Compiling planning data for a dynamic city : The Case of Hong Kong

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The Greater Pearl River Delta Region, of which Hong Kong is an integral part, is one of the biggest mega-city regions in the world. Charting the future roadmap for Hong Kong is full of complexities and uncertainties. We have to rise to this challenge under an evidence-based approach supported by robust planning data. Currently, we are compiling the data through various means including analyzing movement records, undertaking surveys and developing projection models. We have also worked in collaboration with our counterparts in the Mainland of China in some aspects. The paper will discuss some issues pertinent to compilation of planning data for a dynamic city like Hong Kong.

1. Introduction

Hong Kong, being a small territory with a land area of 1,104 km², has a large population of 7 million. Hong Kong is indeed very big when one takes a broader regional perspective. The Greater Pearl River Delta Region, of which Hong Kong is an integral part, is one of the biggest mega-city-regions in the world. Concomitant with the stunning pace of development in China, we see intensifying socio-economic interactions between Hong Kong and the Mainland of China (the Mainland) brought about by enhanced transport network, improved facilities and services at control points, the "Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement" (CEPA) and regional co-operation on various fronts. This has been making Hong Kong more dynamic than ever. Cross-boundary families, students, workers, travel, living, infrastructure, etc, have become hot topics and given rise to a spectrum of issues receiving attention and requiring planning responses.

2. The Evolving Planning Paradigm and Data Requirement

Charting the future roadmap for Hong Kong without due regard to her integration with the Mainland would be futile. As exemplified in the Hong Kong 2030 : Planning Vision and Strategy (the HK2030 Study), completed in 2007, we have adopted a regional perspective in formulating the planning strategy for our territory. Intense economic integration aside, such aspects as the trends and volume of cross-boundary passengers and vehicular trips as well as Hong Kong residents living, working or studying in the Mainland and vice-versa have implications on planning for infrastructure, housing, healthcare, educational, recreational and community facilities, etc. Formulating a planning strategy of
this kind is full of complexities and uncertainties. We have to rise to this challenge under an
evidence-based approach supported by relevant, comprehensive, reliable and timely data.

3. For strategic planning purpose, baseline data pertinent to Hong Kong is insufficient. We
need sufficient and relevant data to allow us to track the trend, postulate the change and predict the
future. In the process, we need to think “regionally”, contemplating how a particular data topic would
be influenced by Hong Kong’s integration with the Mainland. Both spatial planning and data
compilation have embraced a regional dimension in the last decade or so. Since the reunification of
Hong Kong with China in July 1997, we have taken a number of initiatives in the areas of population
projections, which are fundamental to spatial planning, and data compilation to reflect the dynamism
about our demography and to meet our planning needs. Some of the initiatives will be discussed in
the ensuing paragraphs.

4. Hong Kong, being a special administrative region of China, is administered under “One
Country Two Systems”. Planning data have all along been compiled by authorities of the two places
separately. Data on activities of Hong Kong people carried out in the Mainland, such as travelling,
living, studying or working, are mainly compiled by authorities of Hong Kong within the territory of Hong
Kong. Having considered the nature of the data topics, the different political and administrative
systems, the resource implications on data collection and the statistical reliability of data obtained by
different ways, we have resorted to a multi-pronged approach in compiling data about population and
cross-boundary activities. We analyzed movement records, undertook surveys and developed
projection models. We also worked in collaboration with our counterparts in the Mainland in some
aspects.

3. Hong Kong Population

5. Population is a highly complex and multi-faceted subject. Population projection is never
easy, particularly for the present state of Hong Kong - demographic situation is influenced by increasing
integration with the Mainland and hence volatile. Yet, population projections are very important as
they form a common basis for Government planning in various programme areas, such as education,
housing, transport, social services, medical and health services, infrastructural facilities, etc.
Sustainable planning or strategic planning is about planning for our future generations, hence strongly
affected by population projections. For instance, the decline in the projected population in the course
of undertaking the HK2030 Study had allowed us to shift the emphasis from quantity to quality in
accordance with the community’s aspirations. As a result, we had reduced the number and scale of
the proposed new development areas.
The increasing mobility of Hong Kong people and inflow of more Chinese nationals to Hong Kong have posed a great challenge to population projection and warranted a change in the projection methodology. Before discussing the change in the projection methodology, it would be helpful to set the scene by introducing the basic concepts of Hong Kong population and the latest population figures. Hong Kong Resident Population comprises Usual Residents and Mobile Residents. Usual Residents refer to two categories of people: (1) Hong Kong Permanent Residents who have stayed in Hong Kong for at least three months during the six months before or for at least three months during the six months after the reference time-point, regardless of whether they are in Hong Kong or not at the reference time-point; and (2) Hong Kong Non-permanent Residents who are in Hong Kong at the reference time-point. As for Mobile Residents, they are Hong Kong Permanent Residents who have stayed in Hong Kong for at least one month but less than three months during the six months before or for at least one month but less than three months during the six months after the reference time-point, regardless of whether they are in Hong Kong or not at the reference time-point.

According to the 2009-based population projections, the Hong Kong Resident Population is projected to increase at an average annual rate of 0.8%, from 7.00 million in mid-2009 to 8.89 million in mid-2039. The number of Usual Residents is projected to increase from 6.80 million in mid-2009 to 8.63 million in mid-2039. The number of Mobile Residents is projected to increase from 206,000 in mid-2009 to 265,900 in mid-2039. The overall population will increase by 1.89 million over the period from mid-2009 to mid-2039, comprising a natural increase (i.e. births less deaths) of 1.05 million and a net movement (i.e. inflow less outflow) of 0.84 million. The ratio of natural increase to overall population increase is 55%, while that of net movement to overall population increase is 45%.

3.1. Babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women

Like many other places, births are an important constituent of the overall population increase in Hong Kong. Unlike many other places, a substantial portion of births in Hong Kong were born to non-Hong Kong residents in recent years, complicating and adding uncertainties to population projection. Of the 82,100 births in Hong Kong in 2009, 37,300 (i.e. 45%) were born to Mainland mothers. It is noteworthy that the number of births born to Mainland mothers has been on the rise, from 7,800 in 2001 to 37,300 in 2009. Many of these babies have both parents being Chinese nationals but not Hong Kong residents. These babies are entitled to the right of abode in Hong Kong, enjoying the same benefits as babies born to Hong Kong women. This means that the number of live births does not necessarily translate instantly into actual replenishment of the local population, as many of them are taken back to their parents’ home in the Mainland soon after birth. However, if these children eventually choose to reside in Hong Kong, the demand for public facilities, especially schools, will increase. Hence, we need some estimates to allow us to plan for provision of services for new
arrivals from the Mainland, e.g. integration programmes, employment assistance, educational support for newly arrived students.

9. Because of the rapid growth in this constituent of our population and its implications on several programmes of Government’s planning, the 2006-based population projections had incorporated one additional key parameter, viz. separate projection of babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women by a two-step approach. Firstly, based on past trend and after taking into account some other factors (for example, measures on the obstetric services arrangements and complementary immigration measures and the capacity of hospitals in both public and private sectors), the number of babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women is projected at 30,000 per annum in the 2006-based population projections, and it rises to a level of around 40,000 to 50,000 per annum during the period between mid-2009 and mid-2039 according to the latest projections.

10. Secondly, the Census and Statistics Department conducted a survey entitled “Survey on babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women” at the Birth Registries to probe into (i) the intentions of the parents on whether and when they would bring their babies back to the Mainland; and (ii) for those babies who have been taken back to the Mainland, the intentions on whether and when the babies would subsequently return to Hong Kong for living. The net movement of these babies is projected mainly based on the findings of the survey. It is projected that about 52% of babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland mothers whose spouses are Hong Kong Permanent Residents would stay in Hong Kong immediately. The other 48% will leave Hong Kong within the first year of their birth. Among them, 84% will return to Hong Kong before the age of 21. In other words, 92% of these babies will eventually settle in Hong Kong. For babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland mothers whose spouses are not Hong Kong Permanent Residents, it is assumed that only 5% would stay in Hong Kong. The other 95% will leave Hong Kong within the first year of their birth, but 50% of them will return to Hong Kong before the age of 21. In other words, 52% of such babies will eventually settle in Hong Kong. Admittedly, the above ratios will keep changing.

11. The narrowing economic development and standard and cost of living between Hong Kong and the Mainland might affect the propensity of these babies to stay in Hong Kong. This large constituent is more susceptible to projection error than births born to Hong Kong women. We have to make further efforts to capture the actual cross-boundary movements of such babies and review the need for more frequent updating of the population projections where necessary.

3.2. Mobile Residents

12. Another less predictable constituent of Hong Kong population is Mobile Residents. The
number of Mobile Residents is projected based on historical data on the net movement of Hong Kong Permanent Residents. Based on the recent past trend, it is projected that the number of Mobile Residents will continue to grow over the coming 30 years due to the continuous integration between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta region. The figure is projected to increase gradually from 206,000 as at mid-2009 to 265,900 as at mid-2039. Comparing to the 2006-based projections in which the number was projected to reach 411,800 by mid-2036, a substantial downward adjustment is made in the 2009-based projections. The changing projections illustrate how volatile this constituent is. It is important to analyze the reasons behind this continuous outflow of Hong Kong residents such that we can monitor the causes underlying the fluctuation.

13. The downward adjustment is partly due to the increasing proportion of older persons who are less mobile than the young population and partly due to the tremendous improvement in transportation infrastructure. More Hong Kong residents may simply choose to live permanently in the Mainland and hence falling outside the coverage of the Hong Kong Resident Population. That said, we need to be equally mindful of the possibility of a reverse situation which could be triggered off by the increasingly high living cost in the Mainland and the fierce competition for better jobs from the well-educated younger generations in the Mainland. While more Hong Kong people living in the Mainland might then be pushed back to Hong Kong, the Mainland would become less appealing to some who once aspire to live there to take advantage of the lower living cost and more spacious living environment.

4. Hong Kong people living and working in the Mainland

14. There is a host of push and pull factors influencing whether a Hong Kong people would choose to live and/or work in the Mainland. The quantity and profile of these people have varied implications on different aspects of town planning. The increase in mobility has a direct impact on cross-boundary infrastructure and the housing land requirements in Hong Kong, not only in terms of absolute quantity, but also in terms of flat size and location. For instance, the rising trend of Hong Kong people moving to the Mainland or buying a second home in the Mainland may shift the emphasis of some people when considering acquiring property in Hong Kong from the consideration of having ample living space to a focus on convenience. The rising trend for moving to the Mainland will increase uncertainty in planning for public facilities and services. While the total population will fall because of their relocation, which will theoretically lower the demand of those population-based facilities (such as the number of hospital beds), these people are at any time eligible to return to Hong Kong to claim their entitlement for public services.

4.1. Thematic Surveys
15. Needless to say, we need to be more sensitive to our people’s choice of location for living and working in order to formulate a robust planning strategy. The volatility, complexity and importance of this social phenomenon has led to the undertaking of a number of thematic or topical surveys to garner a better understanding of the phenomenon and provide some references for data estimation. Below are some examples:

(a) Special Topic Enquiry on “Hong Kong residents working in the mainland of China” conducted via the General Household Survey;

(b) Thematic Household Survey on “Hong Kong residents’ experience of and aspiration for taking up residence in the mainland of China”;

(c) Thematic Household Survey on “Characteristics of Hong Kong residents having resided / having stayed substantially in the mainland of China”; and

(d) Survey of Hong Kong People Living in Shenzhen.

16. Through these surveys, we estimated the number and profile of Hong Kong people living and/or working in the Mainland. The findings also shed light on the reasons for living/working or not in the Mainland and the future aspirations of our population in this regard. A survey revealed that there might be as many as 500 700 Hong Kong residents having resided / stayed substantially in the Mainland (i.e. having stayed in the Mainland for one month or more during the 6 months before enumeration) ¹. If the estimated numbers of short-stay Hong Kong Permanent Residents without a usual home base in Hong Kong (132 600) and the Hong Kong Permanent Residents who had not returned to Hong Kong from the Mainland (79 600) are also taken into account, the number rises to 712 900. Should the duration of stay in the Mainland be extended to 3 months or more, another survey showed that a total of 155 400 persons aged 18 and over had taken up residence in the Mainland ².

17. Along with the increasing economic integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the number of Hong Kong residents who had worked in the Mainland rose from 122 300 in 1995 to 244 000

¹ Thematic Household Survey Report No. 35 on Characteristics of Hong Kong Residents Having Resided / Having Stayed Substantially in the Mainland of China, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China. The survey period is between July and September 2007.

² Thematic Household Survey Report No. 38 on Hong Kong Residents’ Experience of and Aspiration for Taking Up Residence in the Mainland of China, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China. The survey period is between December 2007 and March 2008.
in 2004 and then slightly decreased in recent years. According to the latest survey\(^3\), there were some 218,200 Hong Kong residents who had worked in the Mainland during the 12 months before enumeration.

18. All the surveys quoted in the two preceding paragraphs were conducted within the territory of Hong Kong and bore some limitations in enumerating Hong Kong people who had taken up residence in the Mainland. The first two surveys mentioned in para. 15 above covered the Hong Kong Resident Population and hence those Hong Kong people who had stayed in Hong Kong for less than one month in the six months both before and after the reference time-point were simply outside the scope of the surveys. In other words, Hong Kong people who had taken up residence in the Mainland and usually stayed in Hong Kong for only a short period of time, regardless of whether they were in Hong Kong at the time of enumeration, were not covered in the survey. To extend the population coverage, the Thematic Household Survey on “Characteristics of Hong Kong residents having resided / having stayed substantially in the mainland of China” also covered those Hong Kong Permanent Residents (HKPR) who had stayed in Hong Kong for less than one month during the six months both before and after the reference time-point and had a usual home base in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, those HKPR who had taken up residence in the Mainland and usually stayed in Hong Kong for only a short period of time and did not have a usual home base in Hong Kong were still not covered in the three surveys mentioned above.

4.2. Survey of Hong Kong People Living in Shenzhen

19. To get round the problem, the Planning Department of Hong Kong and the Shenzhen Statistics Bureau jointly commissioned the “Survey of Hong Kong People Living in Shenzhen” (the Shenzhen Survey). This is the first of its kind. Shenzhen was identified because it is the most preferred place for residence and working by Hong Kong people in the Mainland. The Shenzhen Survey aimed at collecting information on the situation of Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen, their socio-economic ties with Hong Kong and aspirations of returning to Hong Kong for study or living. The survey comprised two phases. Establishing the sampling frame under the first phase was a labourious task since it involved compilation and verification of the administrative records of Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen kept by the Shenzhen authorities. Based on the information collected from the face-to-face household interviews under the subsequent phase, the situation related to all Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen can be inferred.

20. Despite plugging the loophole of other surveys carried out in Hong Kong, the Shenzhen

\(^3\) Special Topics Report No. 49 on Hong Kong Residents Working in the Mainland of China, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China. The survey period is between July and September 2008.
Survey is not problem-free. Those households without any Hong Kong adult member (e.g. the parents were Mainland residents and they were living with their children born in Hong Kong) might not be captured in the survey. As a consequence, the number of Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen (infants and young children in particular) might have been underestimated in this survey. Nevertheless, the findings of the survey can still provide useful reference for understanding the characteristics and profile of the target group of people.

21. The Shenzhen Survey has revealed some interesting characteristics of Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen, and pointed to the need of further monitoring and studying this phenomenon. In total, there were 61,865 Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen (i.e. having lived in Shenzhen for 3 months or more during the 6 months before enumeration). In terms of the economic activity status (for those aged 15 and over), the employed persons represented 57.2% (28,061 persons) whereas the retired ones accounted for 22.0% (10,801 persons). A significant proportion of the employed persons (66.6%; 18,700 persons) still took Hong Kong as the main place of work (i.e. the Hong Kong group) while only 29.2% (8,186 persons) worked in Shenzhen (i.e. the Shenzhen group). There were, however, differences between these two groups in terms of their occupation, industry sector and educational attainment. In gist, the Shenzhen group was better educated with better jobs. This suggests that there were two polarized groups of Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen, one being the working class who lived in Shenzhen to enjoy the lower living cost and commuted to Hong Kong on a daily basis for work, and the other being the better educated ones who lived in Shenzhen to take up professional-managerial jobs.

22. It is noted that more than half (18,976 persons) of those Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen who were married, their spouse was a Mainland resident at the time of marriage. Other than suggesting the popularity of cross-boundary marriages among such Hong Kong people, this also appears to conform with the most commonly cited reason for living in Shenzhen, i.e. “reunion with parents/spouse/children” (70.1%). Other more commonly cited reasons for living in Shenzhen were “lower cost of living” (25.1%) and “place of work or study in Shenzhen” (25.1%).

23. In respect of the socio-economic ties with Hong Kong, more than half (33,118 persons) of such Hong Kong people did not have a usual home base in Hong Kong. The finding echoes the limitation of the surveys done in Hong Kong that the sampling frame fails to capture those Hong Kong people who no longer keep a usual home base in Hong Kong after moving to the Mainland. Moreover, only about one-tenth (6,668 persons) of those 61,865 persons had made clear their intention to return to Hong Kong for residence within the next five years. Notwithstanding, their frequency of visiting Hong Kong was high. Up to 94.0% of them had visited Hong Kong during the past six months, and

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*The fieldwork was completed in September 2008.*
over half of them even visited Hong Kong at least once a week, mainly for visiting relatives and friends (56.3%) and working in Hong Kong (32.8%). Among those Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen who were students (10,106 persons), 40.7% were receiving education in Hong Kong and 59.1% in the Mainland. At the time of survey, 10,368 of these Hong Kong people were prospective students or students currently studying in the Mainland. Nearly half of them (5,421 persons) had plans to return to Hong Kong for their education in the future. The findings suggest that cross-boundary students and the associated issues such as cross-boundary travel arrangement and subsidy as well as safety of young students will perpetuate.

24. The Shenzhen Survey illustrates that although some of these people may fall outside Hong Kong Resident Population, they still maintain strong socio-economic ties with Hong Kong and the Government certainly has to cater for the needs of this group of people.

4.3. Implications

25. The findings of the above surveys form relevant references for considering policies, plans and public services sensitive to the size, profile and mobility of the population. For example, increasing mobility would have a direct impact on cross-boundary infrastructure and boundary control points. The possible return of Hong Kong residents living in the Mainland for education and health care services would obviously increase uncertainty in planning for schools and hospitals/clinics. The trend for retired persons moving to the Mainland would have bearing on the planning for elderly housing and services in Hong Kong. The number of people giving up their usual home base in Hong Kong or not returning to Hong Kong at all would affect the demand for housing units. These are just some of the wide and far-reaching implications. Do we have the full picture of Hong Kong people living and/or working in the Mainland to allow us to grasp the magnitude of the associated issues?

4.4. Movement Records

26. To complement these surveys, the Census and Statistics Department analyzes the Passenger Movement Records of the Immigration Department to derive the stock of Hong Kong people living outside Hong Kong and their movement patterns. Despite all these surveys and analysis of movement records, we still lack comprehensive and precise data on Hong Kong people living and/or working in the Mainland because of the limitations as mentioned above.

5. Cross-boundary Travel

27. Alongside the rising number of Hong Kong residents living/working in the Mainland and
China nationals visiting Hong Kong, cross-boundary passenger and vehicle trips grow in number. This is also an indicator of population mobility. To gauge more information on this data which is crucial to government planning work relating to cross-boundary transport infrastructure, community and tourism-related facilities, the Planning Department launched a program of Cross-boundary Travel Surveys in 1999 to collate statistical information about the characteristics of cross-boundary trips and trip makers on a regular basis. A total of six rounds of survey involving face-to-face interviews at control points have been conducted since 1999.

28. The number of cross-boundary passenger trips continued to increase at a fast pace. There were 6.9 million trips (or a daily average of 490,900) during the two-week survey period in 2007, an increase of 9.6% over 2006. This was faster than the average annual growth rate of 5.4% between 2003 and 2006 or 6.7% between 1999 and 2006. Notwithstanding the overall rising trend, the surveys have shown marked changes in the profile of cross-boundary travel passengers and trip purpose. For example, trip by Mainland visitors, leisure trips and trips by cross-boundary students were increasing at accelerating rate.

29. In respect of cross-boundary vehicular trips, vehicle trips by private car and coach increased by 21.5% and 31.4% respectively from 2006 to 2007. However, not all categories recorded growth. For example, trips by container truck and goods vehicle dropped slightly by less than 3%.

30. Cross-boundary travel is very much influenced by socio-economic developments as well as Government policies of both sides. Both the growth and pattern of cross-boundary travel are still in a dynamic state and call for continuous monitoring through regular surveys.

6. Ways to Improve

6.1 Central Repository

31. Put aside the technical limitations concerning the sampling frame and under-estimation of our thematic surveys as discussed above, data management is an area with scope for improvement. While each of the above sources provides some information on Hong Kong people living/working in the Mainland and cross-boundary trips, they are a little bit piece-meal and are not always aligned in terms of definitions and frequencies since they are being carried out by different government departments serving different objectives under their portfolios. For example, there lacks a common definition of Hong Kong people living in the Mainland and different surveys adopt different durations of stay in the Mainland. This may sometimes render it difficult to make comparisons and consolidate data of different sources.
32. It would be desirable to set up a central repository of population related surveys/data conducted/kept by different departments for reference by all policy bureaux/departments in understanding the underlying population issues, thereby facilitating policy formulation. With an identified authority to oversee the central repository, we can work towards better alignment of definitions, combine surveys of similar scope, facilitate selection and retrieval of the most representative data for a specified purpose, and validate similar findings more easily. Better co-ordination among government departments and consolidation of databases for shared use is also conducive to more effective utilization of government manpower and financial resources.

6.2. Comprehensive Information

33. None of the surveys were specifically designed to gather precise and comprehensive information on Hong Kong residents living in the Mainland given the limitation inherent in the sampling frame. It is in fact impracticable and very resource-demanding to undertake individual surveys similar to the Shenzhen Survey in major China cities. Hence, the figures on Hong Kong residents living in Mainland were based on postulations of the results of cross-boundary travel surveys and other topical surveys.

34. The upcoming China’s 2010 Population Census will cover Hong Kong people for the first time. Basic information on Hong Kong people living in the Mainland, such as their number, demographic profile and distribution in the Mainland, would then be available for filling the unknowns, validating the estimated figures, and identifying the geographical concentration of Hong Kong people. This information is useful for planning future surveys and providing benchmark data for statistical estimation. It would enhance the reliability of the findings of such surveys.

6.3. Collaboration with the authorities of China

35. The Shenzhen Survey is the first joint initiative to gauge information on Hong Kong people living in Shenzhen. The initiative was well received in Hong Kong as it provided a quantitative and objective basis for understanding the social phenomenon. The success of this survey paves the way for more collaboration between the sides in undertaking statistical surveys.

36. The increasing flow of passengers and vehicles between Hong Kong and our neighbouring cities calls for closer collaboration among us in areas of planning and development of cross-boundary transport infrastructure and facilities. In this regard, the Planning Department of Hong Kong is taking lead to develop a transport database with three neighbouring cities, namely Shenzhen, Macao and Zhuhai. The transport database comprises key parameters such as population, GDP and traffic flow.
This heralds the co-operation in building up a shared database for planning purpose. We see the merits in further expanding the shared database and aligning the terms and definitions as far as possible. For example, the census years of Hong Kong and China do not coincide. It would be desirable to agree on a data conversion method or even align the different census years in the longer term.

6.4. Sensitivity Test

37. No matter how rigorously our population projections are prepared by applying appropriate statistical projection techniques and carefully thought-out assumptions as well as making reference to the most recent trends, there could often be unforeseen circumstances and developments causing the actual outcome to deviate from the projection results. In the case of Hong Kong, it is certain that the development of a number of mega cross-boundary infrastructural projects would significantly reduce the travelling time between Hong Kong and the Mainland, in particular the Pearl River Delta region, bringing the two places closer. More cross-boundary trips are very likely to be the outcome. However, its implications on Hong Kong population are less certain because people’s choice, both Hong Kong people and Chinese nationals, to live in the Mainland or in Hong Kong is far more complex. Among others, the ease and cost of cross-boundary commuting, availability of employment opportunities, the narrowing difference in living standard and cost of living between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta region would affect people’s decisions.

38. Dynamism and uncertainty necessitate a high degree of flexibility in the planning process, and sometimes the carrying out of sensitivity tests to test the robustness of the planning proposal. By way of example, the recommended strategy in the HK2030 Study was tested under different “What If” scenarios, derived by varying two key components of change, i.e. population and economic growth. Sensitivity test is most useful when a long time horizon spanning a few decades is involved. This is a tool to cope with less predictable or volatile situation, and should be vigorously employed.

7. Conclusion

39. For a dynamic city like Hong Kong, changes are perpetual and the pace of change is increasing. Uncertainty is associated with the pace of economic growth as well as social and demographic changes, occurring locally and globally, in China particularly. Coupled with increasing uncertainty over time which is unavoidable as we need to plan 20 to 30 years ahead in strategic planning, we are planning in a highly volatile context. The more intricate and unpredictable the changes are, the more we need to equip ourselves to expect and prepare for changes. The availability of high-quality statistical data is a key asset for managing change and making policy. Reliable and timely
statistics are crucial for building persuasive arguments, making informed policy decision, evaluating effectiveness of policy, prompting us to adjust policies, modifying development programmes, and redirecting resources. Compiling high-quality data is the cornerstone in the quest for understanding dynamism. Exploring innovative, effective and efficient way to compile data for coping with ever changing times is a continuous process.

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