkers Sessions where the participants split into smaller groups for discussions on different topics. The four themes of the Urban Thinkers Sessions are: Urban Inclusion and Leaving No One Behind, Urban Prosperity
and Inclusive Economic Development, Urban Resilience and Environmental Sustainability and Urban Design and Public Space. The sessions were moderated by distinguished academics and professionals from their relevant fields, whose expertise and knowledge were especially helpful in facilitating useful and rewarding discussions, during which the participants were able to voice their opinions regarding the different issues. The intense discussions also allowed the participants to reflect on the current urban development of Hong Kong as well as the ongoing HK2030+ Study, and how it can be better aligned with the New Urban Agenda.

The outcome of the Urban Thinkers Sessions were then summarised and reported back to the delegation in the afternoon when elected representatives from each group presented the key issues and messages from their respective sessions. This was followed by the Action and Policy Recommendation Brainstorm session, during which participants could give their individual input by answering a set of questions regarding the HK2030+ Study online or writing and pinning up their answers on the different discussion boards set up at the venue. The information collected from the UTC2.0 was analysed and synthesised to produce an outcome document that was submitted to the Planning Department as part of the HKSAR Government’s official consultation process for the HK2030+ Study.

Summary of all sessions

Urban Lab: HK2030+

- Power-point presentation by the Government representative on HK2030+

Urban Lab: New Urban Agenda

- Power-point presentation by Mee Kam Ng on key contents of the New Urban Agenda

Urban Thinkers Session 1: Urban Inclusion and Leaving No One Behind

- Liveability, compatibility, sustainability, affordability
- City should be designed and built for all
- Who are left behind? Poor, minorities, women and aging?
- Industrial/office buildings for start ups
- Problems
- Linking macro-mind-set to implementation but nothing on locality
- Data and income: cannot understand the life of the citizens in the districts
- Data: needs to have more specific data
- CBDIII: tries to extend business in Central and decentralise but will produce environmental impacts
- Social capital
- Aging population but elderly social relationships better in public housing
- Solutions
- Government has tried to meet citizens’ needs
- Job opportunities
- Locations: new development regions in NT—using existing lands rather than new land because of environmental issues
- Industrial buildings: how to ensure people can continue to use them
- Data access: public can have more data, they can work better with the government
- Affordable housing: value capture?
- Floating house along sea shore

Urban Thinkers Session 2: Urban Prosperity and Inclusive Economic Development

- Current system: highest prices not good for economic inclusion and diversity as this only benefits the same old developers—needs anti-monopoly
- Competition based proposal rather than comprehensive system in urban development
- Economic justice: uneven distribution of the profits
- Ageing population as a challenge and an opportunity
- Land lease system
- Informal economy e.g. free market, low capital entry—less entrepreneurial
- Match of education and jobs

Urban Thinkers Session 3: Urban Resilience and Environmental Sustainability

- Hong Kong—region—Asia—globe
- How can we identify the boundary? Affects solutions
- Proper key performance indicators?
- Happiness? Health care? Attractiveness?
- Environmental sustainability and urban resilience are inter-related, affecting our consideration of food, culture, water, self-sufficiency
- Capacity to face disaster and recover resiliently
- How to identify liveability?
- Implementation: Public, Professional, Government

Urban Thinkers Session 4: Urban Design and Public Space

- More collaboration
- Planning: integrate with the context, design with the surroundings
- Master plan as a process with localised planning/building area specific guidelines
- Control implementation but leave room for change
- Urban renewal not for financing (more GFA) but for people
- Masterplan with smaller plots, diverse ownership of the street front
- Hyper-density and wilderness
- Quality design of public realm (space, street and wilderness)
- Liberalise the use of the public realm, educate/promote shared use
- District identity, improve local identity/quality of neighbourhoods—not only focus on Central/Kowloon
- Think in opportunities rather than constraints
- Density, remove railings, add seats to open up a park for people to use
- Continuous public engagement, empower the local community, trust the community to manage itself
- Can we learn and change the plan?
Key outcomes of the UTC

Planning Principles

Inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental coordination for regional planning: 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.

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: 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: The proposed plans in the HK2030+ study should be both environmentally friendly and sustainable. Not only does 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.
- 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: 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. 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.
  - It is crucial for the government to see opportunities in challenges.
  - Policies for economic diversities and equality: 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.
  - 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.
  - 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: 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: 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: The government needs to continue engaging different stakeholders from all disciplines and tries to establish a long-term trusting partnership with the
various communities involved. 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.

Tripartite commitments

The Public Sector:
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. The government also need to engage and empower the public, and be willing to listen to different opinions. The government should be committed to rethinking the long-term sustainable and self-sufficient development of Hong Kong, 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. 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, 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. 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.

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.

Conclusion & way forward

The Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0 had been a major success in bringing together academics, professionals, advocates and activists to participate in interdisciplinary discussions and exchange ideas on the urban future of Hong Kong. They 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. The participants have raised plenty of constructive and invaluable points, and by collecting and synthesising the discussions from the UTC2.0 and putting them into a report for submission as part of the official consultation process for the HK2030+ study, we aim to give a stronger voice to every individual participant than they otherwise would have. As a result, hopefully the government will listen and answer our call for better alignment and integration of the HK2030+ study and the New Urban Agenda. The fact that a major government official came to
speak at the UTC2.0 represents a step in the right direction, but it remains to be seen whether the government will actually be willing to rethink the planning processes and adopt some of the key principles of the New Urban Agenda in the HK2030+ plans.

In fact, our participants recognise that 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.

Moving forward, in addition to constantly apply pressure to the government to create more participatory spaces during the final stages of the HK2030+ planning process and to seize every opportunity to make our voices heard, it is also important to share and promote the core values and principles of the New Urban Agenda to the public and different stakeholders, as most Hong Kongers are still rather unfamiliar with the New Urban Agenda, the principles and actions it is advocating for, and how they can actually affect and improve their livelihoods and the future development of Hong Kong. The promulgation of the New Urban Agenda will require broad inter-disciplinary platforms and community engagements, and the various networks and partnerships established at the UTC2.0 will be extremely useful for helping us to reach out to different stakeholders and communities.

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**Monitoring & reporting**
How do you intend to monitor the achievements and progress in the implementation of your action plan approved at your Campus (success indicators and other measures of achievement should be proposed)?

The UTC2.0 participants agree that we have to communicate our vision, 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.

We have sent an outcome report to the Planning Department identifying gaps between HK2030+ and the New Urban Agenda. The URSP Programme at CUHK will continue to organise activities related to the identified principles and actions in the Campus. Participants’ views and their actions will be collated to measure the “success” of UTC2.0. These actions could be joining NGOs, participating in social movements, or working with government, legislators, professionals and different stakeholders to enable implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

*Explain how you intend to share the results of your action plan with the WUC community and other partners in order to jointly implement the New Urban Agenda?*

Hong Kong has a top-down planning system directed by an executive-led government and the civil society lacks resources to influence the planning and development of our city. Hence, the action plan identified in the UTC2.0 is a rather flexible one. We can share the results of our action plan through the current report as well as ongoing engagement with the WUC Working Groups. As an academic programme at CUHK, we are still groping for a role in influencing policy debates in the city. The interdisciplinary team will endeavour to publish works which can then be shared with the WUC community and other partners.

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**List of key speakers:**
- Dan K.H. CHAN, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network - Youth Initiative
- Iris CHAN, The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
- Wilfred LAU, ARUP
- Phyllis LI, Hong Kong Planning Department
- Sharon LO, UN Major Group for Children and Youth
- Mee Kam NG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Hendrik TIEBEN, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Hung WONG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Yuen Shan WONG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Paul ZIMMERMAN, Designing Hong Kong

List of Participants:

- Download the full list of participants HERE

List of organizations represented:

1. The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2. Institute of Future Cities
3. Habitat for Humanity
4. Hong Kong Architecture Centre
5. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
6. Hong Kong America Center
7. Hong Kong Institute of Planners
8. Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design
9. Hong Kong Public Space Initiative
10. Planning Department
11. Urban Land Institute
12. UN Major Group for Children and Youth
13. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network
14. Arup
15. Civic Exchange
16. Clean Air Network
17. Centre for Architecture and Urbanism
18. The Conservancy Association
19. Designing Hong Kong

List of Partner Groups represented

1. Research and Academia
2. Civil Society Organizations
3. Grass-root Organizations
4. Women
5. Children and Youth
6. Business and Industries
7. Foundations and Philanthropies
8. Professionals
9. Media
10. Older persons

List of countries represented:

1. Australia
2. China
3. Ireland
4. Germany
5. Netherlands
6. Philippines
7. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
8. United States of America