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QUALITY OF LIFE PERCEPTIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR URBAN REGENERATION IN HONG KONG

(Accepted 10 May 2004)

ABSTRACT. Urban regeneration can be an effective tool to promote sustainability and enhance macro-level quality of life if the principles of encouraging participation, building community character, advancing equity, improving environment and enlivening the economy are observed. Through the assessment of various quality of life indicators related to these five basic principles for sustainable urban regeneration by the public, private and community sectors, this paper finds that Hong Kong falls far short of realizing these fundamental principles. There are also considerable discrepancies between the public and non-public (private and NGOs) sectors in terms of evaluating existing quality of life issues and perceiving their relative priorities. The private and community sectors tend to have lower rating of existing situation and consequently a longer priority list. On the contrary, the public sector seems to be more complacent with the existing quality of life situations and has a much shorter priority list. The public sector's more relaxed attitude coupled with a top-down executive-led polity mean that Hong Kong will probably have a long way to go toward sustainable urban regeneration.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the relationship between quality of life perceptions and directions for urban regeneration in Hong Kong. The first section argues that sustainable urban regeneration, when done properly, should help boost a city's quality of life, which can be a rather subjective concept. The second section gives a brief overview of the practice of urban renewal in Hong Kong. Once a place that bulldozed everything for development, Hong Kong has now adopted a "4Rs" (redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation and revitalization) approach that, in theory, should improve the quality of life of the general public. The third section summarizes the macro-perceptions of the public, private and community sectors on

Hong Kong's participatory culture, ability of building communities with characters, facilitating an equitable distribution of costs and benefits, improving the environment and enhancing economic growth, all of which are essential principles for sustainable urban regeneration. The results are then analyzed to identify areas for improvement in urban regeneration in Hong Kong.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN REGENERATION

The concept of quality of life, similar to sustainable development, has evolved over time (Lim et al., 1999). In the post-WWII period, economic growth was used as a standard measure for quality of life. The failure of the United Nation's first development decade in the 1960s had led to the basic human needs approach in development, emphasizing on satisfying basic human needs and the reduction of absolute poverty. The conception of quality of life extends to basic needs issues, health, education, social security, working conditions and human liberty. Since then, a subjective dimension has been added to the understanding of a good quality of life as equivalent to the enhancement of human capabilities (Sen, 1993).

Hence, quality of life is a complex and multi-faceted concept, embracing objective as well as subjective aspects. As such, people with different socio-economic, cultural and historical background tend to perceive their qualities of life differently. Even those who live and work within a specific cultural context may have a very different evaluation of their qualities of life as a result of different political, social and economic positions. In fact, those within the same social class may have very different perceptions of their environments and hence their qualities of life. Nevertheless, Brown (1999) has set up a conceptual framework for the quality of life at the urban level. He argues that there are two different levels of qualities of life: the micro level referring to the well-being of personal life such as health, income level, personal relationship and satisfaction; and the macro level referring to environmental quality of life such as the living environment, socio-economic conditions, etc. This

paper is interested in understanding this macro level of perceiving the urban quality of life and its implications on urban regeneration. Let us now have a more in-depth understanding of sustainable urban regeneration and why it is related to quality of life debates.

Roughly four phases (two cycles) can be identified in the history of urban regeneration practice since WWII: state-led wholesale redevelopment up to the 1960s; a brief period of multi-dimensional redevelopment and rehabilitation efforts from the mid-1960s to the 1970s; property-led public-private partnership renewal from the 1970s into the 1980s; and the continuation of partnership renewal with an emphasis on 'bringing the community back in' since the 1990s (Table I).

For about two decades after WWII, there was a general belief that economic growth could eventually solve all development problems. As a result, urban regeneration was equated to state-led physical redevelopment. The turning point occurred in the 1960s with the "rediscovery of poverty and a large number of victims of 'multiple' deprivation" (Carmon, 1997, p. 133). It was recognized that massive bulldozing of dilapidated buildings was too expensive in economic and social terms. Urban renewal policy, as argued by Jackson (1980, p. 246), has to be harnessed and be integrated with other social policies both at the national and local levels so as to improve economic efficiency while improving distributional equity.

However, the awakening to 'multiple deprivation' experienced by affected residents in poor neighborhoods was checked by the restructuring of the global economy since the 1970s. In many western cities, the project of urban renewal was to reconstruct the economic, socio-cultural, political-institutional and physical-environmental fabric of cities blighted by the collapse of Fordist manufacturing industrial complexes (Healey et al., 1992, p. 288). This renewal mode was predicated upon the belief that "the private sector [is] the *only possible way* of restoring lasting prosperity to the decaying areas of our towns and cities" (Smith, 1989, p. 241).

TABLE I
Evolution of urban regeneration

Phase	State	Private Sector	Community
Post-WWII–1960s	Clearance (in UK, rehousing of affected residents provided)	Rebuilding/ redevelopment	
1960s–1970s	Decreasing emphasis on bulldozing and comprehensive redevelopment. Emphasis on rehabilitation		Multi-dimensional redevelopment and rehabilitation
1970s–1980s	Public–private partnership in property-led urban regeneration		
1990s–	“New partnership” (state, private sector and community) for sustainable and simultaneous economic, physical and human regeneration		

The economic growth-biased urban renewal strategy in the 1980s had produced “divided cities” (Fainstein et al., 1992; Marcuse, 1993) and “islands of renewal in seas of decay” (Berry, 1985). It became increasingly evident that property-led urban renewal did not offer a reliable foundation for stable and sustainable economic regeneration (Healey et al., 1992). The key task is to link property development investment to real demands and needs of the developing local economy, and to cultural-environmental concerns of local citizens (Healey et al., 1992, p. 290). In fact, increasing social problems in “disadvantaged” neighborhoods have led to the “rediscovery of community,” and a new “partnership” arrangement has been initiated by the government which involves not only the public and private sectors but also the voluntary organizations and the community.

Two major aspects can be summarized in the most recent urban renewal practice. First, there is a need for integrating long-term vision and short-term initiatives embracing physical, social and economic regeneration, and “top-down” and “bottom-up” efforts (Roberts and Sykes, 2000). Second, for genuine integration of various sectors to promote urban renewal and to unite “top-down” and “bottom-up” efforts, partnership is essential between government departments, and between the public and private (business and community) sectors. Hence, sustainable urban regeneration may be perceived as a community-based process directed toward achieving the economic, environmental and social well-being of the people through the rejuvenation and revitalization of the urban fabric (Ng et al., 2001, p. 177). Five dimensions are involved in any sustainable urban regeneration process: inclusive participation by different stakeholders, building communities with character that respect their historical heritages, equitable distribution of benefits and costs to all concerned parties, improving environment and enhancing economic growth (Ng et al., 2001).

These basic principles for sustainable urban regeneration are closely related to a society’s macro-view of its quality of life. It is argued in this paper that a society’s macro-view of participation, community characters, equity, environment and economy will help us assess its capacity and ability of undertaking sustainable

urban regeneration. Before we examine in further detail the macro-perception of the quality of life in Hong Kong and the implications on the implementation of urban regeneration, let us have a brief overview of the renewal practice in the city.

RENEWAL IN HONG KONG: FROM REDEVELOPMENT TO FOUR 'R'S

It is generally agreed that the private sector has played an important role in renewing private residential buildings in Hong Kong.¹ "Dockyards, power stations and oil depots have been redeveloped within a short span of time into large housing estates with comprehensive facilities. Dilapidated buildings have been redeveloped into modern commercial complexes with impressive architectural design. ...about half of all new private domestic units currently come from redevelopment" (Planning, Environment and Lands Branch 1996, p. 5). Susnik and Ganesan (1997) estimated that the average demolition rate of domestic buildings was 570 per year for the decade to 1993. Further, about 70% of these buildings were six-story tenements with an average occupancy of 35 persons per building.

However, there are few dockyards or power stations left in the urban areas and "most of the low-rise buildings have already been redeveloped, often in a piecemeal manner without achieving improvements to layouts, transport networks, community facilities and services" (Planning, Environment and Lands Branch 1996, p. 6). With the disappearance of these low-rise buildings, redevelopment opportunities have diminished because it is harder to acquire 10–15 story buildings in multiple ownership to assemble lots for redevelopment and also the redevelopment gains will be smaller (1996, p. 6). According to the Planning Department (1999), "there has been a consistent decline in the supply of private residential flats through redevelopment in the urban areas since the late 1980s." At the same time, the problem of urban decay has accelerated. According to the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau,² there are about 9300 private buildings in the urban area which are 30 years old and above. In 10 years time, the number of buildings over 30 years

old will increase by 50%. In Hong Kong, a good majority of buildings over 30 years old are due for redevelopment because they were constructed during a period of rather lax building standards and have generally been poorly maintained. The problem of aging buildings is most serious in older urban areas.

Unlike the heavy commitment of western governments in urban redevelopment, the Government of Hong Kong has played a marginal role in redeveloping private residential buildings to date. The government has been much more active in reclaiming land to accommodate urban growth. It was not until 1988 that the government was involved in setting up the Land Development Corporation (LDC), an independent statutory body, to carry out redevelopment through joint ventures with private developers.³ In 1995, the government undertook a review of its urban renewal policy, followed by a 4-month consultation period. In June 1996, the government issued a policy statement *Urban Renewal in Hong Kong*. One of the proposals in this Statement is to set up an Urban Renewal Authority (URA), which would replace the LDC. Four years after this proposal, the Legislative Council passed the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance in July 2000 to set up an Urban Renewal Authority (URA) replacing the LDC.

Unlike the previous approach, the URA emphasizes on the following:

- To accelerate redevelopment by replacing old buildings with new ones to provide a better living environment and neighborhood;
- To enable and encourage the rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings to prevent urban decay;
- To preserve by maintaining and restoring buildings of historical and architectural value, and to sustain local characteristics;
- To revitalize through enhancing and strengthening the socio-economic and environmental fabric for the benefit of our urban communities.⁴

And they stress on a partnership approach trying to involve affected communities including tenants and owners; govern-

ment; development and financial institutions; professionals and academics; and other stakeholders. One can argue that the changing approach toward urban regeneration in Hong Kong tallies with international trends discussed in the last section. However, as can be seen from different stakeholders' perceptions of various quality of life issues, they do have very different assessment of Hong Kong's ability toward sustainable urban regeneration.

MACROQUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENTS IN HONG KONG AND IMPLICATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE URBAN REGENERATION

In September 2000, the Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management of the University of Hong Kong undertook a 6-month study linked to an international comparative research project of urban development outcomes in some 20 cities around the world. The project is known as "Proyecto-Cities" which is being undertaken by Fundacion Metropoli based in Madrid, Spain. A questionnaire survey was sent to representatives of the public sector, business community and civil society, including NGOs and the voluntary sector. A total of 45 questionnaires (15 from each sector) were completed. The respondents were requested to identify Hong Kong's "clusters of excellence" and areas requiring further improvement. Many of the issues listed in the questionnaire were closely related to quality of life issues. In this paper, the answers are re-organized to help us make a better assessment of Hong Kong's ability to undertake sustainable urban regeneration.⁵

The perceptions of the public and private sectors, and the civil society on socio-economic and environmental conditions in Hong Kong are divided into "levels of excellence" and "level of priority." The former is their assessment of the existing situation and the latter is about how important they consider a particular issue is. Only those items with a level of priority reaching 8 or above (out of 10), and the discrepancy between the level of excellence and the level of priority is at least 2 for any of the listed stakeholders are discussed in this paper. Such

selections allow us to identify areas that require improvement if we are serious about sustainable urban regeneration.

As can be seen from Figure 1 below, all the public, private and civil society sectors think that Hong Kong is not performing well in urban redevelopment (5 out of 10) and the issue should receive a relatively high priority (8 out of 10). While the perceptions on urban redevelopment in Hong Kong are strikingly similar among the different stakeholders, their views do differ with reference to other indicators. In the following, the five basic principles used in sustainable urban regeneration, that is, encouraging participation, building community character, advancing equity, improving environment and enlivening the economy, will form the organizing themes for grouping various quality of life indicators. Let us first look at the issue of participation.

Many interesting phenomena can be seen in Figure 2. Ratings of the “level of excellence” by the private sector and to a less extent, the civil society were consistently lower than ratings by the public sector, which were not high anyway. For instance, the average rating of the level of citizen participation by the private sector was only 3 (out of 10) but that of the public sector was 4.5. The private sector gave a very low average score of 3–3.5 to the current situation of participation in political election, democratization and citizen confidence in politicians. This again was significantly lower than the other two sets of stakeholders. The civil society gave a score of 5 to all these

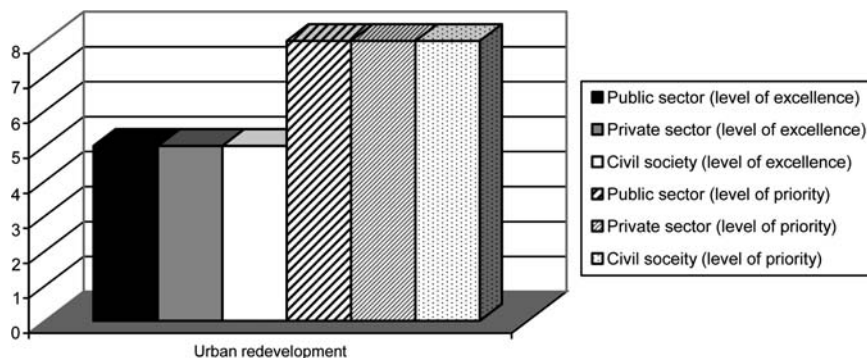


Figure 1. Perceptions of urban redevelopment in Hong Kong.

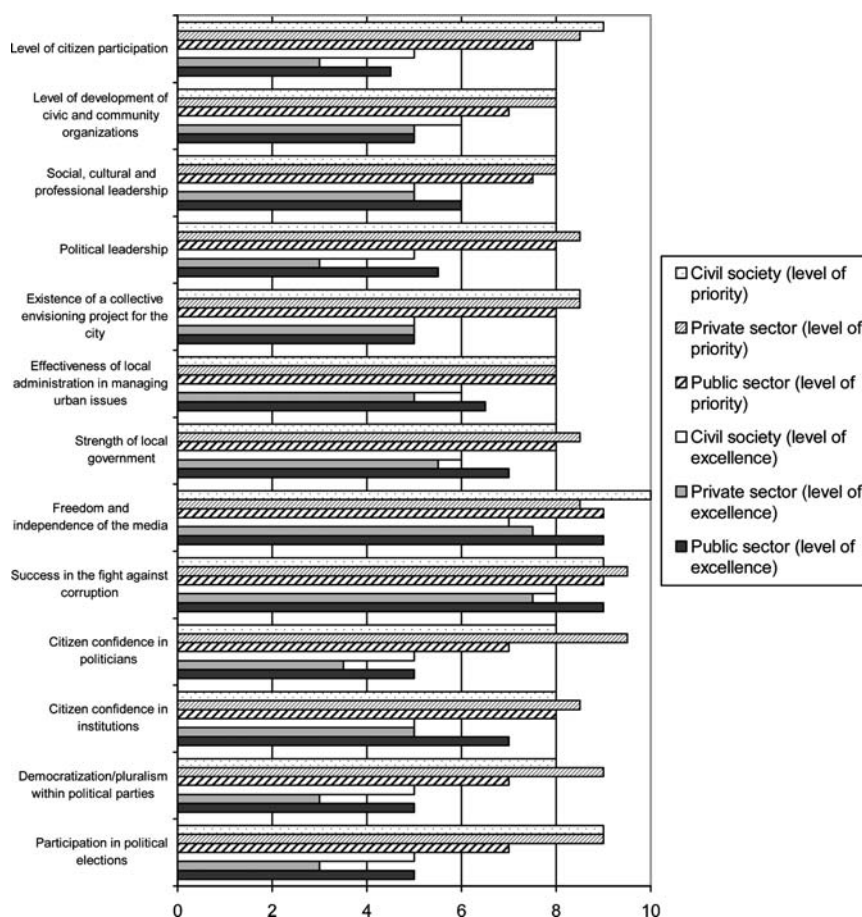


Figure 2. Perceptions of participation in Hong Kong.

indicators whereas the public sector gave a score of at least 5, if not higher marks. The public sector also had a higher rating of citizen confidence in institutions, strength of local government, effectiveness of local administration in managing urban issues and social, cultural and professional leadership (an average score of 6–7) while the ratings of the private sector and civil society were at least one point less for all the items. In other words, in terms of excellence, the public sector tended to give a higher rating of the situation of participation whereas the private sector and the civil society in general did not think that Hong Kong had a participatory culture.

The reverse is true when the level of priority is considered. For almost all the indicators, the private sector and the civil society gave a higher priority score than the public sector. This probably explains why many private individuals in business or the third sector feel a sense of frustration over the opportunities of citizen participation in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, all three stakeholders considered fighting against corruption, freedom and independence of the media, strength of local government, effectiveness of local administration, collective envisioning of the city and political leadership were priority issues to be tackled. Another important principle for sustainable urban development is the need to bring out community characters. Figure 3 summarizes the survey results of the related indicators.

It is very interesting to see the patterns of perceptions repeating again. In general, all three stakeholders did not hold very high regard of indicators related to community characters. While the discrepancies of the perceptions of the public sector and the civil society were less, the frustrations of the private sector could be seen in many of the indicators such as the urban setting for pedestrians, qualities of traditional architecture, water features, historical areas, ecological buffers and greenways and great natural elements (with scores ranging from only 3 to 4). In terms of priority issues related to community characters, the private sector and the civil society had put higher priorities on indicators of the urban park system, low-income residential areas, historical areas, water features, green areas, quality of modern and traditional architecture, urban setting for pedestrians, the need for unique and attractive image, importance of city pride and the external image of the city. In other words, the perceptions of the public sector once again differed from those of the private sector and civil society. Let us see if the same pattern can be found in terms of equity issues (Figure 4).

While the public sector gave average scores of only 5 or less to the balance in income levels, maritime, river front esplanades or walks, facilities for the care of the elderly, the prevention of substandard housing policies and affordability of housing, the private sector and civil society had slightly different ratings

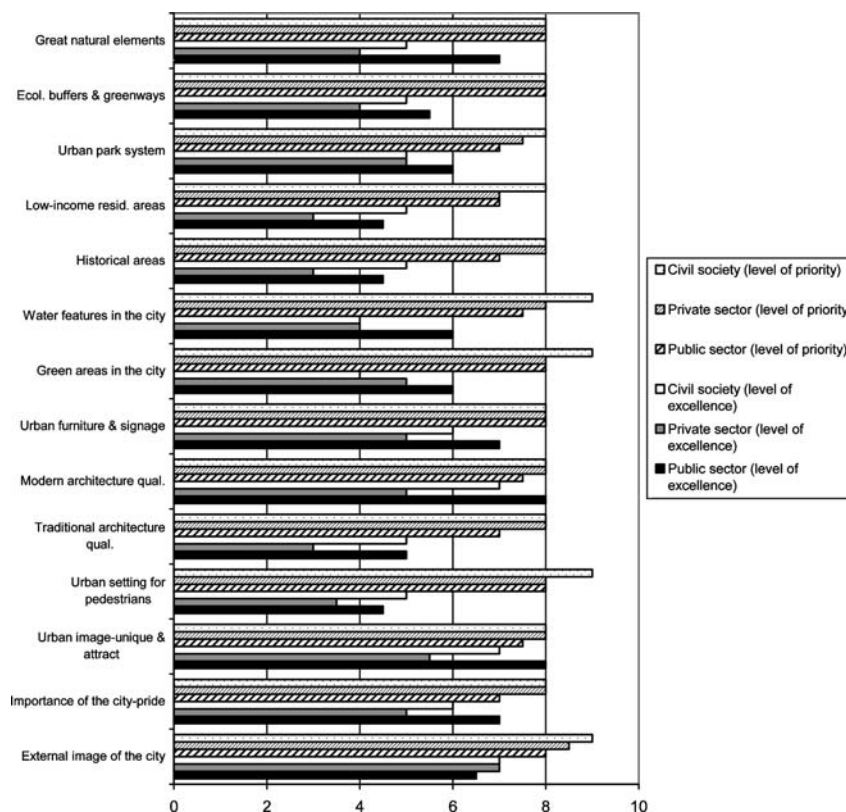


Figure 3. Perceptions of community characters in Hong Kong.

concerning these indicators. The private sector and the civil society did not think that the fight against poverty, a major threat toward equity, was done properly in Hong Kong. Another major difference of opinions with the public sector was the issue of affordability of housing and to a less extent, the prevention of substandard housing. The discrepancies between the public and private sectors could also be seen in the indicators on sports facilities for public use, quality of public medical care, education system suiting the local economy, quality and variety of public housing stock, social cohesion and social development cohesion.

As for the level of priorities, all three sectors had similar aspirations. While the public sector gave top priority (a score of

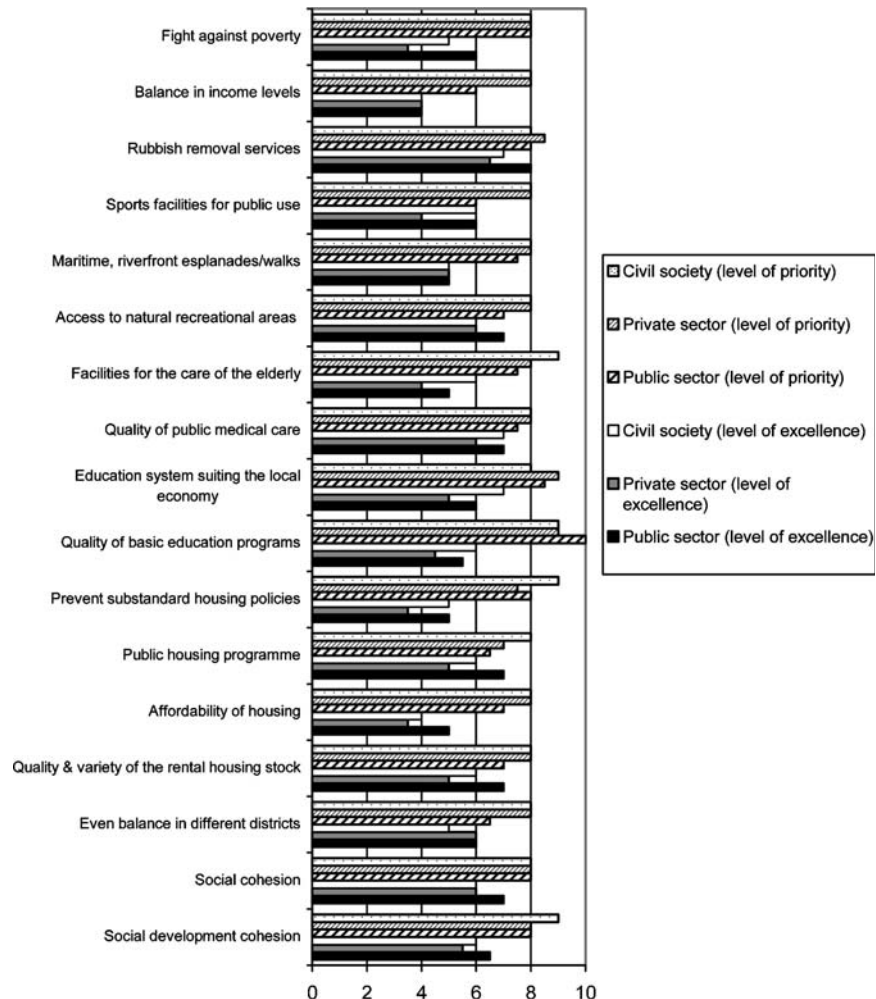


Figure 4. Perceptions of equity issues in Hong Kong.

10) to the quality of basic education programs, and considered balance of income levels, public housing program, even balance in different districts not particularly important (ratings from 6 to 6.5), the private and community sectors rated these latter indicators at an average score of 8, if not more. Nevertheless, it can be seen that educational issues, housing issues and facilities for the elderly and social cohesion were major concerns of all the stakeholders.

In terms of environmental sustainability, the private sector only gave an average score of 4 whereas the scores for the public and community sectors were 5 and 5.5, respectively (Figure 5). Similar to the other indicators closely related to the principles of participation, community characters and equity, the public sector consistently gave a higher rating to the various environmental indicators when compared with those given by the private and community sectors. The graph shows that the private sector and the civil society were particularly disappointed with the current situations of acoustic comfort, air quality, recycling and reuse of wastes, natural water quality, environmental quality and bicycle paths (scores ranging from 2 to 4). In terms of priority issues, while the public sector gave a rating of only 6 to recycling and reuse of waste, natural water

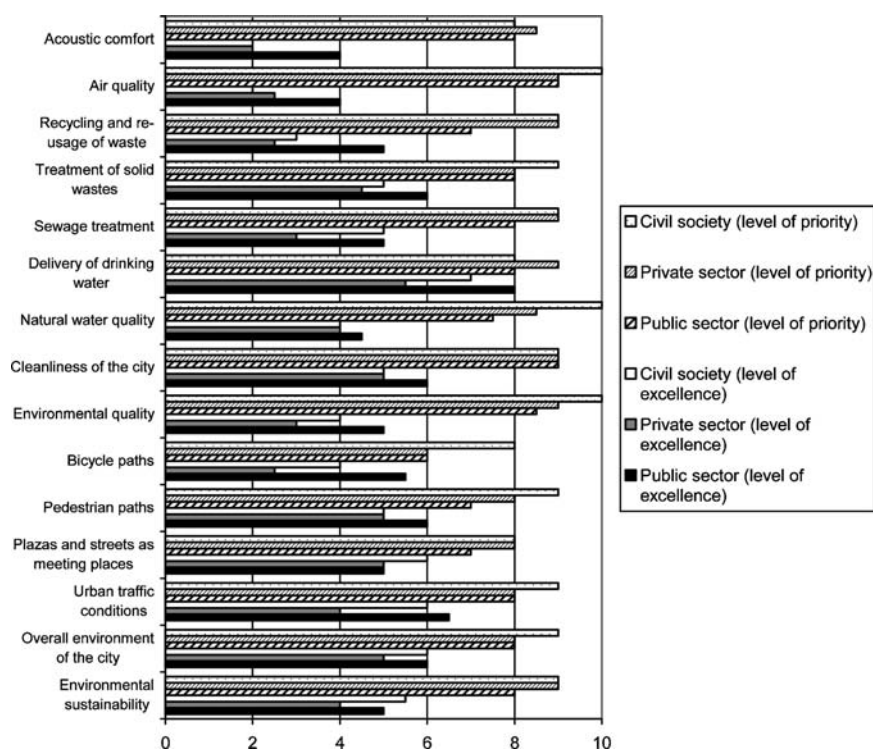


Figure 5. Perceptions of environment in Hong Kong.

quality, pedestrian paths and piazzas and streets as meeting places, the private and community sectors rated these highly (from 8 to 10). All three stakeholders considered that acoustic comfort, air quality, cleanliness of the city, environmental quality, urban traffic conditions, overall environment of the city and environmental sustainability should receive priority attention.

Let us now move to look at the last organizing theme in sustainable urban regeneration and examine the perceptions of the various stakeholders with reference to the relevant quality of life indicators. Figure 6 summarizes the results.

Among all the organizing themes, it seems that the perceptions of the three stakeholders were closest for economic indicators. The most noticing differences were about the level of diversifications of the city's economy, economic activities aiming at improving the environment, and the collaboration and cooperation between universities and businesses. Except the level of economic diversification, the three stakeholders seemed to have closer consensus about the most pressing issues that required immediate attention. These included capacity to generate employment, economic activities that aimed at improving the environment, collaboration and cooperation between private and public sectors as well as businesses and universities.

From the above discussion, we can identify a very interesting phenomenon, that is, the public sector tends to think more highly of Hong Kong's quality of life and the discrepancies between the perceptions of the public, and private and community sectors are quite considerable. As Hong Kong is still a very much top-down, executive-led society, the government plays an important role in formulating and implementing various policies. If the assessments of the government on the current conditions and future importance of various issues are so different from those of the general public, including both the private and community sectors, it is very likely that the general public will be rather passive in responding to government policies as these policies are probably not addressing what they consider as the most pressing issues that need to be tackled with a matter of urgency.

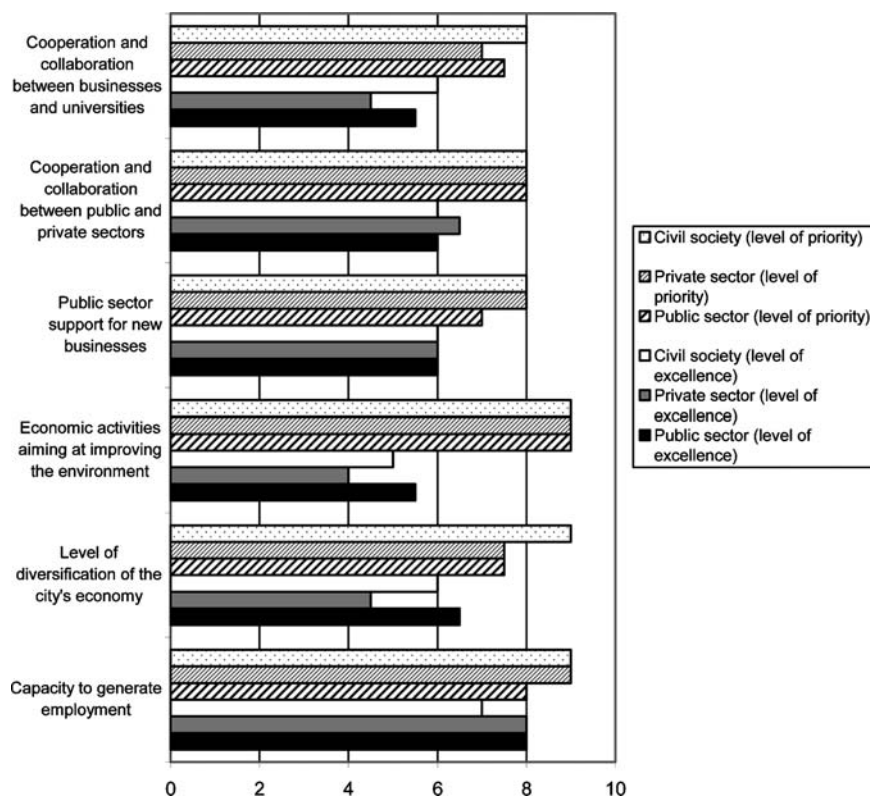


Figure 6. Perceptions of economy in Hong Kong.

Table II attempts to put the results of the macro-quality of life assessment side by side with the principal means of sustainable urban regeneration. It can be seen that a lot more can be done in order to achieve urban regeneration that involves participation, fosters community characters, enhances social equity, improves environment and boosts local economy. However, as mentioned, there are discrepancies of perceptions between the public, and private and community sectors.

Table III lists the most pressing issues that need to be handled as perceived by the public vis-à-vis private and community sectors. It can be seen that compared with the public sector, the private and community sectors have a much longer list of the priority issues.

TABLE II
Macro-quality of life assessment and implications on sustainable urban regeneration

Means	Macro-quality of life assessment
Participation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All strands of the community should be included, encouraged and empowered to participate at all stages of the regeneration process • Comprehensive, balanced and accurate information should be provided to the public • Community initiatives and contacts between stakeholders should be encouraged and facilitated • Full, accessible and easily understood monitoring should be undertaken • Requires an effective and open local government with executive power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and citizen participation had been rated rather poorly by all parties concerned, particularly by the private sector • No matching indicator. However, all three stakeholders agreed that Hong Kong had a free and independent media • Little as reflected in low ratings in collective envisioning of the city, citizen confidence in politicians, etc. • No matching indicator
Community characters	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide amenities and open space to facilitate community involvement • Understand the place-making dynamics of a community • Identify the historical and cultural elements of an area which give it a sense of place • Respect these elements when introducing new development to produce space with unique characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied assessment among the stakeholders. Viewed less favorably by the private and community sectors • Viewed less favorably by the private and community sectors • No directly matching indicator • Not doing a good job as seen by private and community sectors. Higher rating by public sector • No directly matching indicator
Equity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community fairness in access to affordable housing, education, health and welfare services, recreation, shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed more favorably by the public sector than the private and community sectors

TABLE II
Continued

Means	Macro-quality of life assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Fair and reasonable compensation, adequate rehousing and sufficient social services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not doing a good job from the perceptions of non-government sectors, especially by the private sector
Environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the physical environment • Conserve and/or recycle non-renewable resources • Reduce pollution • Adopt “green” building techniques • Rehabilitate buildings where feasible • Maintain buildings and structures in good repair • Build to last • Encourage walking and cycling • Maximize public transport accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No matching indicator. In general pay little regard to redevelopment efforts • Rather low ratings in environmental sustainabilities and various environmental aspects • No matching indicator • Poor ratings • No directly matching indicator
Economy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking local production with local consumption • Improve environmental awareness of local business • Economic feasibility is more important than financial feasibility • Stimulate employment opportunities at local and city level • Re-use under-utilized and obsolete land • Recycle obsolete buildings to other uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No matching indicator • Not very impressive • No matching indicator • Capacity acknowledged by all stakeholders • No matching indicators

TABLE III
Perceptions of priority issues in sustainable urban regenerations

Priority issues by the government (a score of 8 or above)	Priority issues by the private and community sectors (a score of 8 or above by both sectors)
Participation by different stakeholders	
1. Political leadership	1. Level of citizen participation
2. Existence of a collective envisioning project for the city	2. Level of development of civic and community organizations
3. Effectiveness of local administration in managing urban issues	3. Social, cultural and professional leadership
4. Strength of local government	4. Political leadership
5. Freedom and independence of the media	5. Existence of a collective envisioning project for the city
6. Success in the fight against corruption	6. Effectiveness of local administration in managing urban issues
7. Citizen confidence in institutions	7. Strength of local government
	8. Freedom and independence of the media
	9. Success in the fight against corruption
	10. Citizen confidence in politicians
	11. Citizen confidence in institutions
	12. Democratization or pluralism within political parties
	13. Participation in political elections
Building communities with characters	
1. Great natural elements	1. Great natural elements
2. Ecological buffers and greenways	2. Ecological buffers and greenways
3. Green areas in the city	3. Historical areas
4. Urban furniture and signage	4. Green areas in the city
5. Urban settings for pedestrians	5. Urban furniture and signage

TABLE III
Continued

Priority issues by the government (a score of 8 or above)	Priority issues by the private and community sectors (a score of 8 or above by both sectors)
6. External image of the city	6. Quality of modern architecture 7. Quality of traditional architecture 8. Urban settings for pedestrians 9. Unique and attractiveness of urban image 10. Importance of city pride 11. External image of the city
Equitable distribution of benefits and costs	
1. Fight against poverty 2. Rubbish removal service 3. Education system suiting local economy 4. Quality of basic education programs 5. Prevent substandard housing policies 6. Social cohesion 7. Social development cohesion	1. Fight against poverty 2. Balance in income levels 3. Rubbish removal service 4. Sports facilities for public use 5. Maritime, riverfront esplanades or walks 6. Facilities for the care of the elderly 7. Quality of public medical care 8. Education system suiting local economy 9. Quality of basic education programs 10. Prevent substandard housing policies 11. Affordability of housing 12. Quality and variety of rental housing stock 13. Even balance of different districts 14. Social cohesion 15. Social development cohesion

TABLE III
Continued

Priority issues by the government (a score of 8 or above)	Priority issues by the private and community sectors (a score of 8 or above by both sectors)
Improving environment	
1. Acoustic comfort	1. Acoustic comfort
2. Air quality	2. Air quality
3. Treatment of solid wastes	3. Recycling and reuse of wastes
4. Sewage treatment	4. Treatment of solid wastes
5. Delivery of drinking water	5. Sewage treatment
6. Cleanliness of the city	6. Delivery of drinking water
7. Environmental quality	7. Natural water quality
8. Urban traffic conditions	8. Cleanliness of the city
9. Overall environment of the city	9. Environmental quality
10. Environmental sustainability	10. Pedestrian paths
	11. Plazas and streets as meeting places
	12. Urban traffic conditions
	13. Overall environment of the city
	14. Environmental sustainability
Enhancing economic growth	
1. Cooperation and collaboration between public and private sectors	1. Cooperation and collaboration between public and private sectors
2. Economic activities aiming at improving the environment	2. Public sector support for new businesses
3. Capacity to generate employment	3. Economic activities aiming at improving the environment
	4. Capacity to generate employment

Notes: Only listing indicators with scores of 8 in the 'level of priority.'

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The macro-quality of life assessments by various stakeholders show that Hong Kong still has a long way to go if the city is serious about sustainable urban regeneration. Participatory culture needs to be further cultivated to involve different stakeholders in initiating and implementing urban regeneration. More effective and open local governments with executive power is necessary so that different players can be better informed of regeneration efforts and help monitor consequent developments. According to the perceptions of the stakeholders, Hong Kong is not doing a good job at all in terms of building local communities with characters. Local neighborhoods lack amenities or open spaces for facilitating community involvement. There is also an urgent need to bring out the unique history and culture of a community in the course of restructuring spaces, a concept yet to have wide currency in Hong Kong. Similarly, equitable distribution of social amenities is not perceived to be done properly. It is very important to take care of the needs of all the stakeholders, especially those who are disadvantaged, in the regeneration process.

The rather poor perception of the environment and economy in Hong Kong shows that the city has not utilized the renewal opportunities to improve environmental qualities or boost economic growth. All these point to the fact that the new "4Rs" approach adopted by the Urban Renewal Authority probably needs to be further revised to embrace a comprehensive and integrative sustainability framework so that the five principles discussed throughout this paper can be used to guide the formulation of strategy and implementation of projects.

Another problem that Hong Kong needs to face is the discrepancies between the perceptions of the public sector vis-à-vis the private and community sectors. As can be seen in Table III, many issues regarded as priority ones by the private and community sectors are not on the agenda of the public sector. While the discrepancies between the public and private sectors are less dramatic over environmental and economic issues, the differences of perceptions are considerable for participation,

community characters and equity issues. As Hong Kong is a top-down executive-led polity, such patterns of perceptions are worrying because the government's regeneration policies may fall short of the expectations of the general public. For instance, the private and community sectors consider a collective envisioning project for the city and the strengthening of citizen, democratic and political participation are important for Hong Kong, these are all absent in the public sector's priority list. The public sector's perception of community characters is also different from the private and civil society's ones, which focus more on historical areas, architecture and urban imaging.

The quality of life survey results provide a convenient set of indicators for us to assess Hong Kong's efforts toward sustainable urban regeneration. The results are not particularly encouraging. And all stakeholders, in particular the public sector, have to work much harder for a better and more livable urban environment.

NOTES

¹ In Hong Kong, public housing, which amounts to close to half of existing housing stocks, is provided by the quasi-public Hong Kong Housing Authority. In fact, Housing Authority has contributed significantly to improving the urban environment in Hong Kong through its redevelopment projects. However, in this paper, we will focus on private sector residential redevelopment.

² Extracted from website of Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau, The Government of Hong Kong: <http://www.hplb.gov.hk/eng/policy/urs.htm>, accessed in April 2004.

³ The Corporation had received a start-up loan of HK\$31 (US\$4) million from the Government, which had been repaid with interest. As boasted by the Land Development Corporation, it had not used one single cent of tax payers' money in renewing the urban fabric.

⁴ Adopted from: <http://www.ura.org.hk/html/c204000e1e.html>, viewed on August 22, 2003.

⁵ Information on the survey results can be found in an unpublished report in: CUPEM (2001), *Study on Hong Kong's Urban Innovations and their Impact on the City's Physical Form and Metropolitan Structure*, Hong Kong: CUPEM.

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