

Hong Kong Young Leaders Programme

Redefining “Smart City” for Resilience in the New Normal

Current Situation

In December 2020, the HKSAR Government introduced the Smart City Blueprint 2.0. The Blueprint put forward initiatives under six smart areas: mobility, living, environment, people, government, and economy. While the government has implemented many technology initiatives to enhance city management, there remain opportunities to take bold steps to ensure smart city initiatives will address some of the fundamental issues surrounding quality of life for Hong Kong citizens. It is time to redefine “smart”.

Hong Kong’s recent social unrest and global COVID-19 pandemic have revealed deep fragilities in the city’s economic model. Despite being one of the world’s wealthiest economies, it is one of its most unequal, with a higher-than-average Gini coefficient of 0.54. Hong Kong’s wealth disparity has created a multitude of socio-economic issues that have been detrimental to citizens’ quality of life and inflamed recent discontent.

- Over one-fifth of Hong Kong’s population lives in poverty.
- A shortage of affordable housing has almost 100,000 people living in overcrowded sub-divided flats with sub-standard hygiene.
- At 11.4%, the city’s ever-increasing youth unemployment rate has hit a new high due to the pandemic.
- Hong Kong’s ageing population, too, presents an imminent challenge to Hong Kong’s already overburdened healthcare system.
- Over 60% of current Hong Kong adults suffer from poor mental health wellbeing.
- In the face of climate change, residents have more frequently faced extreme weather conditions and poor air quality leading to adverse health conditions.



Envisioning a Smart City

Hong Kong's Smart City Blueprint presents technology initiatives to enhance and expand existing city management measures and services to bring convenience to the public. To enhance its status as a leading international city, Hong Kong can benefit from taking this approach a bold step further by redefining “smart” to identify and address its complex socio-economic and environmental challenges. It is time for smart city practices to build resilience and improve the quality of life for its citizens. Key opportunities for the city include:



Inclusive Economy

Hong Kong's current economic model prevents a wide range of companies and individuals from realising their full potential due to unequal access to resources and opportunities. Hong Kong should promote an inclusive economy that provides equal access to financial capital for SMEs, boosts employment opportunities, and improves living conditions for vulnerable socio-economic groups and low-income residents. Apart from reducing income disparity, an inclusive and diversified economy would increase the city's economic cohesion and increase its overall competitiveness.



Future Skills

University graduates make up 34% of Hong Kong's workforce, yet demand for administrative and professional positions have grown more slowly, leading to underemployment.¹ The pandemic has also revealed a need to be more adaptable in the face of increasing unpredictability. Hong Kong should thus bolster future skills to prepare its labour force to have greater flexibility in the job market and access to new industries. By making changes and reforms to the education system, Hong Kong can better prepare its youth for a rapidly changing future.



Low Carbon Economy

The bulk of Hong Kong's greenhouse gas emissions come from electricity generation, of which 90% come from buildings. Generating over 15,000 tonnes of waste per day, Hong Kong's landfills are reaching saturated conditions.² There is significant opportunity to be gained from Hong Kong transitioning to a low carbon economy that adopts climate mitigation strategies, building energy efficiency, and sustainable waste management. Bold strategies are needed to achieve Hong Kong's stated goal of decarbonisation by 2050. If successful, Hong Kong will better secure its future, and create new job opportunities commensurate with a robust green economy.



Health and Wellbeing

The recent social unrest and pandemic have exacerbated existing mental and physical health issues among individuals. Access to affordable high quality food is increasingly affecting low-income residents. Hong Kong should prepare the relevant socio-economic and physical infrastructure needed in healthcare, food supply and elderly care to maintain a high quality of life for all its citizens at every stage of life. Despite country parks accounting for 40% of the total land area, Hong Kong still lacks accessible community and public spaces to support active lifestyles. By investing in arts and culture, sports and community wellness hubs, and public space, Hong Kong can strengthen social cohesion and create a thriving community.

¹ [Census and Statistics Department \(2018\)](#)

² [Environment Protection Department \(2019\)](#)

Technology as an Enabler, Government as a Facilitator

In transforming Hong Kong into a smart resilient city, **technology** plays a crucial role. Technology provides the foundation for digital and traditional businesses to grow and engage in smart city development. It also enables citizen participation in the self-collection of data and increases civic engagement and trust in city officials. Most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of the "StayHomeSafe" app effectively supported home quarantine in Hong Kong and limited the spread of the disease. There are many opportunities for Hong Kong in building smart technologies for the aforementioned four pillars affecting economy, health, and environment.

Equally important, is the role of the **government** as a facilitator. For smart technologies and innovations to be effectively utilised, the Hong Kong government has to redefine its vision for a "smart" Hong Kong to prioritise its citizens' socio-economic and environmental challenges. As a facilitator, it should create or change laws to pave the establishment of sustainable and innovative business models and products while protecting the interests and quality of life of Hong Kong citizens and set priorities for investments to be made in promising sectors such as urban and green technology and healthcare. Most importantly, the government should actively engage businesses and civil society to build a sustainable ecosystem that supports smart city development at every stage, from raising capital and R&D to implementation and adoption, making Hong Kong the smart resilient city of the world.

Outcomes of a smart resilient Hong Kong



Diversified economic opportunities and job creation



Enhanced quality of life



An international model to be replicated and inflow of talent



Effective data-driven decision-making



Mitigated risks and reduced damage from external shocks



Sustainable living and efficient use of resources

Programme Objectives

The annual **Hong Kong Young Leaders Programme (HKYLP)** is a platform designed to bring young professionals together across sectors (government, business, and civil society) to develop solutions that address pressing social issues, from housing affordability to opportunities in the Greater Bay Area. The 7th HKYLP will focus on solutions to **develop Hong Kong into a smart city that enhances the resilience and quality of life for businesses and individuals.**

Participants on the HKYLP will develop a set of strategic recommendations that enables Hong Kong to become a model smart city with a focus on building an inclusive and low carbon economy that bolsters future skills for its youth, promotes individual wellbeing and builds cohesive communities. The final report will be a policy proposal that redefines the vision for a smart Hong Kong that addresses its socio-economic challenges and strategises the implementation and adoption plan of smart city applications. For more information, check out our brochure [here](#).
