

## PLACES FROM THE PAST LOST IN NEW TOWNS: HONG KONG'S OLD VILLAGES

Terry Van DIJK\*, Gerd WEITKAMP\*\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Awareness of Hong Kong's built heritage and its value is considered to have begun to increase around the time of the end of British rule. The change in Hong Kong's sovereignty in 1997 prompted a search for its own identity, because while no longer under British rule, and not being nor becoming entirely Chinese, it was not immediately obvious what the emerging Hong Kong should put forward as its cultural identity. The question since that time has also become economically pertinent, as Hong Kong has developed into a major Asian tourist destination. As cultural tourism could be developed into one of the pillars of Hong Kong's leisure economy, debate emerged on its identity and the built heritage it reflects.

This article addresses the popular assumption that before 1997, heritage had been of little interest to Hong Kong's governments, as articulated by Yung and Chan (2011), Henderson (2001) and Cheung (1999). This negligence was explained by the fact that Hong Kong's population was growing exponentially through several waves of large-scale immigration, while being under an obviously temporary British government. This resulted in a heterogeneous population (Henderson, 2001) which had just migrated there and was more concerned about access to housing, employment and transportation than the history of the lands they were about to inhabit (Yung and Chan, 2011, 459). Hong Kong did establish the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (AMO) as early as 1976, but that was an elitist effort (Yung and Chan, 2011) to save only the most appealing landmarks from the pressure of land development (Henderson, 2001, 232). With the British leaving Hong Kong midway through the 1990s, its population by then feeling less as immigrants and a much greater sense of belonging, and the world recession prompting the question of economic diversification towards tourism, Hong Kong set out to configure a discourse with which to distinguish itself from mainland China, urging the revisiting of its history. Today, heritage is a growing interest and appears

\* Department of Planning, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, THE NETHERLANDS

\*\* Department of Cultural Geography, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, THE NETHERLANDS

to be a considerable driver for tourism, both in a policy sense and in an economic sense (Nguyen and Cheung, 2016). Chan and Lee (2016) however show that articulating a heritage policy for Hong Kong faces a diversity of contradictory views and discourses. It will take long time to develop.

We report on what nonetheless remained of developed sites' former structures, and why, during the allegedly less culturally sensitive decades before 1997, when New Town development rapidly transformed Hong Kong. We sought to discover whether the New Towns – while being landmarks of modernist planned cities, channelling huge immigration pressures – did adopt elements of their sites' history in their urban form, in an awareness that historic structures have intrinsic value and can contribute to place distinctiveness.

Based on historic maps, New Town Master Plans and site visits, we show how the villages and towns which had previously occupied most of Hong Kong's New Towns sites have been preserved. The extent to which they are integrated as an asset for the surrounding New Town today is limited but did increase over time.

### LITERATURE ON CONTEMPORARY USE OF HISTORIC PLACES

Treating a building as heritage is subjective. The myth of being able actually to conserve a place's true full presence and meaning was already proven false by Lynch (1972) and Lowenthal (1985). Jokilehto's (1999) account of the evolution of architectural conservation indeed shows the ebb and flow of fashions for certain style periods (style selectivity) and methods of conservation (anti-restoration, eclectic restoration, façadism, ensemble approach), which are all attempts to respond to the impossibility of turning back and freezing time in a place. Cheung's case studies (2003; 1999) show that built heritage is not only multiplicatively interpreted, heritage designation may even be a source of disputes over the historical events which happened in a place.

Ashworth's texts in particular, discuss and criticise simplified perspectives on old buildings being of intrinsic value, and reflections of the past. In reality, places have many pasts (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1999; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Ashworth, 2006; Ashworth, 2008), and choosing which to preserve and highlight are normative decisions which say more about today's interpretation of the past than about a place's actual history. It is creation and not preservation. When heritage, being the "commodification of the past", gradually became intimately related to tourism (Nasser, 2003; Ashworth and Larkham, 1994; Urry, 1990; Graham, 2002), the commercial drive to serve the public's preferences became an additional selective factor in heritage management, unevenly distributing conservation efforts depending on consumer taste. From being an end, conservation has become a means (Ward, 1998), and it inevitably leads to tension (Pendlebury, 2002). It may even lead to the creation of fabricated historical places which never really existed in a given form or location (Newby, 1994; Tramposch, 1994; Ouf, 2001).

We may wonder whether selectivity, distortion and recreation in conservation practices is avoidable, and whether it is necessarily a bad thing. Heritage, however selective or distorted, can be effectively employed in urban design to provide new neighbourhoods with the "sense of place" they need (Ouf, 2001). Of course, as for example Mazumdar et al. (2000) show, the built environment is just one of the factors for communities to

feel rooted in a location and to construct a local identity with values and meanings attached to place (Kunzmann, 2000; Jivén and Larkham, 2003), and social capital may be even more important, but urban design which is respectful toward the past can help. We may then experience these places as authentic because history provides places of today with a spirit which attaches them to the continuum of time (Hayden, 1995). In places with no real built-up past, however, attempts to create authenticity can ironically lead to uniformity and placelessness again (Knox, 2005, 4).

In this context, our study focuses on the everyday remnants of the past of a place, instead of the landmark buildings, such as ancestral halls. Everyday physical elements which survive can be a street pattern, a canal, an un-noted block of houses or a square. We wish to understand how Hong Kong has treated this type of legacy from the past.

The contrast between a New Town site and its legacy from the past, consisting of typically older, more gradually and organically developed patterns of fields, roads and buildings, is stark. Nevertheless, could the combination be effective in giving New Towns a sense of place? Our research addresses the structures which allow a place to display its history, without being explicitly labelled as a monument or being protected by conservationist laws. This history lies in the forgotten market building, the old harbour now used for yachts, the city's fortifications which are now an ornamental park, the ancient market street, the housing block designed by a long-forgotten architect. These can be the silent links to the past which few realise give a place its heart.

Despite being a common language, or perhaps because of it, defining what a New Town is exactly has not been easy. Not every urban expansion is necessarily a New Town. Size matters, as does its age, the planned building method, the virgin site providing room for it, the limited period for its emergence, as well as its self-containment in terms of labour, consumption and leisure. But all of these requirements are known to be relaxed in some cases. We use the definition Brislow (1989, 3) prefers: "...planned communities created in response to clearly stated objectives [...] an act of will presupposing the existence of an authority or organisation sufficiently effective...".

The existence of a central organisation deciding to create a new, independent city, produce a large-scale design and coordinate its construction is important. New Towns can be found across Europe and even in Egypt (Hegazy and Moustafa, 2013), Indonesia (Firman, 2004), Iran (Bahrainy and Khosravi, 2013) and Nigeria (Olanipekun, 2013). The population growth in the wealthier parts of Asia continues to drive large-scale urbanisation in a New Town fashion (Den Hartog, 2009; Tan, 2010), with extensive projects for massive housing production. Although some, particularly pre-Second World War New Towns, are now considered heritage in themselves (Glendinning and Watters, 2012), more recent generations of New Towns tend to be associated with anonymity, social problems (Hegazy and Moustafa, 2013; Firman, 2004) and placelessness. They run the risk of becoming a nowhere (Kunstler, 1993). They either lack a specific identity or *genius loci*, or became something we have come to reject.

## METHOD

In order to establish the extent to which the original villages were integrated in New Towns, we studied eight New Town-sites by firstly establishing a map of the structures present in the pre-New Town period. We considered settlements (groups of houses), and main roads, tracks and canals. We consulted aerial pictures and maps from just before and after the New Town development started. These were made available for consultation at the Hong Kong Central Public Library map department.

We converted this material into standardised maps of the areas before and after development. This could not be done with great precision because of the quality and variety of the historic material. Where the pre-development state was based on aerial photographs, our reconstruction is an estimate because the exact land use shown in the pictures could not always be established with certainty. And because of the dramatic changes in land use, it was not always possible to find reference points on the maps to make an exact comparison. Moreover, land use definitions differed between some topographic maps. The maps we compiled are therefore mainly indicative – they are meant to show the changed urban contexts of the old structures.

Secondly, we consulted the New Town Development Plans and established how plans described the approach to original structures. Broadly speaking, a plan may have suggested erasing a structure, preserving it by building around it, or adopting it as an asset to the New Town design. We also wanted to determine the reasons behind these approaches, and therefore studied the plans' accompanying explanatory texts, if available, as an indication of the contemporary attitudes toward the original structures.

Lastly, to determine how preserved structures are included in today's New Towns, if at all, we visited the remains of the original villages to determine what they currently appear to contribute to the wider New Town urban structure. We mainly focused on the former villages and market towns, and examined whether they can be and actually appear to be used by the people living around them. Villages could typically be expected to now be tourist attractions and former market towns to function as centres hosting shops, markets or events.

This paper does not delve into the socially constructed complexities of heritage discourses from the past, but limits itself to studying at the physical level, what village heritage remains and why and how it is integrated in the urban designs of the New Towns.

## FINDINGS

### The Hong Kong New Town Policy

With a growth rate of about 1 million inhabitants every decade between 1960 and 2000, flattening out to half a million every decade in the years after, Hong Kong has experienced a prolonged period of housing shortages. Migration from mainland China as well as natural reproduction explains this growth. To combat housing shortages, after the flat parts of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon were developed, an assertive expansion scheme was implemented to build planned communities, typically for several hundreds of thousands inhabitants (**Figure 1; Table 1**). To allow these communities to function independently from the central city, the first waves of New Towns included an industrial estate for employment. When manufacturing industries moved to cheap labour countries, the New Town



Figure 1. Position of the New Towns

population became more closely oriented towards a central city for work, and highways and metro lines had to be built to accommodate commuting. A total of nine New Towns have been built in Hong Kong so far.

### General New Town Patterns

For geographical reasons, the New Towns were typically built on sites with existing towns and villages. Hong Kong's landscape has steep mountains and narrow valleys, and as a consequence, there has always been a shortage of places to dwell in, let alone land suitable for cultivation. The original settlements in the area were found on the few places where rivers flowed from the mountains out to sea. Here, sediment had formed shallow estuaries with flood plains, offering space for agriculture and fishery for the indigenous people – and the least expensive New Town building sites for later generations.

The typical original state of a New Town site is a valley meeting the sea at a river mouth. The valley opens up to an estuary, with one or more settlements along the shoreline and surrounded by fields. Given the shortage of land and the tendency to preserve settlements, New Town development mainly used large-scale land reclamation in the estuary. The original settlements therefore no longer lie at the shoreline, but sit between the mountains and the New Town developments. The river will now typically run through a New Town in a channel, stretching from its original mouth out to sea.

We will divide the more detailed accounts of the old structures into the four periods suggested by Brislow (1989, 3, 148).

Current New Town name	Settlements present prior to NT construction	Zoned in the Master plan as	Part still remaining	Usage	Currently surrounded by
<b>First generation</b>					
Tsuen Wan (1960)					
<b>Second generation</b>					
Sha Tin (1967)	Tai Wai		Entirely	Residential	Moderately high buildings with shops. Tai Wai metro station adjacent
	Sha Tin Wai		Entirely	Residential	Isolated by highway and metro line
	Sha Tin Tin Sam		None Entirely	Residential	Highrise
Tuen Mun (1967)					
<b>Third generation</b>					
Tai Po (1979)	Tai Po market town	Residential	Entirely	Market, shopping, residential	Well-connected by Tai Po metro station and footbridges to New Town buildings
	Tai Po Tau village Yuen Chau Tsai	Village-type Park	Entirely None	Residential	Isolated by roads and railway
Fanling (1979)	Luen Wo Market	Residential	Entirely	Commercial	The old market square is now used as a parking lot
	Fan Leng Tai Wai	Village-type	no data	Residential	no data
	Wu Nga Wok Long	Low land rural	no data	Residential	no data
	Ma Wat Wai	not applicable	Entirely	Residential	Embedded in a semi-urbanised landscape.
	Tung Kok Wa Tu Tong Tsuen	not applicable not applicable	Entirely Entirely	no data no data	Hidden behind an industrial zone, but highlighted by a 'Heritage Trail'
Yuen Long (1979)	Yuen Long Kau Hui (old market)	no data	Entirely, much rebuilt, road	Residential	Behind a relatively closed back side of metro station
	Yuen Long San Hui (Hop Yik new market)	no data	Rebuilt after 1984	Markets, shops, residential	Central position, well connected to new parts around it
	Northern fishing villages	no data	Mostly	Residential	Peripheral and isolated
	Tai Kiu	no data	Entirely	Residential	Well connected to more recent neighbourhoods
	Tung Tau Tsuen/ Tai Wai	no data			
<b>Fourth generation</b>					
Tseung Kwan O (1984)	Tseung Kwan O village	Village-type	Entirely, expanded	Residential	Outside ringroad, visually hidden
	Yau Yue Wan	Village-type	Entirely, expanded	Residential	Outside ringroad, visually hidden
	Mai Wat Tsin Tiu Keng Leng	Gov/Instit not applicable	no data None	Health care not applicable	Outside ringroad, visually hidden not applicable
Tin Shui Wai (1989)	North cluster: San Hing Tsuen, Ngau Hom, Shin Kong Wai		Entirely	Residential	Isolated by roads and light industrial zones
	South cluster: Tung Tau Tsuen, San Wai, Lo Uk Tsuen, Sik Kong Tsuen, Ha Tsuen		Entirely	Residential	Isolated by roads and light industrial zones
	Fung Kong Tsuen		Entirely	Residential	Isolated by roads and light industrial zones
	Tseung Kong Wai		None	not applicable	

Tung Chung (1998)	Ma Wan Chung		Partly preserved	Residential	Isolated from the new development by difference in street level
	Tai Po	not applicable	Relocated to Shan Ha	Residential	Replacement is well connected to surroundings
	Ma Wan	not applicable	Relocated to Shan Ha	Residential	Replacement is well connected to surroundings
	Chek Lap Kok	not applicable	Relocated to Shan Ha	Residential	Replacement is well connected to surroundings
	Shan Ha	Village-type	Entirely	Residential	Well connected to replacement villages but no central role
	Western hillside cluster				

**Table 1.** Overview of the original settlements and their current remains.

### First generation: Tsuen Wan

Although Tsuen Wan is generally considered to be the first of Hong Kong's wave of New Towns, it is an extension of Kowloon, which experienced an extensive period of massive growth. Rather than being a dormant site, which was suddenly transformed by means of a master plan, it grew during an extended period of time. We did not, therefore, include it in our comparison.

### Second Generation: Sha Tin and Tuen Mun (Early Seventies)

The original Sha Tin site contained several settlements visible in aerial photographs from 1961 and 1964. The northern bank of the original estuary had some scattered houses, fields and farm buildings. On the south bank lay several villages, and at the west end of the estuary, at the mouth of Shing Mun river, lay the town of Tai Wai.

Sha Tin had been considered for development as early as in the 1950s, because of its location near Kowloon. The projected numbers of inhabitants were smaller then (growing to an estimated million in 1964 plans), as was the acreage of land reclamation, and the role of government was envisaged to be relatively small. The intention then was nonetheless already to channel the Shing Mun river artificially by reclaiming land on either side and building along it (Brislow, 1989, 151-3). During the 1970s, building started but debate continued about the Master Plan, detailed plans for the various planning areas, densities and open space ratios.

The Sha Tin Master Plan (Sha Tin Outline Zoning Plan LST/69) explicitly states that heritage should be preserved, but (in paragraph 2.5) mentions only specific buildings and temples ("...famous landmarks which include the walled village of Tai Uk, the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the To Lung Shan Mission and Pottery Works and the Amah Rock. In addition, Yuen Chau Kok, Che Kung Temple and the hill opposite Tsang Tai Uk have important 'fung shui' significance. All these are recommended to be retained in the development of the new town"), and apparently does not regards the villages or the rural landscape as something historically important worth preserving. However, "... provisions have been made for retention, expansion and in some cases relocation of village settlements ..." (paragraph 5.4). Eventually, the plans for Sha Tin zoned all the villages and towns and most of the scattered housing for village-type development.

Today, many of Sha Tin's scattered north bank houses can still be found, although they are currently fronted and mixed by high-rises. Sha Tin itself



**Figure 2.** Sha Tin Wai today is separated from the high-rises by a railway line and sports fields.

originally consisted of several streets near the railway station. Those have disappeared.

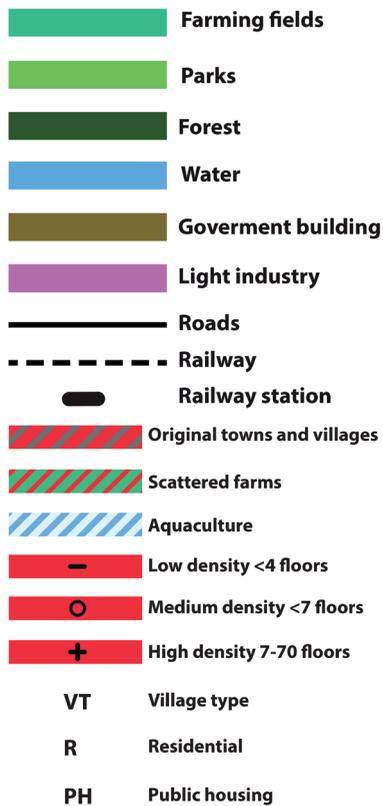
What did remain is Tai Wai, a village further south, still present today with its maze of narrow alleys. It is now framed by a quadrant of more recent buildings with shops at ground level up to five storeys high, and a metro station close at hand. It has thus become the silent heart of a lively neighbourhood. Accessible, but by nature of its original structure, not suitable to serve as a shopping or market district for a larger community.

Sha Tin Wai, a village on the cliffs of the South bank, was also preserved (**Figure 2; Table 2**). It has remained purely residential and lies quite detached amidst the newer development. It does not serve the surrounding residents.

**Table 2.** Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Sha Tin.



**Legend**



The legend applies to all tables that include schematic maps of the before and after situations in case study areas.

Tsuen Mun lies much further from Kowloon, but was planned in the same period as Sha Tin. Tsuen Mun also was designed for a projected 1 million inhabitants, but was to be an industrial city, profiting from its access to the sea.

**Third Generation: Tai Po, Fan Ling and Yuen Long (Late Seventies)**

In 1972 the executive Council of Hong Kong announced a Ten Year Housing Target Programme, including expansion of three market towns: Tai Po, Fanling and Yuen Long. The New Territories Development Office (1978) presented it in a colourful brochure as a way to restore the original significance of these market towns, which had diminished because of the growth of Hong Kong and Kowloon.

Tai Po (**Table 3**) was one of three old market towns selected for expansion. It was an administrative centre for the British Hong Kong government for a large part of the New Territories. The original state of Tai Po, as visible on the 1956, 1964 and 1976 (resp. numbers F22/81A RAF/560 0188; 2697; 12517) aerial photographs, was a compact market town (Tai Po) on an estuary, surrounded by fields which were quite densely mixed with farms and groups of farms, and with fishing villages along the shoreline. There was a squatter settlement on the eastern mud flats, and a fishing community sat on the Yuen Chau Tsai peninsula. Up the valley in the west there was a village called Tai Po Tau. This cluster of town, villages and farms lay along an important rail and road route connecting Hong Kong with mainland China.

The plans for Tai Po initially (Planning Department, 1972) emphasised industry and a modest increase in Tai Po's population from industrial labourers. Land reclamation on the northern shore of the estuary (Tai Po Industrial Estate) started in 1974. Soon after, the 1976 Master Plan (New Territories Development Office, 1976) announced its expansion to 220,000 inhabitants.

The old town was zoned as residential in the General Land Use Proposal of 1978, like the areas planned for high-rise development directly north of it. Village-type development was proposed for the site's outskirts. This was probably for resettled farmers, because there were no villages previously on these sites.



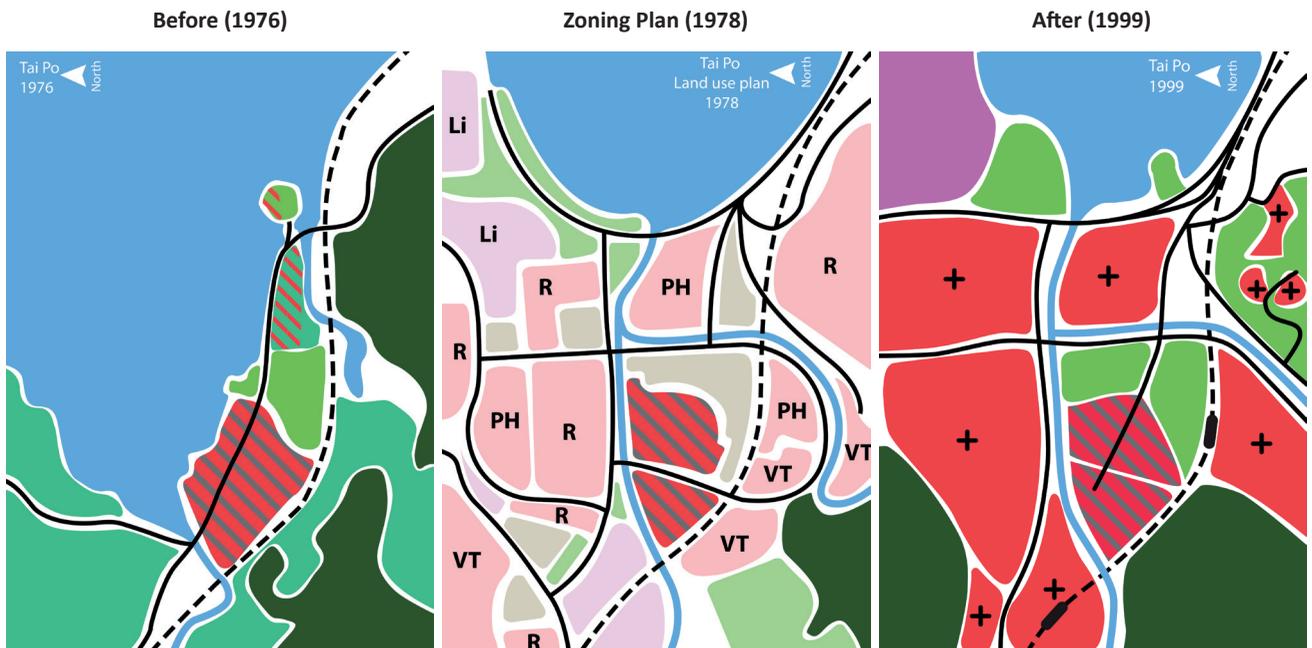
**Figure 3.** The Tai Po centre is still a bustling place and well connected to the new town development surrounding it.

The only mention of the original settlements in text in the plan was of the outskirts area (defined as Package 9), consisting of “lowland rural areas and existing fringe village areas”, that “the extent of development of these areas is still under consideration”. The Yuen Chau Tsai slums will be “cleared and redeveloped” (New Territories Development Office, 1978, 5). By 1981, extensive land reclamation and many apartment tower blocks had been realised (aerial photo number 39274).

Today, the original town of Tai Po is still there, and it serves as a lively city centre with shops, market streets (**Figure 3**) and squares. With the Tai Po metro station lying directly adjacent to the old town, several cycling and walking routes and bridges connect it to the high-rise estates surrounding it. Parts of farming villages can be found in the village-type development zones. Yuen Chau Tsai is now a park with apartment buildings. As Cheng (2008, 275) shows, the fishing villages have disappeared in Tai Po’s development, because their rights were less strong, whereas the town and the farmers represented claims on land and buildings which demanded negotiation and compensation.

Fan Ling, although also a market town, developed very differently (**Table 4**). The original Fan Ling site, as shown in the 1968 topographic map (Directorate of Overseas Surveys, 231, Series L884), was a complex conglomerate of towns and villages in field densely dotted with farmhouses. Along the railway and the roads lay the towns of Luen Wo Market, Fan Leng Lau, Fan Leng Tai Way and Luen Wo San Tsuen. To the east, on the other side of Ma Wat River and against the mountain lay the walled villages of Ma Wat Wai, Tung Kok Wa and Tu Tong Tsuen, with various mansions in between. At this point, it was already much more densely developed, and much more sprawling, than it appeared on the 1945 aerial photograph (number 3070). Interestingly, Luen Wo Market was not there in 1945, but was under construction in the 1964 photograph (number 2697).

**Table 3.** Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Tai Po.



**Figure 4.** A light industrial zone was built between the Fan Ling high-rise to the east and the villages.



**Figure 5.** The Luen Wo Market, currently used for parking.



The Fan Ling Master Plan (General Land Use Proposal, 1978, AV) draws the project boundary along the Ma Wat River, thus leaving the eastern villages unconsidered. It does zone the areas between the residential parts of Fan Ling and the eastern villages as “Light Industrial”. The original towns around Luen Wo Market (**Figure 5**) become part of an area zoned as “Residential”, although the planners promise to improve the Luen Wo Market area, and promise as well that “close contact with local people will be maintained in order that their cherished landmarks... are not unnecessarily affected” (The New Territories Development Office, 1978, 17).

Today, the eastern villages can still be found, now in a landscape that is less agricultural (**Figure 4**) and more sprawling. They form a scenic mixed landscape, weakly connected to the city, rather isolated from it by a commercial zone and the river, but they are brought to people’s attention by a Heritage Trail, a signed walking route that appears to be used intensively.

The Luen Wo Market is also still there, even with its 1960s entrance building to the central market square, but despite its central location, it gives the impression of disuse, being used as a parking lot instead of the square it could be. The buildings around it are relatively low, and there



Table 4. Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Fan Ling.

are some shops and offices among the houses, but it has not become an appealing district.

Yuen Long (Table 5) lies to the west, isolated from the chain of Sha Tin, Tai Po and Fanling, which traverse the New Territories from south to north along the railway between mainland China and Kowloon. Yuen Long was the central market place of the extensive western floodplain. A rail connection was not available until 2002.

The original Yuen Long site, as shown on the 1974 topographic map (HC20) of the area, had the central city of Yuen Long, the old Yuen Long town directly northeast of it, a group of villages along the estuary to the north (Chung Sam Wai, Teung Uk Tsuen, Lam Uk Tsuen, Tung Tau Tsuen and others) and scattered dwellings and farming to the south. An extensive wetland extended to the north, used for aquacultures, such as fish farming



Figure 6. Remnants of Yuen Long’s original villages.

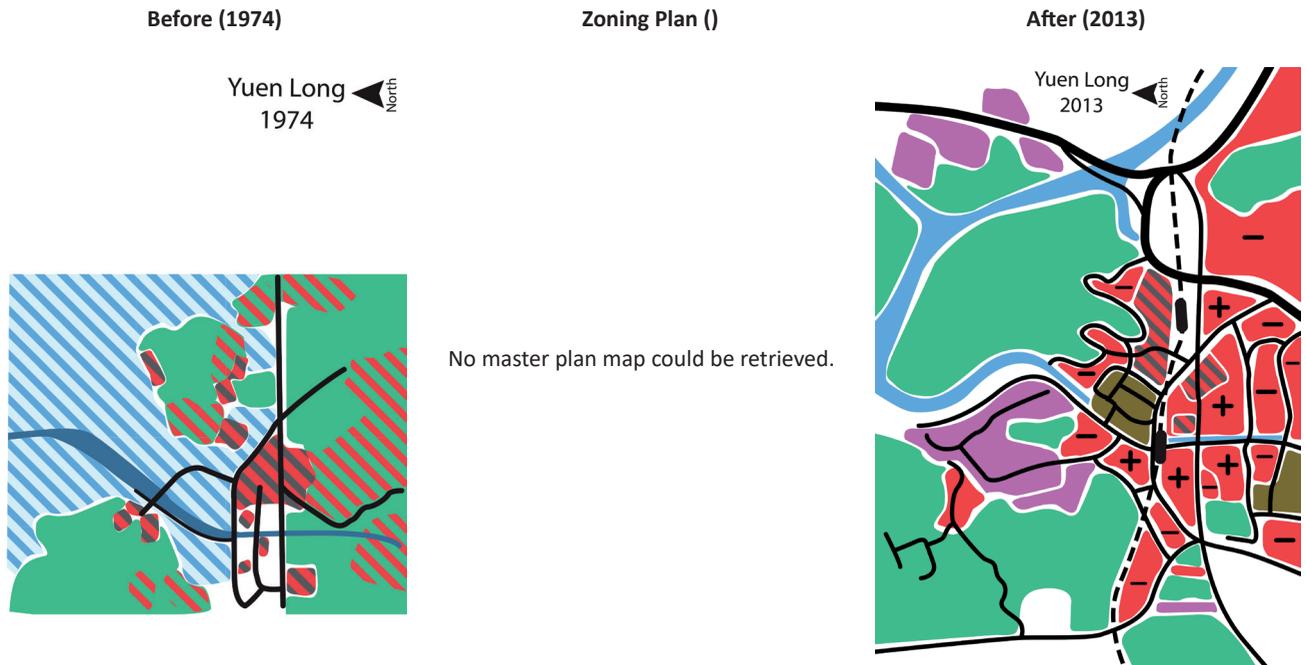


Table 5. Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Yuen Long.

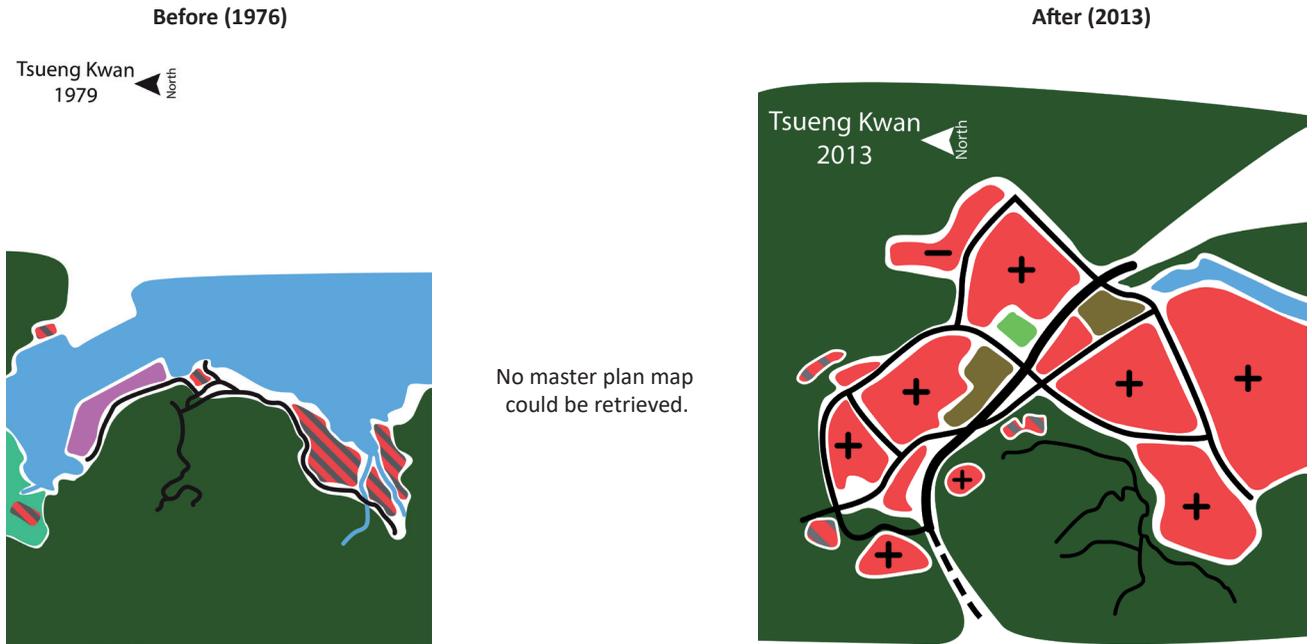
and submersed crops. It was not a static situation. Wong (1996, 117) describes how the old town of Yuen Long had been a market place (Kau Hui, or old marketplace) since the seventeenth century, until sedimentation made the location less convenient and a new market (San Hui) was built around 1915 to the southwest. The Yuen Long Master Plan could not be retrieved.

Today, the old town of Yuen Long (the Kau Hui part) still exists (Figure 6). It does not serve any other purpose than as habitation for the village population. Its market function has disappeared, also because most NT high-rises were developed to the south of the more recent Yuen Long. Its original isolation by water has now been replaced by isolation due to the metro line and the Yuen Long station, which only has exits to the south. The new market area was torn down in 1984 (Wong, 1996) but has retained its street plan and clear market function until the present. The northern fishing villages also remained, in a zone of village-type development. Interestingly, the small village of Tai Kiu also continues to exist, today lying quite centrally, just south of Long Ping metro station.

**Fourth Generation: Tseung Kwan O, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung (Eighties and Nineties)**

Tseung Kwan O (Table 6) was developed in the mid-1980s and lies to the south-eastern extreme of the New Territories. Metro services were extended to the site in 2002.

The 1979 topographic maps of the original Tseung Kwan O site show three settlements (Hm20c-11 and HP5C/11-NE-D). The village of Tseung Kwan O was found at the usual position for such a village, at the river mouth, in this case the north end of the estuary, surrounded by a small area of fields and farms. East across the bay lay Yau Yue Wan, directly by the sea. Further south on the western shoreline was Tiu Keng Leng, consisting of a town at the foot of the mountains with several churches and temples. The map does



**Table 6.** Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Tseung Kwan O.

not distinguish whether the buildings marked are residential or industrial, but we suspect it was partly the latter.

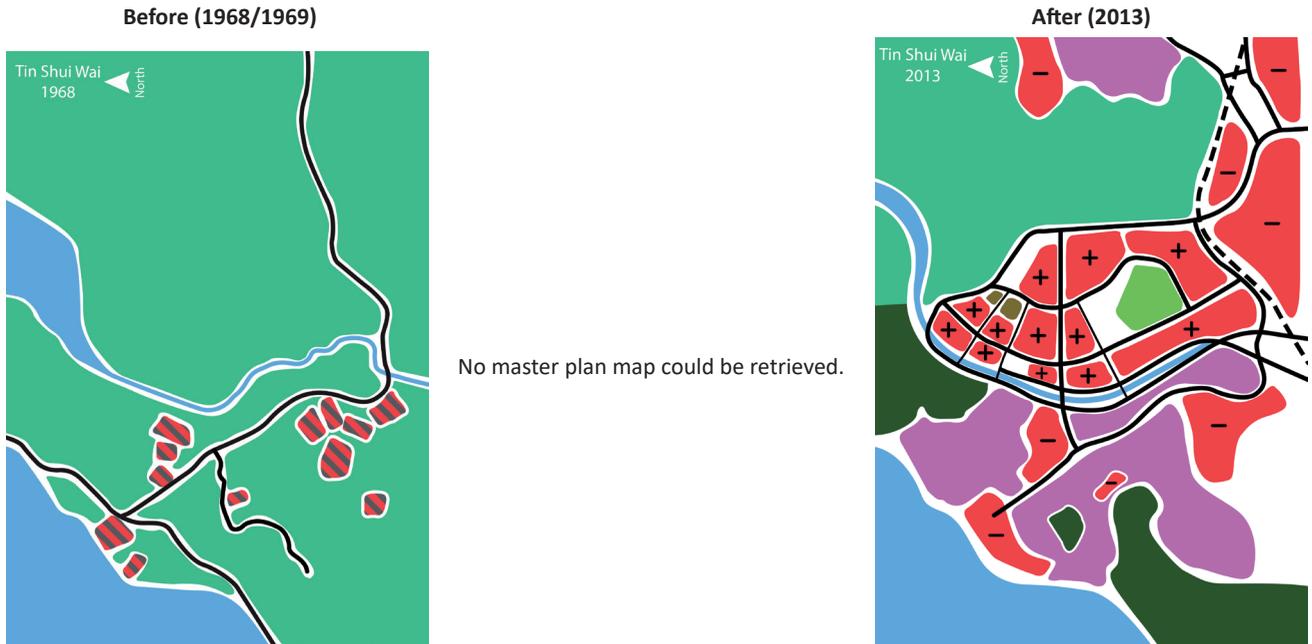
The plans prompted an extensive land reclamation project of an estimated 10 square kilometres. The villages were not part of the plans as they were officially outside the project boundary.

Today, the old village of Tseung Kwan O still exists. It sits on a steep slope, on the periphery and isolated from the high-rise estates by a four-lane outer ring road. The village was expanded with newly-built low-density houses, which form an additional barrier preventing people from reaching the village of Tseung Kwan O proper. Yau Yue Wan also still remains, but is hidden. It was no surprise to find that the villages are purely residential. Tiu Keng Leng has disappeared. Its original site consists of exclusively high-rise today.

Tin Shui Wai (**Table 7**), built in the late 1980s, neighbours Yuen Long and shares Yuen Long's original main access road, its metro line and its location at an extensive wetland area, used for aquaculture farms. It can be considered part of a second wave of New Town construction in the northwest corner of the New Territories.

The original site consists of a strip of land enclosed between the sea in the west and the agricultural wetlands in the east (1968 and 1969 topographic maps, 1986 aerial photograph) with several groups of villages.

The Master Plan (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983) presents how the southern part of the New Town was to be developed. Interestingly, the Master Plan is very explicit about using the assets of the location in the New Town design: "The landscape and topography of the areas surrounding the site provide opportunities for relief from the flat urban character of the development. It is important that the urban form is sensitive to areas of visual, recreational and environmental importance in the immediate hinterland... The planning and design of the urban areas should respect the adjacent land uses and hill sides... the villages in the



**Table 7.** Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Tin Shui Wai.

immediate area... are fine examples of traditional architecture... form an attractive element in the landscape” (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983, 19 and a similar statement at 73). However, the development and zoning plan addresses only the drained wetlands, and did not consider the villages (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983, 25 and the subsequent zoning plan S/TSW/12).

Today, most of the villages can still be found, but their spatial context has changed drastically. The wetlands to their immediate east have been drained developed into high density New Town estates, but ring roads, a canal, a difference in street level and light industry zone are barriers between the two worlds. To their west, almost all the land is now a fragmented landscape of warehouses, small factories and other light industrial uses – a development which the Master Plan foresaw as a possibility (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983, 70) and proposed to regulate (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983, 73-75). The plan to “decrease the building heights from the central core towards the rural edges” (Shankland Cox Partnership and Binnie & Partners, 1983, 33) does not achieve the proposed effect. Despite its good intentions, the plan was unable to prevent the villages from being excluded from playing any role in New Town life. Tseung Kong Wai has disappeared.

Tung Chung New Town (**Table 8**) lies farthest from Hong Kong and Kowloon, far west, on the north shore of Lantau Island next to the new airport. Its development started in the early 1990s, and is planned to continue for years, as much of Lantau’s north shore is designated for NT development.

The original Tung Chung site was an isolated seaside valley with fields, farms and several small villages (according to 1991 topographic maps). The main fishing village at the river mouth was Ma Wan Chung, serving as the economic centre. The valley was accessible only by one road. Just off



**Figure 7.** The original Ma Wan Chung fishing village still present at the Tung Chung New Town site.

the coast lay the Chep Lap Kok Island, with several fishing families living there.

The Master Plans which started the transformation of the area stem from the Rose Garden Plan of 1990. The basic idea was a combined plan for a new airport to replace the outgrown one in Victoria Harbour, and a New Town in the Tung Chung valley. The small island of Chep Lap Kok would be levelled and dramatically expanded to accommodate the airport. The New Town would be built partly in the original valley and partly on newly reclaimed land. From 1990 on, dozens of drafts, partial plans, revised plans and outline plans were published, making it hard to determine what the real intentions for the site were.

What does become clear from our review of these plans is that heritage preservation centred around specific monuments (the fort and the battery), with no mention of landscapes or villages. Tam and Yip (2005, 369) nonetheless mention “meetings with the villagers, who had strongly requested that the new town and the old village be integrated”.

Today, at the time of our fieldwork, all but one of the Tung Chung valley villages have been relocated or expanded. The extensive study by Tam and Yip (2005) reports on the details and the difficulties of resettling the villages. The island dwellers of Chep Lap Kok were resettled to Chep Lap Kok New Village, next to the inland village of Shan Ha – their arrival in Tung Chung led to protests (Tam and Yip, 2005, 426) and the newcomers complained of not being able to make a living from fishing anymore (Tam and Yip, 2005, 195). Tai Po (not to be confused with the New Territory New Town discussed earlier) was completely cleared to allow for the Seaview Crescent land reclamation of 1994, as was Ma Wan, and their residents moved to Tai Po New Village, also adjacent to Sha Ha.

The Shan Ha village group and its surrounding relocated communities are well connected to the high-rise neighbourhoods by sky bridges and route signs to and from each of the (new) villages, which also mention the monuments in the villages. These relocation areas were zoned as “village-type developments”.



Table 8. Schematic maps of the before and after situation at Tung Chung.

Only Ma Wan Chung, the fishing village on the shoreline, remains intact (Figure 7), although it was originally, and still is, officially scheduled for clearance and relocation. For the time being it stands as a dramatic contrast with the towers beside it. It has become isolated because the main road originally leading straight to the village is now diverted. Moreover, between the high-rise development (Yat Tung estate) and the village is a wall and a drop in street level. The village serves no purpose for the apartment dwellers. There is a scenic route leading to the village, depicting the historic significance of the villages.

## DISCUSSION

Based on areal pictures and observation, we observe that most villages have survived the New Town policy. They have become small-scale enclaves, no longer surrounded by fields and shoreline, but by high-rises, industrial zones, metro tracks and highways. The persistence of the villages may seem surprising given the combination of top-down planning, housing shortages and low heritage awareness. Hong Kong has an executive-led government that is not democratically elected. The corresponding government structure is highly centralised, making planning typically government-initiated. There are statutory planning procedures, but the opportunities for people to demand changes are limited (Bristow, 1989, 129), although cases have been described where residents rallied against development or redevelopment plans, and protected monumental buildings (Yung and Chan, 2011; Zhai and Ng, 2013).

So why do the villages still exist? Not because locals resisted the clearing of their villages out of nostalgia, which might have been expected in a European context. In Bristow's (1989) 385 pages on Hong Kong's New Towns, no protests are mentioned other than villagers wanting greater financial benefits from the New Town development. He does devote one page to "the issue over the integration of existing settlement structures and communities... when clearance has proved unnecessary within the

wider considerations of urban design..." (Bristow, 1989, 260). Integration has been problematic, but all was done to improve and expand the villages within the urban fringes. Interestingly, Bristow writes that the practice was to "separate out these 'cocoon' of traditional life from the bustling metropolis around them" (Bristow, 1989, 262).

Thus, the initial reason for keeping the villages is clearly not their value to the first wave of New Towns or nostalgia. The main reason was that most New Towns were built in what is known as the New Territories – the mountainous mainland part of Hong Kong, North of Hong Kong Island. Legislation on the New Territories, in terms of property rights, administrative law and land-use planning, dates back to 1898, and because the area already contained many villages and towns, unlike on Hong Kong island, existing property rights had to be respected (Nissim, 2012, 17). The sovereignty of the villages was further strengthened by a specific institutional circumstance in the Hong Kong, the Small House Policy (SHP). The SHP gives male indigenous villagers of recognised villages in the New Territories the right to build a small house on their own land, thus by definition located in the village (Legislative Council, 2006), which in practice means no more than three storeys in height. It was meant to enable the village population and their sons to continue their village way of life. This right, however, allows villagers to replace their old houses with more modern and more spacious buildings (Nissim, 2012, 130), from which they typically rent out floors to make an income. The right can also be sold, and is thus often transferred to developers who then construct small apartment buildings.

This policy has been important in the first decades of New Town development as it prevented villages from becoming high-rise developments, but did not prevent them from changing and being redeveloped into three-storey apartment streets. Because of this process and similar ones that prevented villages from being demolished, the SHP is now under debate. In light of the ever-pressing shortage of space for housing, and the consequences of that shortage affecting so many, the original policy is being called into question now that the villages can hardly be considered indigenous anymore in terms of population or appearance.

The end of British rule, the population now growing more attached to the territory and the rise of the tourism industry now can be expected to become the new protective mechanism for remnants of the old Hong Kong villages.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings confirm that there has been little appreciation for the built everyday heritage of the original villages during the rapid expansion of Hong Kong. The villages were largely preserved, but instead of being connected to the newly erected blocks of buildings, they just stand there, isolated from new structures – and often face the rear of these structures. Hong Kong appears to have a history of New Towns that ignored rather than integrated former settlements. We see an inclination throughout the first decades of building New Towns to plan around the towns and villages. We could even detect a reluctance to connect the villages to the New Towns through the ring roads and industrial zones which were built as barriers in between. Respect for historic buildings has nonetheless been articulated from the beginning. However, the reluctance to clear the New

Town sites of the former structures appears to result more from legal impediments than from a desire to add authenticity to the planned high-rise cities.

Although little was cleared, equally little was explicitly considered an asset in the New Town plans. No reference is made in any of the master plans to the benefits of integrating the old structures to add to the quality of living in the New Towns. There was an increase in the apparent need to address the village at the planning stage. The villages were mainly kept as a reserve, with little relation or relevance to their present surroundings. The market towns do add some value to their New Town context, by serving as marketplaces. The most positive example is Tai Po; a less well-integrated market town is Fan Ling.

In Hong Kong's current era – in which tourism and increasingly heritage tourism has undeniable economic value – could the remaining villages be rediscovered and be given a more vital role? In the most recent New Towns, inclusion of villages is still not prominent in the urban design choices, but more and more heritage trails are showing tourists the way to what is worth visiting.

In the context of today's contested (Chan and Lee, 2016), yet growing cultural awareness and tourism economy, thus assuming that heritage will play an increasingly important role, the question is how the villages will fare. On a small scale, experiencing and exploring this everyday heritage is attractive in itself, partly thanks to the isolated location of the village remains. But on a more substantial scale of touristic exploitation, not every village is equally suitable to be given a role in its surroundings. Tai Po had the squares, the wide streets, the more spacious buildings, and the railway lines adjacent which allowed it to develop into a lively centre for the New Town which came. But the maze of narrow alleys of Tai Wai and old Yuen Long exclude these villages from serving many visitors or the residents from their surroundings. In addition, we also observed that the European historic city centre model, where people from the surrounding residential neighbourhoods come to the old town to shop, does not apply to Hong Kong. Because of its high building densities, there are shops in the lower floors of practically every apartment building. This diminishes the need for a centre in the European sense of the word, for which historic towns or villages could be reused.

Hong Kong's villages are largely preserved, but have been radically transformed as well. Traditional village life has disappeared, many if not all original homes have been replaced by the three-storey apartment houses, and their population is hardly indigenous anymore. The Small House Policy is openly criticised to have become an anomaly that occupies scarce building locations. A tourism-induced trend of reconstructed or invented old streets, so common in mainland China (Xian, Shanghai, Beijing) is likely to be the next strategy for Hong Kong.

Asia's wave of New Town development will only partly be able to create a sense of place with reference to the past of the New Town site. The typical New Town dynamics (density differences, in-migration and pressure to produce quantity) makes it unlikely that an identity will be effectively drawn from history. New Towns will need to find their own, invented atmosphere.

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## **YENİ KENTLERDE KAYBOLMUŞ ESKİ YERLER: HONG KONG'UN ESKİ KÖYLERİ**

Hong Kong metropolü 1960'tan bu yana Yeni Kent stratejisi sayesinde inanılmaz ölçüde büyüdü. Ana karada her onyılda bir milyonluk bir nüfus artışını içine alabilecek kendi kendine yeten kentler yapıldı. İddialara göre bu süreç kültürel miras pek de dikkate alınmadan gerçekleşti. Bu yazı bütün Yeni Kentleri sistemli olarak kıyaslayarak kültürel mirasın ne kadarının ayakta kaldığını incelemektedir. Standart haritalarla Yeni Kent öncesi arazi kullanımı (özellikle de köyler), Yeni Kent imar planı ve mevcut arazi kullanımları gösterilmiştir. 1960'ta var olan çoğu köy halen yerindedir ancak bir değer olarak Yeni Kentle çok nadiren bütünleşmişlerdir. Yapılı kültürel mirasa verilen değer son yirmi yıllık dönemde artmıştır. Bu da en önemli şeyin gelen göçü karşılamak olduğu bir dönemin ardından, artık Hong Kong'un bir kimlik kazanma ihtiyacının gittikçe arttığı yönündeki hipotezi doğrulamaktadır.

## **PLACES FROM THE PAST LOST IN NEW TOWNS: HONG KONG'S OLD VILLAGES**

The metropolis of Hong Kong has expanded enormously since 1960, by means of a New Town strategy. On its main land, self contained cities were built to accommodate the population growth of as much as a million inhabitants per decade. Allegedly without paying much attention to built cultural heritage. This paper reports on a systematic comparison for all New Towns to see how much heritage has survived. Standardised maps were made showing the pre-New Town land use (the villages in particular), the New Town master plan, and the current land use. Most villages that existed in 1960 are still there, although they are rarely integrated as an asset for the New Town. The appreciation for built cultural heritage did increase over the last two decades. This confirms the hypothesis that after a period where housing to accommodate in-migration was most important, currently the need for a Hong Kong identity is growing.

**TERRY VAN DIJK**, B.Sc., M.Sc. Ph.D.

Received his B.Sc. and M.Sc. from Wageningen University, the Netherlands, in the Land Use Planning Department (1993-1997). Earned his Ph.D. degree from the Geodesy Faculty at Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands (2003). Major research interests include the effects designs, designers and designing has on neighbourhoods, cities and regions.  
t.van.dijk@rug.nl

**GERD WEITKAMP**, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D.

Received his bachelor and master degree in Landscape Architecture and Geographic Information Science from Wageningen University. Earned his PhD degree in Geo-Information Science from the Centre of Geo-Information of Wageningen University. Major research interests include landscape research and health geography & active transportation.  
s.g.weitkamp@rug.nl