

**COMMENTS ON  
“PEOPLE FIRST-A CARING APPROACH TO URBAN RENEWAL.  
URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY: CONSULTATION PAPER”**

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The Consultation Paper is divided into five major parts:

- Tackling the problem of urban decay
- Role of the URA
- Land assembly process
- Processing of projects
- Financial arrangements

My comments will be on selected aspects of the Consultation Paper.

**Hong Kong Needs Urban Regeneration, Not Just Urban Renewal**

The session on “Tackling the problem of urban decay” puts forward a “people-centred” approach to carry out urban renewal: “The purpose of urban renewal is to improve the quality of life of residents in the urban areas.... The aim is to reduce the number of inadequately housed people”. The paper continues to list “the key principles underlying the Government’s approach to urban renewal:

- a. owners whose properties are acquired/resumed for the implementation of redevelopment projects should be offered fair and reasonable compensation;
- b. tenants affected by redevelopment projects should be provided with proper rehousing; and
- c. the community at large should benefit from urban renewal” (PLB, 2001, pp.1-2).

As argued elsewhere (please refer to attached paper), Hong Kong is not just facing an urban decay problem. Different sources of information confirm that Hong Kong is experiencing simultaneous economic, social and physical changes and we should recognize that renewing the urban fabric is not enough. Hong Kong needs urban regeneration rather than just urban renewal. A “people-centred” URS should go beyond the discussions of compensation, rehousing and a vague statement of “the community at large should benefit from urban renewal”.

Sustainable urban regeneration should be “people-centred” and concerned about “place-making”. A “sense of place” is not only derived from the physical fabric (buildings and other structures) and the green fabric (trees and other vegetation) but from activities that take place both in buildings and in the spaces between the buildings. We need an urban regeneration strategy that will help rebuild or rehabilitate the urban fabric, revitalize community-based economy and rejuvenate social capital.

## Sustainable Urban Regeneration

We argue that successful urban regeneration should promote social equity, diversity in culture, economy and the built form. Regeneration should begin from within, building upon local history, culture, heritage and community, and adopt multi-disciplinary and cross-boundary approaches to revitalize society and space. Some of these ideas are reflected in the main objectives of urban renewal stated in the Consultation Paper:

- a. restructuring and replanning designated target areas;
- b. designing more effective and environmentally-friendly local transport and road networks;
- c. rationalizing land uses;
- d. redeveloping dilapidated buildings into new buildings of modern standard and environmentally-friendly design;
- e. promoting the rehabilitation of buildings in need of repair;
- f. preserving buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural interests;
- g. preserving as far as practicable local characteristics;
- h. preserving the social networks of the local community;
- i. providing purpose-built housing for groups with special needs, such as the elderly and the disabled;
- j. providing more open space and community/welfare facilities; and
- k. enhancing the townscape with attractive landscape and urban design.

However, most of these objectives are about buildings and physical structures, reflecting a “building-first” rather than a “people-first” strategy. The absence of discussion on economic regeneration is surprising. A sustainable urban regeneration should be “people-centred” and concerned about “place making”. Yet, the URS only promises to preserve local characteristics “as far as practicable” rather than making it as one of the first priorities.

Table 1 attempts to evaluate the proposed strategy with the general principles and means of sustainable urban regeneration, which include participation, community, equity, environment and economy. Hong Kong still has a long way to go if the city is serious in pursuing sustainable urban regeneration.

## Urban Renewal Strategy? Or Just a list of Targets?

Parkinson (1996) quoted in Carter (2000, p.41)<sup>1</sup> states that a strategy approach to urban regeneration should:

- have a clearly articulated vision and strategy;
- specify how its chosen mechanisms and resources would help to achieve the long-term vision;
- clearly integrate the different economic, environmental and social priorities of the regeneration strategy;
- identify the intended beneficiaries of the strategy and the ways in which they will benefit;

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, A. (2000), “Strategy and partnership in urban regeneration,” in Roberts, P. and H. Sykes (2000) (eds.), *Urban Regeneration: a Handbook*, London: Sage Publications.

- identify the level of private, public and community resources, financial and in kind, that would be committed over defined periods of time;
- specify the role and contribution that the public, private and community partners would make to regeneration;
- integrate, vertically and horizontally, the policies, activities and resources to those partners in a comprehensive strategy;
- link explicit regeneration policies to wider mainstream programmes in housing, education, transport, health, finance which constitute the implicit urban strategy;
- specify the relationship between short, medium and long-term goals;
- establish economic, social and physical baseline conditions before the policy intervention to allow an assessment of change over time;
- have agreed milestones of progress;
- monitor the outputs and outcomes of the strategy and evaluate their impact.

The URA Ordinance specified that URA “when preparing its programme of proposals and its programme of implementation for projects should follow any guidelines set out in an urban renewal strategy prepared under section 20(1) in relation to the implementation of those proposals and projects” (Section 21(3)(a)). However, it seems that only quantitative targets are set in the URS (pp.2-4). The Consultation Paper argues that “urban renewal is not a ‘slash and burn’ process. A comprehensive and holistic approach should be adopted to rejuvenate older urban areas by way of redevelopment, rehabilitation and heritage preservation” (p.3). Yet, the Paper does not lay out the contents of this “comprehensive and holistic approach.”

Do all the 225 project areas require a “slash and burn” approach? Does it mean that other buildings not included in these 225 areas do not require redevelopment? How would these redevelopment projects affect Hong Kong environmentally, socially and economically? Although the Consultation Paper suggests some factors for URA to determine the priority of individual redevelopment projects (pp.4-5), the criteria probably apply to many of the identified projects and hence it would be difficult for URA to make a decision. Given the fact that the Government would like to see “a self-financing urban renewal programme in the long run” (paragraph 35 of the Consultation Paper), would financial feasibility, which is not listed as one of the criteria, be a major, if not the most important, consideration in prioritizing the projects?

Similar questions can be raised on rehabilitation and heritage preservation. What is the strategy for rehabilitating the buildings in Hong Kong? Where are they located? Who will be responsible for it? The same questions apply to the issue of heritage preservation.

How will the three major means: redevelopment, rehabilitation and preservation be coordinated in the Strategy? Or is it true that URA has the maximum flexibility in employing these three means as long as the quantitative targets are tackled eventually? What should be the roles and duties of the private, public and community sectors in the process of urban renewal? What benefits will they derive from the process? What are the relationships between urban renewal and wider urban development policies including housing, education, transport, health and finance, etc? How will the renewal process be monitored and evaluated?

## **Social Impact Assessment**

An important suggestion in the URS is the introduction of social impact assessment (SIA). The freezing surveys have now an added importance because the Consultation Paper instructs that “most of the factual data for the detailed SIA should be collected as part of the freezing survey” (p.11). While this idea is a good one, a detailed SIA probably would require a much longer time. The attitudes required in these two exercises should be different as well. While a freezing survey should be done quickly and accurately, a detailed SIA should be done patiently and professionally (with caring and empathetic attitudes). The freezing survey is to secure the right information. The SIA is to help the affected community members. Some of the information for the SIA can be obtained when consultation sessions are held with the local community. The items listed in Point 31 (p.10) of the Consultation Paper reviews the lack of economic and environmental concerns of the URS. In fact, a good URS should conduct SIA right from the beginning before the strategy is finalized. Information concerning the affected residents, economy and environment should be in place before the finalization of an URS, not when it is implemented. Otherwise, how do we know that the Strategy is achieving the stated objectives?

Anyway, another important point is that while the URA should be responsible for identifying mitigation measures required in the SIA exercise, assistance and cooperation from other related Government departments and indeed, community-based NGOs are necessary. The Government should develop mechanisms to ensure and monitor the cooperation and assistance from relevant Government departments such as education and social welfare departments in providing services to affected residents.

## **District Advisory Committees**

The idea of setting up District Advisory Committees (DACs) is a great one. However, there are questions about its roles and functions. How can these Committees be more effective in advising the URA? Will they be given resources to do the work? Will they help monitor the projects or serve as a bridge between URA and local communities? If resources are available, DACs can play a more proactive role in identifying bottom-up regeneration plans that are people-centred with place-making characteristics. URA probably also needs these inputs to supplement its basically top-down redevelopment plans.

## **Parameters and Guidelines**

Finally, the details of the projects, etc. (section 37 (a) to (d)) are really sensitive issues. However, the planning parameters and financial guidelines which lay the foundation (the real underlying principles) of the consequent selection of projects and their priorities, may be less factual, and perhaps can be published for public discussions and information.

## Sustainable Urban Regeneration and the Case of Hong Kong

Principles	Means	Hong Kong
<b>Participation:</b> A sustainable urban renewal process should be participatory, making good use of local knowledge and taking into account the interests and perspectives of different stakeholders. Participation channels and information should be available and accessible to all. Participation should be more than consultation: it should be engagement in making choices and determining future development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All strands of the community should be included, encouraged and empowered to participate at all stages of the regeneration process;</li> <li>▪ Comprehensive, balanced and accurate information should be provided to the public;</li> <li>▪ Community initiatives and contacts between stakeholders should be encouraged and facilitated; and</li> <li>▪ Full, accessible and easily understood monitoring should be undertaken.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities do not know the contents of the redevelopment project until the implementation phase.</li> <li>▪ Information is always sparse and few.</li> <li>▪ Working in partnership at the community level is still a very new concept and culture in Hong Kong.</li> <li>▪ Monitoring work done by the community is not common.</li> </ul>
<b>Community:</b> Sustainable urban renewal should respect community history, strengthen community identity, facilitate community building and fulfil the needs and expectations of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide amenities and open space to facilitate community involvement;</li> <li>▪ Understand the place-making dynamics of a community;</li> <li>▪ Identify the historical and cultural elements of an area which give it a sense of place; and</li> <li>▪ Respect these elements when introducing new development to produce space with unique characteristics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community space is lacking in Hong Kong.</li> <li>▪ Community history and networks area not considered in the formulation of the Urban Renewal Strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity:</b> Sustainable urban renewal should ensure equitable distribution of benefits and costs. It should consider the impacts on different social groups and ensure adequate resources and services are available to mitigate the impacts on disadvantaged groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community fairness in access to affordable housing, education, health and welfare services, recreation, shopping;</li> <li>▪ Tackling social exclusion by providing opportunity for a better life for people in poverty, without jobs, with low educational achievement, lacking access to public services, living in degraded environments; and</li> <li>▪ Fair and reasonable compensation, adequate rehousing and sufficient social services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitoring work done by the community is not common.</li> </ul>
<b>Environment:</b> Sustainable urban renewal should improve the overall living and working environment in order to promote health, safety and enjoyment. It should safeguard resources and prevent environmental degradation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improve the physical environment;</li> <li>▪ Conserve and/or recycle non-renewable resources;</li> <li>▪ Adopt “green” building techniques;</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitate buildings where feasible;</li> <li>▪ Maintain buildings and structures in good repair;</li> <li>▪ Build to last; and</li> <li>▪ Maximise public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This principle is stressed in the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance. However, the emphasis is on physical improvement rather than sustainability.</li> </ul>
<b>Economy:</b> Sustainable urban development should improve the overall economic conditions, both for the old urban areas and the whole territory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic feasibility is more important than financial feasibility;</li> <li>▪ Stimulate employment opportunities at local and city level;</li> <li>▪ Re-use under-utilised and obsolete land; and</li> <li>▪ Recycle obsolete buildings to other uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This principle is not considered in the Urban Renewal Ordinance.</li> </ul>

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## PRACTICE FORUM

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# The Road Not Travelled: A Sustainable Urban Regeneration Strategy for Hong Kong

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### Introduction

Renewal of private residential properties in Hong Kong has always been considered as a business undertaking in which the government has played a negligible role. Where the government has been involved in urban renewal, through the Land Development Corporation from 1988 to the present, emphasis has been on renewal of the physical fabric of the city.

In July 2000, an Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (URAO) was enacted, opening a new page on urban renewal in Hong Kong. For the first time in the history of the city, the government proposed to inject resources for this new authority to "improve the standard of housing and the built environment of Hong Kong" (URAO, Clause 6(1)). The legislation, as will be discussed, continues to view urban renewal primarily as a physical planning exercise and expects the private sector to play a major role in renewing the dilapidated urban fabric.

This article will present a different picture and an alternative strategy. The political context in which Hong Kong's land-use planning system operates will first be discussed. Unlike other cities where local communities are involved in planning their immediate neighbourhoods, the political and planning systems in Hong Kong tend to alienate the citizenry from the whole development process. However, the multidimensional urban restructuring

processes in Hong Kong demand renewal mechanisms, which go beyond physical and market-oriented solutions. Yet the new proposals for tackling urban renewal do not seem to be adequate for addressing the ensuing challenges. The present article concludes by proposing a set of principles for sustainable urban regeneration and suggests that various processes, measures and implementation strategies have to be in place for people-centred and place-specific renewal, a concept still beyond the imagination of the current Hong Kong administration.

### Urban Planning without Local Governance

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 to 1997. In July 1997, Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule and became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under the concept of 'One Country, Two Systems'. Post-colonial Hong Kong is led by a Chief Executive (CE) who is not directly elected by the people but rather selected by an Election Committee composed of 600 electors. According to the Basic Law, this number will increase to 800 in 2002 and 2007. The second Legislature of the Hong Kong SAR has 60 members, with 24 members returned by geographical constituencies through direct elections, 30 members returned

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by functional constituencies, and six members returned by an Election Committee comprising 800 elected representatives of the community (Hong Kong Government Information Services (HKGIS), 2000). At the end of 1999, the government abolished two grass-roots-level municipal councils and increased the proportion of appointed seats to the local district councils. Unlike local councils in Western cities, the district councils only serve advisory roles. Local governance as a concept or practice is unknown to the people of Hong Kong.

Similar to the political system, planning in Hong Kong is top-down and executive-led. Figure 1 shows the hierarchy of plans in the SAR. Of these, only the Outline Zoning Plans are statutory in nature. When these plans are gazetted the public have a right to object to them, but generally the lay public do not understand the planning process. The only consultation that the government undertakes before gazetting a plan is to present a draft plan to the district council. However, the district councillors in Hong Kong have little knowledge about planning. Empowering the general public or engaging them in planning and making decisions about the future of their own neighbourhoods are radical ideas beyond the imagination of many community leaders, not to mention government officials (Cook & Ng, 2001). As a result, Hong Kong has rich experience in executing top-down plans. Bottom-up planning processes are absent, and this has put Hong Kong in a disadvantaged position in terms of resolving challenging multidimensional restructuring problems through collective wisdom.

### **Multidimensional Urban Restructuring Processes in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is experiencing simultaneous economic, social and physical changes. Economic restructuring has given rise to the need for varying degrees of physical change over urban space. While the market plays an important role in the ‘destructive creation’ and the ‘creative destruction’ (Castells & Henderson, 1987) of old urban spaces, there are often areas where the invisible hand never visits. These are usually spaces where physical dilapidation coincides with social exclusion. As the

economic restructuring processes deepen, and with the passing of the Asian Financial Crisis, Hong Kong is facing similar problems to other countries in tackling simultaneously issues related to physical, economic and human resource regeneration.

#### *Economic Restructuring*

Since the late 1980s, Hong Kong’s economy has moved away from a production-based to a service-oriented or, more correctly, speculation-biased one. For instance, the Hang Seng Index was about 3000 points in 1990 and it increased to 16 800 points in 1997, and property prices increased almost six-fold from 1990 to 1997 (though they have dropped by about 50% since 1998). At the same time, Hong Kong has experienced a very rapid de-industrialisation process. Manufacturing industries’ contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) has declined from 23.7% in 1980 to 17.6% in 1990 to 6.5% in 1997 (Census and Statistics Department (CSD), 1996, p. 62, 1999, p. 68). In 1980, 41.7% of the workforce was in the manufacturing sector. The figure dropped to 27.4% in 1990 and 9.7% in 1997 (Ng, 2001). As of 1999, a total of 200 000 people had lost their jobs and another 100 000 were underemployed.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Social Polarisation*

According to research by Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) & Oxfam Hong Kong (1996, p. viii), 250 000 households (15.5%) or 640 000 people (11%) were living in abject poverty<sup>2</sup> in 1994 and 1995. The income of the highest income bracket was, on average, 38 times that of the lowest (Yeung, 1997). Studies indicate that the number of marginalised workers<sup>3</sup> increased from 450 000 in 1996 to 640 000 in 1999, a growth of 45% over the four-year period. In 1999, one in five workers was marginalised (Wong & Lee, 2000, p. 2).

#### *Physical Restructuring (Magnitude of Redevelopment Problems)*

The urban renewal problem which Hong Kong is facing is quite massive. According to Metroplan (the metropolitan development strategy for Hong Kong), 639 ha of private residen-

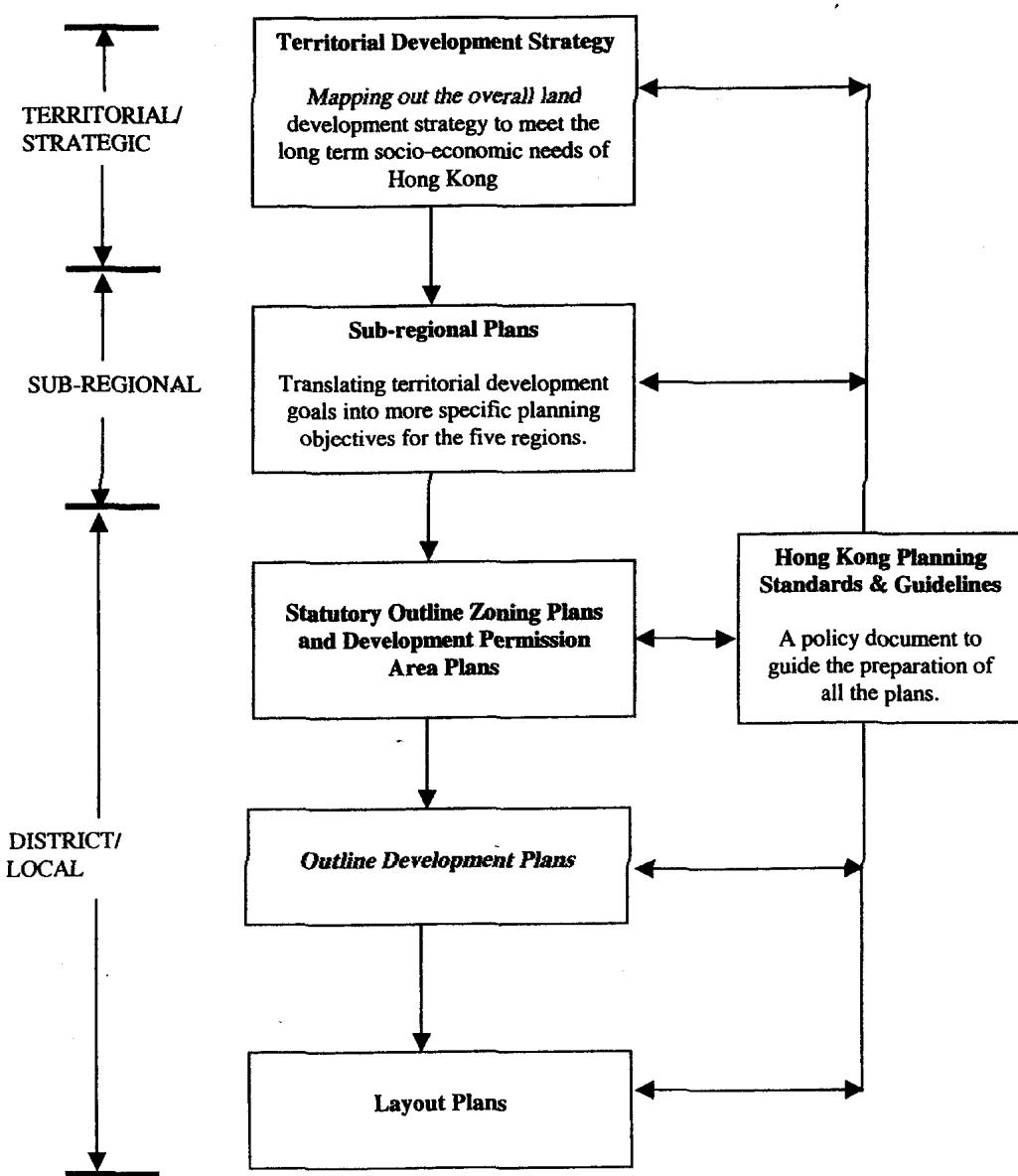


FIGURE 1. Hierarchy of Plans in Hong Kong. Source: Planning Department (1995), *Town Planning in Hong Kong: A Quick Reference*, Hong Kong: Government Printer, p. 7.

tial development are denoted as requiring selective or comprehensive improvement or renewal (Planning Department, 1991, p. 25). One of the technical reports prepared as inputs to Metroplan estimates that a net area of 260 ha of private residential development and 190 ha of private non-residential development are in need of urban renewal. These estimates are based primarily on two criteria: under-utilisation of

land in terms of development potential under the existing plot ratio permitted in the statutory zoning plan, and obsolescence of the building stock.

The problem of improving deteriorated living environments is exacerbated by the urban form and occupancy characteristics. Hong Kong has extensive areas of extremely high-density land use. Not only is commercial development high

rise with intensive use of space, but residential and industrial development also has similar urban form and occupancy characteristics: high buildings with multiple occupancy and ownership. Over half of the 50 000 buildings in the urban area are over 20 years old. Some 7000 are over 40 years old. In a few years time, 40% of these buildings will be 30 years old, reaching the end of their useful life due to poor construction standards and lack of maintenance. The *Urban Renewal Strategy — An Outline* identifies 8500 buildings over 30 years old:

- 2400 buildings are in reasonable condition and can last for a number of years, given proper maintenance;
- 3900 buildings may require rehabilitation (but not redevelopment);
- 2200 buildings may require redevelopment. Of these:
  - 1300 buildings will be redeveloped by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA);
  - 300 buildings may be redeveloped by private developers or building owners on their own;
  - 600 buildings will be rehabilitated.

### **Urban Renewal in Hong Kong: Private-sector-led Physical Redevelopment for Profit**

With the exception of the public housing sector, government involvement in urban renewal had been negligible until the establishment of the Land Development Corporation in 1988. Hong Kong has for decades relied on private-sector resources for renewing its urban fabric. The government took over a decade (from 1965 to the late 1970s) to complete a pilot scheme in the Sheung Wan Urban Renewal District. In the 1970s, the government adopted a programme of ‘Environmental Improvement Areas’ (EIAs) where necessary government, institutional and community facilities were provided. However, the approach failed to solve the wider issues of urban decay (Lau, 1999). The government also designated ‘comprehensive redevelopment areas’ to encourage redevelopment by the

private sector. At the same time, the government also allowed the Housing Society, an independent non-governmental organisation, to carry out Urban Improvement Schemes. Under these schemes, dilapidated buildings in the urban areas were acquired/resumed and redeveloped into modern housing blocks (Lau, 1999).

In the 1980s, the government stepped up the incentives for private-sector participation in urban renewal. In 1988, the Land Development Corporation (LDC) was set up as an independent statutory body under the LDC Ordinance “to improve the standard of housing; and improve the standard of the environment, by undertaking, encouraging, promoting and facilitating urban renewal” (LDCO, clause 4(a)). The LDC has to operate according to “prudent commercial principles” (LDCO, clause 10(1)), which means that its operations are not subsidised from public funds. Although the LDC received a start-up loan of HK\$31 million from the government, this had to be repaid with interest.

The government set the following joint-venture rules for the LDC: that a third-party property developer is required to pay a deposit at the start of the joint-venture development, as well as shoulder all costs relating to the acquisition of the site and subsequent development costs; and that the private-sector partner has to guarantee that the LDC will have no loss and provide a 50% share of any profits gained<sup>4</sup> (Ng, 2001). Such a model had worked initially for two reasons: properties were available for redevelopment where substantial gains in plot ratio could be achieved under the zoning and/or lease conditions; and the property market had experienced a boom period with rapidly rising prices. By 2000, 30 LDC redevelopment projects, involving a total of about US\$9 billion, had been completed or were in progress. Of those completed, most were for commercial uses. From 1988 to 1998, 15 projects were completed covering 2.76 ha of land, providing 269 075 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial or office space and only 1050 flats (LDC, 1999, p. 2). The redeveloped area is a mere 0.4% of the target redevelopment areas identified by Metroplan in 1991 (Ng & Cook, 1999).

In the face of the rapid deterioration of the urban fabric, the government undertook a review of its urban renewal policy in 1995 and concluded that “it is getting more difficult for

private developers to undertake redevelopment projects because of the increased difficulty of site assembly and the decreasing marginal viability of redeveloping medium-rise developments" (Lau, 1999). In June 1996 the government issued a Policy Statement entitled 'Urban Renewal in Hong Kong', introducing a set of short-term and long-term measures (see Table 1) to increase the speed and scale of urban renewal (Lau, 1999).

The Policy Statement proposed the setting up of a URA. In July 2000, the URAO was enacted. While the power (in terms of employing public resources and land resumption power) of the URA will be increased, the purposes listed in the URAO show that the government is mainly interested in dealing with the dilapidated buildings rather than the people living within these buildings:

The purposes of the Authority are to:

- (a) replace the Land Development Corporation as the body corporate established by statute having the responsibility of improving the standard of housing and the built environment of Hong Kong by undertaking, encouraging, promoting and facilitating urban renewal;
- (b) improve the standard of housing and the built environment of Hong Kong and the layout of built-up areas by replacing old and dilapidated areas with new development which is properly planned;
- (c) achieve better utilization of land in the dilapidated areas of the built environment of Hong Kong and to make land available to meet various development needs;
- (d) prevent the decay of the built environment of Hong Kong by promoting the maintenance and improvement of individual buildings;
- (e) preserve buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural interests; and
- (f) engage in such other activities, and to perform such other duties, as the Chief Executive may, after consultation with the Authority, permit or assign to it by order published in the Gazette. (URAO, 2000, Clause 5)

These purposes suggest that improving the buildings is the main objective of the government. Scant regard is given to those affected by urban renewal. According to the URAO, the community will not know whether their living space will be redeveloped until the publication of the project (Clause 23), that is, when the project is about to be implemented. Strangely, the term 'urban renewal' itself is not defined in the URAO, despite questioning about its meaning by the general public when the URA Bill was out for consultation. Nor was there reference to an urban renewal strategy in the URA Bill. Part V, 'planning procedures', dealt with the 'corporate plan' of the URA. It was only after repeated comments by different actors<sup>5</sup> that reference to the 'urban renewal strategy' is now included in the Ordinance. Clause 20 of the URAO stipulates that:

- (1) The Secretary [for Planning and Lands] may prepare from time to time an urban renewal strategy for the purpose of ... carrying out of urban renewal.
- (2) The Secretary shall consult the public before finalizing the urban renewal strategy prepared under subsection (1) in such manner as he may determine. The Secretary need not consult the public before revising or amending the urban renewal strategy prepared under that subsection if he considers that such revision or amendment is of a minor, technical or insignificant nature.
- (3) In the course of consultation under subsection (2), the Secretary need not disclose information which, in his opinion, would not be in the public interest to disclose. (URAO, 2000, Clause 20)

#### **The Need for New Policy Rhetoric: 'Multidimensional, People-centred and Place-making with Local Identities'**

As can be seen, the current redevelopment policy, process and implementation mechanisms are couched in financial terms only. It seems that the measures aim only at rebuilding old premises for profit. However, any urban regeneration efforts will incur distributive effects: different social groups will be affected in different ways, and invariably those at the

TABLE 1. Action plan for urban renewal

Proposal	Action	Target commencement date
<i>Short-term actions</i>		
Granting land at reduced premium to the Housing Society <sup>1</sup> for the construction of rehousing units.	To include the sites in the relevant Land Disposal Programme and to seek the Land Commission's agreement as appropriate.	Late 1996/early 1997
Extending the priority period for affected tenants on the General Waiting List in allocating public housing.	To seek the Housing Authority's <sup>2</sup> agreement to the proposal.	Mid 1996
Testing the linked site concept.	To select a redevelopment scheme(s) as the pilot project(s) to test the practicability of the linked site concept	Late 1996
Establishment of the dedicated urban renewal team under Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau	To seek the approval of the Legislative Council.	Late 1996
<i>Long-term actions</i>		
Introducing a mandatory building inspection scheme.	To conduct public consultation on the proposal. To introduce a bill to amend the Building Ordinance.	Mid 1996 Mid 1997
Enacting new legislation to give owners' corporations more power to carry out improvement to the common parts of a building.	To introduce a bill to amend the Building Management Ordinance.	Mid 1997
Transforming the Land Development Corporation <sup>3</sup> into a URA.	To consider the proposal in detail and to work out a recommendation.	Late 1997/early 1998
Creating a rehabilitation fund.	To consider the proposal in detail and to make a recommendation.	Mid 1997
Compulsory disposal of whole lot by majority owners.	To consider the proposal in detail and to make a recommendation.	Mid 1997

<sup>1</sup>The Housing Society is an independent non-profit-making organisation which provides affordable, purpose-built flats for Hong Kong citizens.

<sup>2</sup>The Housing Authority was established in 1973 under the Housing Ordinance. It advises the then governor (since 1 July 1997 Chief Executive) on all housing policy matters and, through its executive arm, the Housing Department, plans and builds public housing estates for rent or ownership, and temporary housing areas.

<sup>3</sup>The Land Development Corporation was established in January 1988 with the purpose of redeveloping older urban areas of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon.

*Source:* Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau (1996, pp. 27-28).

lower end of the socioeconomic scale will gain the least from the process (Taylor, 1999). Hence, “in engaging in physical planning it is vital for planners to understand and assess these social effects” (Taylor, 1999, p. 42). In other words, “the means of town planning are primarily physical, but its ends are social” (Taylor, 1999, p. 43). In Hong Kong, the social dimensions of the redevelopment process are confined to compensation and rehousing. Little, if any, attention is paid to the original social networks or the worries and concerns of the local population in the whole planning and redevelopment process. Since the policy rhetoric does not touch upon social issues, the affected residents often suffer in silence. In the course of redevelopment, social networks disappear, social capital dwindles and the cityscape is homogenised by more and taller buildings. Hence there is an urgent need for a change to the property-led, profit-biased and physically-oriented policy rhetoric of urban redevelopment in Hong Kong.

As Hong Kong is undergoing various types of transition, it needs to be recognised that renewing the urban fabric is not enough. Multidimensional regeneration efforts are required to revitalise Hong Kong society. In order to be sustainable, regeneration needs to go beyond the concern of purely making a profit, and has to be ‘people-centred’ and concerned about ‘place-making’. Jane Jacob’s seminal work (Jacobs, 1961) on urban renewal very clearly illustrated the failure of planning systems to understand that cities were more than buildings and that the life of cities emanated from the people who lived there both in the past as well as in the present. Hence, a ‘sense of place’ is derived not only from the physical fabric (buildings and other structures) and the green fabric (trees and other vegetation), but also from activities that take place both in buildings and in the spaces between the buildings. The temporality of the relationships of people to places and among people may span different time periods, for example places may acquire meaning from past activities. Regeneration needs to be considered as ‘social investment’, and the biggest beneficiaries should be the people themselves. The most successful urban regeneration efforts not only tackle social equity and justice issues, they also promote diversity in culture, economy and built form. Regeneration should begin from within,

building upon local history, culture, heritage and community, and adopt multidisciplinary and cross-boundary approaches to revitalise society and spaces. Regeneration should provide spaces for ‘human flourishing’, not just short-term economic growth. It needs to be sustainable.

### **Sustainable Urban Regeneration Strategy as the Guiding Principle<sup>6</sup>**

The concept of sustainable development, encapsulating economic and social well-being and the safeguarding of the Earth’s resources, is an appropriate principle for guiding urban regeneration. Sustainable urban regeneration may be conceived as a community-based process directed towards achieving the economic, environmental and social well-being of the people through the rejuvenation and revitalisation of the urban fabric. A collaborative and integrative partnership approach is needed to achieve such restructuring. As indicated in Table 2, Hong Kong still has a long way to go in terms of fulfilling the principles of sustainable urban regeneration.

Hong Kong needs to recognise that urban renewal involves different dimensions: participation, community, equity, economy and environment. As shown in Table 3, it is argued that the proposed redevelopment process as stipulated in the URAO will continue a top-down planning process with minimal community involvement that will not lead to a sustainable renewal process. A multidimensional urban regeneration strategy should be people-centred and concerned about ‘place-making’. Mechanisms for checks and balances (within and beyond the government) are needed in the formulation, evaluation, implementation and review of the Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) to ensure that it is dynamic, flexible, inclusive and suits the needs of the restructuring context. The principles listed in Table 2 may serve as useful pointers.

#### *Participation and Community*

The government should play a more important role in the urban regeneration process than it has in the past. In order to ensure the implementation of a sustainable URS, the URA

TABLE 2. Sustainable urban regeneration and the case of Hong Kong

Principles	Means	Hong Kong
Participation: A sustainable urban/ renewal process should be participatory, making good use of local knowledge and taking into account the interests and perspectives of different stakeholders. Participation channels and information should be available and accessible to all. Participation should be more than consultation: it should be engagement in making choices and determining future development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All strands of the community should be included, encouraged and empowered to participate at all stages of the regeneration process.</li> <li>● Comprehensive, balanced and accurate information should be provided to the public.</li> <li>● Community initiatives and contacts between stakeholders should be encouraged and facilitated.</li> <li>● Full, accessible and easily understood monitoring should be undertaken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Communities do not know the contents of the redevelopment project until the implementation phase.</li> <li>● Information is always sparse and limited.</li> <li>● Working in partnership at the community level is still a very new concept and culture in Hong Kong.</li> <li>● Monitoring work done by the community is not common.</li> </ul>
Community: sustainable urban renewal should respect community history, strengthen community identity, facilitate community building and fulfil the needs and expectations of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide amenities and open space to facilitate community involvement.</li> <li>● Understand the place-making dynamics of a community.</li> <li>● Identify the historical and cultural elements of an area which give it a sense of place.</li> <li>● Respect these elements when introducing new development to produce space with unique characteristics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community space is lacking in Hong Kong.</li> <li>● Community history and networks are not considered in the formulation of the Urban Renewal Strategy.</li> </ul>
Equity: sustainable urban renewal should ensure equitable distribution of benefits and costs. It should consider the impacts on different social groups and ensure adequate resources and services are available to mitigate the impacts on disadvantaged groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community fairness in access to affordable housing, education, health and welfare services, recreation, shopping.</li> <li>● Tackling social exclusion by providing opportunity for a better life for people in poverty, without jobs, with low educational achievement, lacking access to public services, living in degraded environments.</li> <li>● Fair and reasonable compensation, adequate rehousing and sufficient social services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● These are not considered in Hong Kong.</li> </ul>
Environment: sustainable urban renewal should improve the overall living and working environment in order to promote health, safety and enjoyment. It should safeguard resources and prevent environmental degradation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improve the physical environment.</li> <li>● Conserve and/or recycle non-renewable resources.</li> <li>● Adopt 'green' building techniques.</li> <li>● Rehabilitate buildings where feasible.</li> <li>● Maintain buildings and structures in good repair.</li> <li>● Build to last.</li> <li>● Maximise public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This principle is stressed in the URAO. However, the emphasis is on physical improvement rather than sustainability.</li> </ul>
Economy: sustainable urban development should improve the overall economic conditions, both for the old urban areas and for the whole territory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic feasibility is more important than financial feasibility.</li> <li>● Stimulate employment opportunities at local and city level.</li> <li>● Re-use under-utilised and obsolete land.</li> <li>● Recycle obsolete buildings to other uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This principle is not considered in the URAO.</li> </ul>

TABLE 3. Planning procedures stipulated in the URAO

*Urban Renewal Strategy (Clause 20)*

The Secretary of Planning and Lands is responsible for preparing an urban renewal strategy. “The Secretary shall consult the public before finalizing the strategy in such manner as he may determine” and he/she needs not disclose information which it would not be in the public interest to disclose.

*Corporate Plan (Clause 21)*

The Urban Renewal Authority (hence the Authority) shall not later than 3 months before the end of each financial year submit to the Financial Secretary for approval a draft corporate plan for a period of 5 years.

*Business Plan (Clause 22)*

The Authority shall submit to the Financial Secretary for approval a draft business plan for the next financial year.

*Publication of Project (Clause 23)*

To implement a project, the Authority shall gazette it “within the space of a period of 2 months”. The Authority shall exhibit for public inspection a description of the general nature and effects of the project and a plan delineating the boundaries of the project. ‘Project’ means a development scheme or a development project.

*Objections to Project to be Implemented by Way of Development Project (Clause 24)*

Any person who considers that himself/herself will be affected by a project may send to the Authority a written statement of objections to the project. The objections will be considered by the Authority within three months after the expiration of the publication period before the whole case is passed to the Secretary for authorisation. Any amendment to the project recommended will need to be gazetted for further comments.

*Development Schemes (Clause 25)*

No objection is considered for project to be implemented by way of a development scheme. The Authority may seek the endorsement of the Town Planning Board before the scheme is incorporated into existing outline zoning plans for gazetting and consultation purposes.

*Appeal Board (Clauses 27 and 28)*

The Appeal Board shall hear the appeal and a majority of the members hearing the appeal shall determine the question before it (27(17)). Aggrieved objector to a development project may appeal to the Appeal Board within 30 days after notification of the Secretary’s decision.

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should be directed by a multidisciplinary committee, and its operation should be transparent and accountable to the general public. For each redevelopment project, an advisory committee with wide representation from different stakeholders should be set up to work closely with the URA to ensure that the redevelopment process is people-centred and enhances place-making.

Community access to information is essential. Advice from the renewal agents should be provided to fully inform residents of available redevelopment or regeneration options. Also, channels such as public forums or hearings are needed for communities to air their concerns.

As for rehabilitation and heritage

conservation, legislative control is supported. However, communities should be involved to identify the historical and cultural elements of their living environment. When faced with financial difficulties, they should also be provided with resources and financial assistance in fulfilling the rehabilitation and heritage requirements. To nurture social capital in the process, community planning/building/development is crucial. A multidisciplinary team set up for each district would be helpful in facilitating community involvement and enabling capacity building, community planning and implementation of certain projects to satisfy local needs.

The URA also needs the power to solicit cooperation from various government departments in implementing urban redevelopment schemes. This is essential for successful regeneration.

### *Equity Issues*

Projects should not just be affordable for the government and the developers; the redeveloped properties should also be affordable for the local users affected by redevelopment. Measures are also needed to help re-house residents affected by private-sector redevelopment. Suggestions have been made by social workers for private redevelopment projects to contribute to an urban regeneration fund for re-housing affected tenants.

Putting resources into the process seems to be inevitable, and the question is how to use resources effectively and efficiently. The emphasis on financial viability indeed limits the authority's imagination in regenerating the city. A better accounting system is required to reflect in a more comprehensive way the costs and benefits of a redevelopment project. Impact assessments are, therefore, essential for generating redevelopment schemes:

- Community Impact Assessment prior to the launching of the projects
- Economic Impact Assessment
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Landscape Impact and Visual Impact Assessment.

A first step might be to establish a community facilitation team, or teams, to help local residents make overt what is special about their neighbourhood, to identify problems and to determine what needs to be changed. Factors pertaining to the physical environment that should be considered in planning urban regeneration projects are listed in Table 4. This team, together with the advisory committee and representatives from different local government offices, should form a monitoring body to ensure that the issues identified in the assessment exercises are tackled properly.

It is essential that those who execute renewal projects have caring attitudes. Empathy

is important for a better understanding of the concerns and worries of the public. The redevelopment agent needs a very good understanding of the community before it can offer appropriate support. Here the social workers and community planners (still non-existent) could be of great help. In terms of re-housing, different groups have different needs and different abilities to adapt to new environments. Where it is not possible for all re-housing to be provided in the same district, priority for in-situ re-housing should be on compassionate grounds. For example, for many elderly people, moving out of a district where they have been living for most of their lives is a traumatic experience. Other disadvantaged groups may also need special assistance and care. In some cases, affected owners and tenants, given suitable reorientation, assistance and resources (such as changing schools for children, finding jobs, or knowing where facilities are in the new areas), may be more amenable to resettling in new places.

Re-housing is a critical issue in Hong Kong as redevelopment invariably takes place in already densely developed areas. Some developers have suggested that the government could provide sites for the private sector to build re-housing accommodation (for rental or owner occupation) prior to redevelopment of the old buildings. This would allay fears and uncertainty about post-redevelopment accommodation and would have the added benefit of providing opportunities for owner participation in the design of the new accommodation. Developers could also be required to build a certain number of units for re-housing the elderly or priority groups as part of the redevelopment. For tenants who are on the Housing Authority's (HA) waiting list, and who are affected by redevelopment projects, the URA could provide some good-quality temporary housing in the transition period before they are eligible for HA flats. These could be charged at the full market rate—in line with what the tenants are paying in the old urban areas.

### *Environment and Economy*

As stipulated in the URAO (Clause 5), the purpose of the URA is to "prevent the decay of

TABLE 4. Checklist on physical environment factors for area improvement/restructuring

<i>Vitality and variety</i>	✓ <i>Existing buildings</i> Physical condition: ● safety ● appearance ● special individual quality (historic, architectural, or cultural merit) ● special group quality (contribution to streetscape, townscape)
✓ activity nodes ✓ street activities ✓ land uses ✓ texture (relationship of buildings and space) ✓ grain of street pattern ✓ visual quality ✓ relation of buildings to street	
<i>'Greening the city'</i>	Use: ● compatibility with area ● compatibility with immediately adjacent uses ● contribution to needs of area ● contribution to character of area
✓ colour ✓ shade ✓ softening ✓ air pollution absorption ✓ micro-climate ✓ aesthetics ✓ ambience	Re-use potential: ● rehabilitation ● conservation ● recycling to other uses
<i>Traffic and transport</i>	
✓ public access to non-polluting transport ✓ connectivity of public transport modes and routes ✓ pedestrian accessibility ✓ pedestrian permeability ✓ pedestrian experience	<i>Form of new development</i> ✓ sympathetic to topography ✓ compatible with the desired character of the area
<i>Building—appropriateness of fit</i>	
✓ <i>New buildings</i> ● scale ● layout ● form ● appearance ● use ● materials	<i>Public space</i> ✓ appropriateness of location ✓ opportunities for 'conferred life' ✓ quality ✓ connectivity ✓ appropriateness of purpose
	<i>Internal living space</i> ✓ privacy—personal/family space, i.e. not shared except by choice ✓ self-containment (independent bathroom and kitchen) ✓ adequate living area (floorspace) ✓ safety (building structure; electrical wiring; plumbing; drainage)

the built environment" and to improve "the physical appearance and conditions of that built environment" through redevelopment, maintenance and preservation. However, the government should also investigate 'green' building techniques and recycled buildings to suit local needs. Instead of 'modernising' the

dilapidated areas, care should be exercised to safeguard resources, enhance local characteristics and develop a deeper understanding of how the local environment is used and valued by people working and residing in these areas. Improving

the environment should be an inclusive process involving many stakeholders.

In order to promote economic sustainability within the community, active consideration should be given to the means of regenerating economic activities rooted in local communities, rather than the current redevelopment practice of just paying cash compensation for removing community-based economic activities. An approach to realising this goal could be the mobilisation of non-market resources, such as an urban regeneration fund to promote alternative (non-market) means of urban regeneration.

## Conclusion

Many social workers and academics have urged the government to include reference to ‘people-centred urban renewal’ in the URAO. However, the government insists on a ‘building-centred’ approach and focuses on the redevelopment, maintenance and rehabilitation of urban structures. This paper has argued that the need for urban renewal should be understood within a wider restructuring socioeconomic context. An integrated approach is required if we want to have urban renewal exercise that can rejuvenate not only the urban landscape, but also its people and the economy.

In the longer term, Hong Kong has to start community planning and building. Only when communities are organised and have built up their capacity to run their own affairs, can they contribute more meaningfully to maintaining their buildings; nurturing human resources; caring for the local environment and quality of life; building up local capacities; and providing bottom-up inputs and alternative solutions to urban regeneration and development.

To facilitate the development of social capital and ‘social bridges’ among various organisations and institutions in the process of people-centred place-making, we need infrastructure (soft and hard) to facilitate “a dialogue where people can affirm, interrogate, and construct knowledge they need in order to maintain their own places” (Schneekloth & Shipley, 1995, p. 6). People deprived of self-organisation and self-governance are inherently ungovernable (Hock, 1999). Community-building and planning must be on the agenda if Hong Kong is serious about reinventing itself as a sustainable society.

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## Notes

1. Figures are from: <http://www.info.gov.hk/censtad/eng/hkstat/hkinf/labour/labor3.htm>
2. Households having difficulties in meeting basic and necessary food costs are defined as living in abject poverty (<http://www.hkcss.org.hk/>)
3. Marginal workers are those workers who cannot find stable jobs in the labour market as a result of their age, sex, race, skills, talents or illness.
4. This was revealed by LDC officials during a meeting on 19 August 1999.
5. Social workers and academics were among the most vocal advocates. In fact the government has blamed these actors for not being able to publish the urban renewal strategy for public consultation as the Ordinance itself is yet to be enacted.
6. Modified from Tam (1999). See also Roberts (1999) and Roberts & Sykes (1999).

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