

Urban Collaborative + Commons Studio (2023)

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The city-making process is often decided in the hands of a few, with a developmental mindset that prioritizes time and cost efficiency over people in global cities like Hong Kong. This approach has resulted in a top-down view of the city that celebrates grand architecture and infrastructure, while people and everyday life are often left out of the picture. This exclusive planning process has led to social issues such as weakened community ties and the misallocation of urban resources.

As urban designers, positioned between the institution and the end-users, we have a chance to **rethink urban design in a bottom-up way that reconnects people to the city, and question how we can create strategies to influence stakeholders towards urban design that can impact all.** How might we rethink our urban condition through 'commons' as the inspiration for collective action?

To rethink the process of delivering urban design projects

Bottom-up Problem Identification

Collective Decision Making

Participatory Design

Crowdsourcing Funding

Consensus Building

Co-Managing

Manifesto:

We believe in local intelligence and resilience, learning from how they adapt to adverse conditions and solve everyday issues. The power of Urban Collaboratives is the recognition of differences and therefore potential, to discover hidden resources and build collaborative networks that can transform the urban environment in a bottom up way. And through principles of Urban Commons, through tapping different ways to share, access, and appropriate urban forms as resources for all, to create channels to collectively manage these resources in a sustainable way that support the needs across different users and stakeholders.

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[Death and Life of Great American Cities](#) - Jane Jacobs

- Part 1 - Peculiar Nature of Cities
- Part 2 - The Conditions for City Diversity

[The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces](#) - William H. Whyte

- Chapter 2 Sitting Space
- Chapter 3 Sun, Wind, Trees, Water

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Urban Collaboratives + Commons

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[Creating a Network of Places with Participatory Actions across Cities and Cultures](#) - Leandro Madrazo

[Collaborative Resilience: Moving Through Crisis to Opportunity. United Kingdom: MIT Press, 2012.](#)

- Chapter 1 - Introduction : Crisis and Collaborative Resilience

[How to Build a Collaborative City: In Conversation With Sheila Foster | The MIT Press Reader](#)

[Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies | SpringerLink](#)

SDGs and Targets

[The Global Goals](#)

[Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2023](#)

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[Three Minutes to the Perfect Pitch with Brant Pinvidic | Science of People](#)

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Hong Kong Planning and Tai Po New Town

[Hong Kong 2030+: Home](#)

[Tai Po New Town - Hong Kong](#)

[Insight Report - Public Policy and Innovation Economic Analysis: Hong Kong 2030+, Industry 4.0 and District Improvement in Tai Po](#)

[\(研究分析簡報\) 社企民間高峰會社區實驗室公共政策分析報告 \(2022年8月\): 大埔區「再工業化」政策及社區發展現況](#)

[Explainer: What is Hong Kong's San Tin Technopole and why is the planned tech hub controversial?](#)

Studio Approach

The studio process in term 1 will focus on **field work, community engagement, participatory design, and strategic urban design strategy** for Tai Po, a neighborhood in close proximity to CUHK campus, also a new town planned together with Fanling/Sheung Shui and Yuen Long in the late 1970s, the second generation new towns within the 3 generations of 9 new towns, since the initiation of New Town Development Programme in 1973, in order to cope with the population increase and decentralizing the population from the overcrowded central urban districts in Hong Kong¹.

Throughout the years Tai Po have been changing drastically and developed into a mix of old and new fabrics, with different functions like old market urban cores, villages, public housing estates, private residential areas, industrial park, Science Park, embraced by its natural resources like rivers, waterfront, wetland and mangroves, mountains.

Through vigorous engagement with various key stakeholders from the community, private sector and government, the studio aims to rethink urban design starting from neighborhood scale, with Tai Po as the testing site to explore various design strategies of new sustainable and regenerative neighborhood, and to re-strategize Tai Po's position in relation to Northern Metropolis and innovative developments along the Knowledge and Technology Eastern Corridor.

First stage - Investigate

will consist of strategic research to unpack the complex theoretical, historic, economic and political models that have shaped Tai Po neighborhood and its specific materialization. Through multiple-scale mapping exercises and immersive site investigations, students will discover urban and social issues focusing on Population Aging, Live-Work, Market and Local Economies, Re-industrialization, Innovations, Environments and Ecology.

Second Stage - Engage / Strategize

With the issue topics identified, students then initiate stakeholders engagement in Stage 2 to further construct the issue in a multi-dimensional way, and to analyze how the existing community collaboration, resource coordination, networks, urban form, public spaces, natural resources are working or not working in relation to the identified issue. We will be working with a variety of community partners, including social venture **Loco Bike**, which started bike sharing in Tai Po; **Social Enterprise Summit** and the **Good City Foundation**, to build on their community research and lab that has identified Tai Po as a site of research and policy intervention in the past 3 years along with local stakeholders across different topics.

Third Stage - Design Scenario

With Collaborative + Commons in mind, students will learn from local intelligence and leverage existing resources to re-configure the existing urban system, spatial and morphology design scenarios based on urban design framework / principle, creating spatial interventions as urban design, tactical urbanism, public space design, imagining new design scenarios through visualizations, drawings, or technological interventions by advocating for a process of liaison and engagement with local stakeholders and users. Such scenarios are designed as part of a process of urban strategy that creates a feedback loop including but not limited to policy makers, neighborhood stakeholders and end users.

¹ Hong Kong: The Facts New Towns, New Development Areas and Urban Developments.

Studio Project:

Urban Design Strategy for a Regenerative Neighbourhood

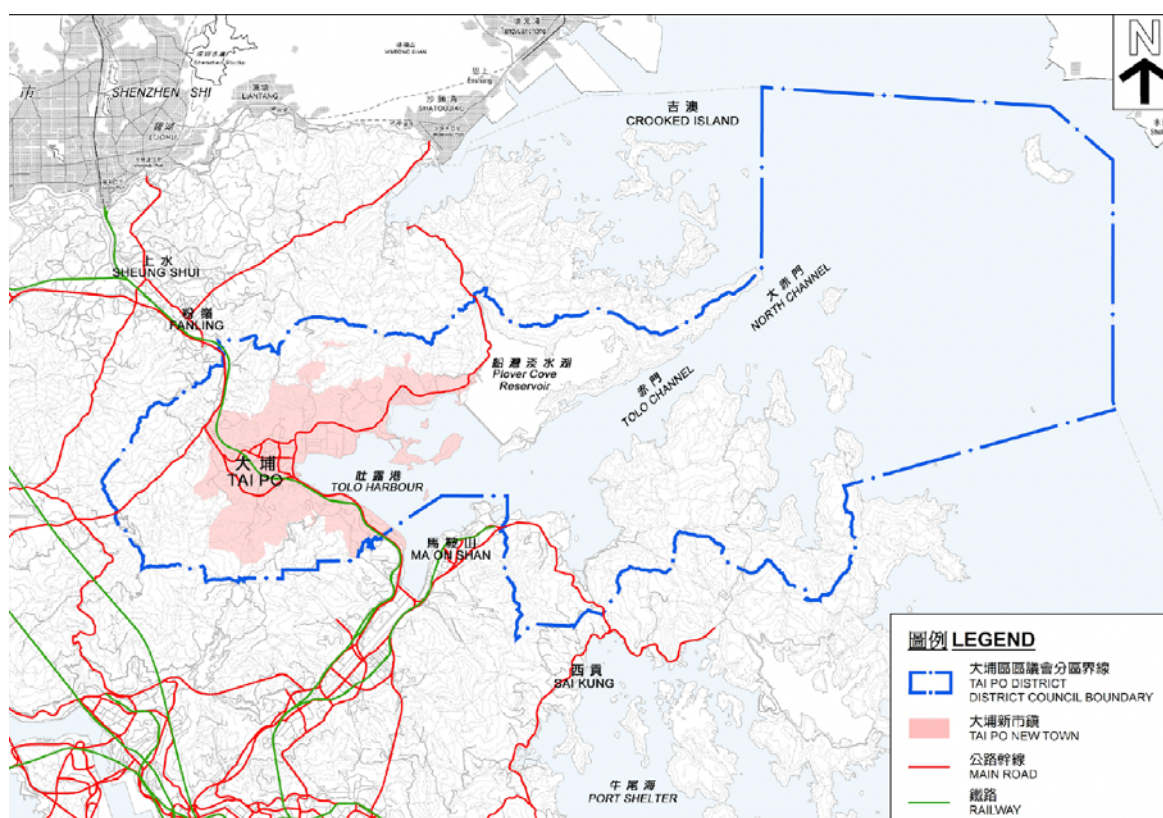
“In the past decades, Tai Po has experienced rapid changes and has been developed from a rural market town to a modernized new town with a good living environment and adequate community and infrastructural facilities. It is worthy to note that Tai Po is among one of the new towns where on the one hand, development has taken place and on the other hand, disturbance to the natural areas has been kept to the minimum. This will remain the major planning objective for Tai Po New Town in the future.” - Planning Department, 2022

With the new developments and plans for the Northern Metropolis and other new forms of developments in the New Territories, Tai Po has become an unique example of a new town that has balanced the need for development with cultural and natural assets.

How might we rethink the position of Tai Po as an “old” new town in Hong Kong, to reinject intervention in terms of policy and spatial transformation through understanding and identifying the users and stakeholders of the neighborhood, and create people-centric forms of urban design strategy that respond to both the existing context and needs, but projecting new ideas of intervention that may tap into different collaboratives and resource-sharing models.

What is the original concept of the ideal new town and how has it evolved at this point in time an overall strategy for Tai Po rooted from topical issues and local contexts? Furthermore, how can we envision the future for these areas in an Urban Collaborative or Urban Commons model?

One of the core principles of a regenerative culture is to co-create shared meaning by supporting individual and collective capacity for shifting from competitive to collaborative systems. Regenerative cultures are about “co-evolving mutuality” between people and within the community of life.



An urban design strategy to reposition / rethink Tai Po district as a people-centric neighborhood [Image reference: Planning for Liveable New Towns Tai Po, Planning Department]

Process :

The studio process is planned in three stages: Investigate – Strategize – Design, with 5 key steps span across research/design tasks including stakeholder engagement, urban morphology mapping studies, and networks/flows analysis, leading towards an urban design proposal.

[1] What is the problem?

Identifying social & spatial issues

Problem definition is the first step towards a successful collaboration. To begin with, immerse in the field to observe existing conditions and learn from the locals, and make a **visual journal** to document spatial issues. In parallel, conduct desktop research to collect supporting data, and present the social issue with **infographics** and **mind map diagrams**. The goal for this stage is to delineate a clear problem statement that can guide next-step investigations and actions.

[2] Who are the users & stakeholders ?

Understanding target users & beneficiaries

Users (e.g. specific demographics or social group) and stakeholders should be identified as the targets. The next step to building an effective collaborative network is to understand them thoroughly to allow an emphatic design approach. Role play and semi-structured interviews can help to construct a clear picture of user persona and behavior, in order to analyze the **pain points** and the **root cause** of their concerns.

[3] How to connect and build a network?

Develop an Urban Collaborative Model

The key components of a *collaborative* are people, resources, and places. [*people*] The dynamic of different parties can be highlighted through stakeholder mapping, followed by engagement activities to understand the deeper relations. [*places*] To understand spatial conditions and potentials, public space analysis would be the core tool to learn about spatial conditions in terms of urban form and scale as the basis of interventions. [*resources*] Finally, learning about people and places should lead to the discovery of hidden resources, where an investigative resource map can be constructed and seek potential linkage and connection. The understanding of resources should expand from spatial elements (such as a vacant lot) but also include intangible elements such as money, time, skills etc...

[4] How to work in space?

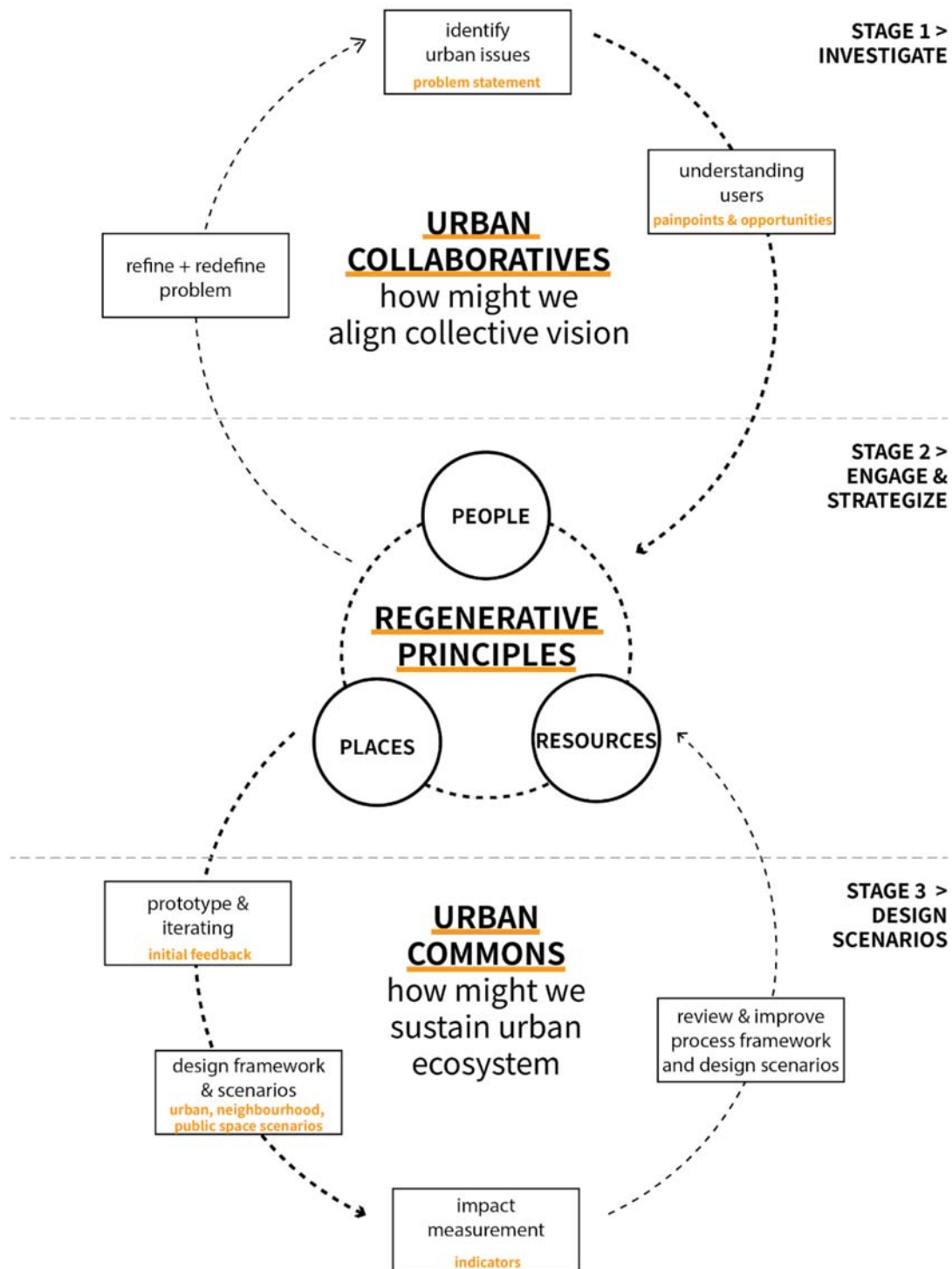
Prototyping & design intervention as urban commons

As the collaborative model is developed with strategies to link resources with people/space, it needs to be tested in the field. Tactical urbanism tools can be employed as cheap and quick prototypes of the strategies and ideas, to collect user feedback and data. This will inform the next step design interventions to implement the collaborative model. The spatial design proposal can generally be understood in two scales: a district scale of Urban Design Framework, and a street scale Public Space Intervention. Urban Commons principles can be applied here to help drive the ultimate ecosystem of the operations and management of these urban design models involving the stakeholders and the users served.

[5] What change does it make?

Impact Measurement & Feedback to Design and Problem Definition

Ultimately, Urban Collaborative + Commons projects aim to make changes and therefore should incorporate an impact design mindset. According to the defined problem and user/beneficiaries, the anticipated impact can be elaborated into outcomes with measurable indicators, to be used at this stage to evaluate the collaborative model and design interventions. Further data on user experience can then be collected and feedback to review and improve the model, completing the iterative loop of the Urban Collaborative process.



ADDITIONAL READING LIST

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