

South China Morning Post 南華早報

14 years to buy a flat: Quality of life in Hong Kong going down, shows survey

Thursday, 14 August, 2014, 4:13am

News › Hong Kong SOCIETY

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Why city's quality of life is getting worse, starting with inability of the average household to afford to buy even the most modest of homes

Hongkongers' ability to afford a home has hit a new low amid growing dissatisfaction over the government's performance and pessimism over press freedom.

This is indicated by the Chinese University's latest quality of life index, released yesterday.

Quality matters

Property prices



The index lists the housing affordability ratio for last year at minus 4.91, down from minus 3.49 the year before and the lowest in the 12 years since the index was first compiled.

Air quality



"When we conducted our first survey in 2002, a typical household would need only five years' saving to buy a 400 sq ft flat in Kowloon," Terence Chong Tai-leung, associate professor in the university's department of economics, said. "Now they would have to stop eating and live [on the streets] for 14 years to save enough money for a flat."

Press freedom



Noise pollution



Government performance



The housing affordability ratio first plunged into negative territory in 2010, at minus 0.85.

Wages



Public perception of press freedom also reached its lowest point last year with a score of 4.69, the highest single drop from the median index rate of 4.85 since 2002.

Public expenditure on education and health



The overall score for the index, based on three sub-indices covering society, economy and environment, was 102.57, a slight drop from 102.90. It was based on a telephone survey of 1,004 people last August.

Sources: Chinese University, Hong Kong Quality of Life Index 2013

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Nine per cent said they felt restrained when discussing political affairs with friends, a jump from 6 per cent in the previous year. This was accompanied by 16 per cent saying they would feel worried about criticising the government out of fear of retaliatory action against them, up from 11 per cent the year before.

It was the fourth consecutive decline in the perception of press freedom. Media scholars at the university attributed it to a spate of events before the survey.

These included Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's letter to the chief editor of the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* demanding the retraction of an article.

They also included a search of the Oriental Press Group headquarters' server room in Tai Po by Fire Services Department officers after an unverified email complaint about the building's fire-safety systems.

"People's perception of press freedom is expected to reach another new low, what with the brutal assault on former *Ming Pao* chief editor Kevin Lau Chun-to," said Professor Paul Lee Siu-nam, of the university's School of Journalism and Communication. Lau returned to work this month, almost six months after the triad-style chopping attack.

Despite this, a content analysis of four sections of six major newspapers, including *Ming Pao* and the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, showed that press criticism of the government remained strong at 4.55, up from 4.23 in the previous year.

Source URL (retrieved on Aug 17th 2014, 10:52am): <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1573019/14-years-save-flat-just-dont-eat>