DECENTRALISATION IN HONG KONG: HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT AND LAND USE IMPLICATIONS

By KULATILAKE, K. K. R. P.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban Design

The University of Hong Kong

2000

80525

Abstract

Growth polarities of the city into centralised and decentralised forms have been synonymous as the birth of the city itself. Concurrently, two basic schools of thought have sprung based on these and the patterns of city growth have constantly been subject to argument. In the debate no conclusive ends have been arrived at, although both seem necessary for the city growth. Contrary to some arguments, decentralisation is not mere diluting of urban density. It could rather be used as an effective way of mitigating over-dense urban setting or creating, still dense polynucleated, autonomous centres around a main urban core. The primary attribute of such centres should be the availability of employment opportunities to sustain its resident population within themselves.

Hong Kong rests itself in the extreme end of this debate as a compact city, which however does not prove itself on most of the arguments put forward by the 'centrists'. Its extreme environmental pollution, sky-rocketing urban metabolic rates, traffic congestion, grossly inadequate open space provisions, severe lack of land in the urban core and the limitations of harbour reclamations alone to add land for development have necessitated its march towards decentralisation, which has manifested in the form of new towns. In terms of population and housing, decentralisation efforts have become much successful, however in terms of employment it lags behind. Also Hong Kong's economic transition from manufacturing to services sector, its increasing links with the Pearl River Delta region, re-union with the mainland China, whose free economic policies are making significant impacts upon the future role in Hong Kong, have subtle impacts on Hong Kong's urban form and its decentralisation ventures.

Thus, finding strategic planning options to make decentralisation has to take these factors into consideration. The most appropriate option may be to create alternative autonomous and sufficiently large urban centres at strategic locations, the primary concern of which is to provide employment opportunities for the already established

new towns. They will be amply fed with necessary infrastructure and service facilities. Once formed, those urban centres will be mutually complementary to one another by way of providing employment and supplying the necessary work force. Locations of such centres, size and the type of employment provisions are extremely important to decide, taking into consideration the factors cited at the end of the foregoing paragraph. Positive government intervention in terms such policy measures as fiscal incentives, land-related concessions, grants and subsidies are necessary.

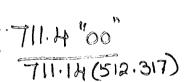
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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signed:

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBD Central Business District

GDP Gross Domestic Product

Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines HKPSG

Internal Floor Area IFA

Mass Transit Railway MTR

OZP Outline Zoning Plan

Pearl River Delta PRD

Territorial Development Strategy TDS

Territorial Development Strategy Review **TDSR**

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