

State - Entrepreneurial - Urbanism

The evolution of Hong Kong's Urban Model

Rolf Jenni, July 2010

Abstract

Hong Kong had developed gradually, and in only fifty years, from a colonial city - characteristic for its spontaneous and informal urban growth - to a highly controlled and formalised urbanisation model, simultaneously and continuously involving neo-liberal strategies. This coupling of liberalism and control might seem, on first glance, contradictory, since capitalist liberalism is very often associated with a 'laissez-faire' attitude; but in the case of Hong Kong, "control and laissez-faire" eventually became the economically successful strategy for the post-colonial government. This lecture tries to sketch out an understanding of the specific characteristics of the entrepreneurial governing model, striving for a maximization of efficiency and perfection, while trying to explore its complex mechanisms and the roles of its various actors. An investigation into the public transport and infrastructure system of HK, which functions as a concordance between the HKSAR Government and the ostensible private transportation company to generate profit through real-estate developments, will reveal the complex mechanisms at play. As a main aim, this lecture will try to construct an argument, that the direct relationship between infrastructure and property development - conducted by the government and in concordance with the *Mass Transit Railway Corporation MTRC* and private developers - eventually led to a new and highly profitable urban typology, *the infrastructure node*. This node-network-system and its typology may serve the government today as the ultimate instrument to generate high land value through accessibility and high density of vertically organised programs.

1. Urban conditions

Controlled Surface - Engineered Territory

An aspect that seems crucial in understanding Hong Kong is certainly its ambiguous role as a global city – on the one side its hub-position as an international financial centre and trading place - and on the other side a highly controlled governance system under the state-protectorate of China.

(fig. 1 - skyline)

One could call it a combination of ‘control-and-laissez-faire’ that has produced the unique urban form over the past fifty to sixty years. This image of Hong Kong as a global city could be seen on the first glance as generic: for example as many other global cities HK brands itself with the well-known omnipresence of its skyline, announcing the dominant presence of the global international capital. But a closer look behind the disguising mask of global glamour however, reveals Hong Kong’s urban form as highly specific because of its unique historical development, topographical condition and geo-political situation.

(fig. 2 - Satellite image)

Hong Kong, located at the Pearl River Delta has together with the former Portuguese colony Macao the status of a *Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)* and exists in its territorial expansion since the ‘Second Convention of Peking’ in 1898. The territory is characterised by a hilly landscape covered with homogeneously dense vegetation that hinders urbanisation already with the constraints of its nature. The main concentration of the urban fabric extends around the Victoria harbour, between the Kowloon peninsula and Hong Kong Island where originally the old fishing village was located, eventually becoming British in 1842.

(fig. 3 - frontier closed area)

The northern border is defined by the linear form of the border city Shenzhen, disconnected from the *Special Administrative Region* by the so called ‘frontier closed area’, a pristine fenced ‘nature’, facing the rampant urban developments on the mainland side. As against Special Economic Zones, *Special Administrative Region* means an autonomous and largely self-governing sub-national entity of the People’s Republic of China with a *gubernatorial Chief Executive* as head of government. The region's government, however, is not fully independent, in as much as foreign policy and military defence are retained as the responsibility of the central government. Consequently, Hong Kong and Macao have their own legislature, immigration policies, currencies, etc.

The very liberal policies regarding capitalist development are founded in the constitutional *Hong Kong Basic Law*, drafted in accordance with the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* in 1984. The law guarantees that the capitalist system and the way of life, as well as its independent taxation system remain unchanged for 50 years after the Hand-over. The combination of the English common law, low tax regime, historical trading links and access to China is therefore a highly attractive business environment.

(figure 4. Density comparison)

Hong Kong's territory with its 7 million inhabitants is about forty times smaller than Switzerland. Concentrated on a built up area of only 14 percent of the territory it is obvious that scarcity of land generates an enormous density of about 300 people per hectare whereas the average area for housing is at about 11m² per person.

(fig. 5 - Urbanised areas)

Since the geological condition of HK's topography only allows construction on the hills with massive efforts, most of the urbanised areas are located at the flat foothills, on the scarcely existing plain areas, which were steadily extended since the late 19th century.

(fig. 6 - contrasting landscape)

This condition, represented in many well-known images of Hong Kong – emphasising on the sharp the contrast between the dense vegetation of the hills and the dense urbanised areas of the plains is the essence of Hong Kong.

(fig. 7 - scarcity of land)

With the scarcity of buildable land and a rapidly growing population, the colonial power had to develop new strategies including high-density housing, and massive land reclamation projects. Since the government owns most of the land in Hong Kong and the policy of the SAR doesn't allow the insertion of a tax system, land reclamation became a perfect instrument to make economic revenues. Land reclamation was introduced the first time in the 1890s, and its techniques were gradually refined together with the public transport system.

(fig. 8 - model 300x700m)

Within the first Studio Basel research on Hong Kong in 2004, most exemplary is a work dealing with the city's ingeniously organised 'skin' done as a sort of 'cut-out of Hong Kong's territory', a rectangle of 300 by 700m, showing in close coexistence all the paradigmatic segments of the controlled surface:

(fig. 9 – view to the port)

Port and other Infrastructure facilities, landslides protections, metro stations, public and private housing estates on the hillsides.

(fig. 10 - last land reclamation)

This condition of a highly organised surface results obviously from Hong Kong's major dilemma - the lack of land and the concentration of its growing population on the disposable land. The unleashed economical pressure on the existing urban fabric generated by this paradox is materialised in the growing trends for increasing urban renewal projects striving for a more efficiently 'used' territory.

(fig. 11 – informal Rooftops)

This mentality is not only reflected in the abolishment of historical building substance for the sake of a higher economic efficiency, but also how all the informal urban phenomena, such as squatter areas or the formerly so predominant layer of illegal bamboo constructions spread all over the city are increasingly erased in the favour of hygiene and safety.¹

(fig. 12 - informal structures)

Hong Kong based urban theorist *Li Shiqiao* describes this twofold bias of efficiency and safety in his article *the cathartic city*² grounded in the fact that Hong Kong tries to resist its 'archive-character'. According to his thesis, cities can normally be understood as "dynamic archiving archives, where personal and communal histories are deeply inscribed into the bricks, stones, and tiles of the buildings." He claims that Hong Kong is "a city that mutated from the normative archive city into its opposite. It has become, through its carefully cultivated smooth adaptation and incessant urban renewal, a *cathartic city* with an extraordinary productive force that could only come from non-violent deep cleansing."

(fig. 13 - antiseptic surfaces I, lobby)

Therefore the concept of safety and hygiene may be seen as the ultimate form of controlling the territorial surface, which has gradually developed towards its extremes: the visual perception especially in the inner-city areas at Hong Kong Central, the endless interiorised spaces of connected hotel-lobbies, shopping malls and

¹ In 2007 a law was introduced to prohibit illegal building extensions due to 'security reasons' especially in the inner-city areas of HK-island and Kowloon

² *StadtBauwelt* no.175, 2008

metro stations is marked by very slick and antiseptic surfaces reflecting the desire for cleanliness.

(fig. 14 - antiseptic surfaces II, metro station)

Shiqiao argues that, “in the absence of humanistic discourses, all kinds of expert knowledge of hygiene and safety reached an unprecedented height in Hong Kong. While we hear reminders of dangers of gaps, closing doors, slippery floors, and many other cautions when we take the public transport, the same commitment to expert knowledge on hygiene and safety makes and remakes the city with powerful and insistent forces: the physical environment of the city of Hong Kong has been transformed by hygienic and safety concerns.” Expert knowledge or specialisation is therefore for him mainly the reason that fosters this incredible efficiency and vibrancy of Hong Kong’s urban condition.

(fig. 15 - Engineered Territory)

In respect to these meaningful thoughts I would like to introduce the notion of *engineered territory* to describe Hong Kong’s specific surface: It describes the perception of a territory in which almost every square meter seems to be designed and organised to a point where nature is transformed into a purely artificial and technical landscape: a condition that has very little to do with the understanding of a deeply inscribed historic and anthropogenic transformation of the landscape as cultural value. I will try to give a closer insight at the emergence of the governance system and mechanisms behind the genesis of that specific landscape today.

2. The rise of an Urban Model

Historical discourse - economy and housing policy as foundations of Hong Kong’s Urban Model today

A brief historical detour before we come to the mechanics of HK’s urban model shall give a comprehension of its comparatively short development of not more than 150 years. Of main interest is the relationship of the major political events and economic changes and how they have fostered the specific urban development of HK.

(fig. 16 - Urban periodisation)

Looking at the periodisation of HK’s urban history, we can recognise several phases that altered the development continuously almost without periods of stagnation. We can talk here of about five different periods, while after the first two colonising periods starting in the midst of the 19th century, a major shift happened in the fifties of the last century when Hong Kong lost its important position as trading entrepot and

was forced to reorient itself economically.

(fig. 17 –status square colonial period)

I will not enter a long revelation of the colonial history of HK, nevertheless its most important phases shall be briefly mentioned: The territorial extension of the current Hong Kong area was appropriated by the British within three steps: Whilst Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon peninsula became British in 1860, Hong Kong's *New Territories* became additionally colonial territory after the British negotiated a leasing contract in the *Second Convention of Peking* in 1898. The contract was based on the agreement that it expires after 99 years, which defined the time of the Hand-Over in 1997.

(fig. 18 – Shek Kip Mei – squatters)

The period after the turn of the century up to the first and Second World War was marked by the first attempt to modernise the urbanisation with massive land reclamation projects and institutionalisations in the urban and health policies etc. This was mainly a reaction on the highly precarious living and hygienic conditions of the local 'Chinese' population, which were mostly living in slums and squatter settlements.

Settlement of Shek Kip Mei

(fig. 19 - Synopsis – 'Peripheral Fordism')

In the late forties and early fifties this situation changed drastically after Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the PRC and the UN imposed its embargo on China who entered the Korean War. This historical episode subsequently lead to massive migrations overcrowding Hong Kong and was a major turning point in the economical and urban development, leading to a complete reorientation for a new economic base. On the one hand the massive migration from China offered huge amount of labour forces to the colonial power. On the other hand the industrial know-how brought to Hong Kong by Shanghaineese-industrial families, escaping from the communist regime, were immediately applied to establish factories for the production of cheap mass products for a global market.

(fig. 20 – vertical factories)

The massive migration flux from China, which was resulting in highly precarious living conditions, caused a major accident in the squatter area of *Shek Kip Mei* in 1953:

(fig. 21 - Shek Kip Mei)

A devastating fire destroyed nearly the whole area and left 50'000 people homeless over night. On the first sight recognizable as an emergency measure, the government built resettlement blocks nearby to rehouse those affected by the fire. Urban geographer Manuel Castells studied this development on the relationship between public housing policies and economical improvement in 1987, published under the title of *the Shek Kip Mei Syndrome*.³

(fig. 22 – Book 'Shek Kip Mei Syndrome')

Castells identified the fire of Shek Kip Mei as a key-moment in the urban history of Hong Kong which triggered a bureaucratic and political dynamic that led to significant changes in the public housing policy and was accompanied with a series of sanctions, which have become the most explicit shaping forces for future developments. By analysing the mechanism of the relationship between the state, economic development and public policy, Castells and his colleagues argued that there is a “positive interaction between economic development and public housing, and more broadly, between the role of ‘collective consumption’ and the process of production and capital accumulation”. The provision of basic social stability since the early 1970s that enabled and ensured a proper production of labour and simultaneously enabled the rising entrepreneurial population to take risks in business, made steady economic improvement possible.

Shek Kip Mei is considered as key moment in the ‘modern urban development’ of Hong Kong because it ‘heralded’ the underlying economic motivation behind the urban development processes.

(fig. 23 - Shek Kip Mei street view)

As Castells explains, it was cheaper to build six-storey high resettlement blocks of low standards than to pay relief fund to 50'000 people for two weeks. The fire was in that sense the perfect reasoning for the government to resettle the illegal squatter areas and to clear the now vacant land for new developments.

Since the Hong Kong government largely owns the land, the public housing development and later the new towns have provided key financial resources to the government. This strategy was used to create the necessary infrastructure for growth without having to resort to heavy direct taxation that would have undermined the business climate. The system, based on the two simple but vital interests - trade and land -

³ M. Castells, L. Goh and R. Y.-W. Kwok, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome – Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore*, (Pion Limited 1987).

was already established by the colonial occupation through the British since 1841 and further inherited by the city's postcolonial Chinese elite.

(fig. 24 - Synopsis - toward a global city)

The aftermath of the new economic sanctions introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the late seventies and early eighties that strangely enough simultaneously coincided with the 'global shift announcing the success story of the neo-liberal project', subsequently led to a gradual involvement of the private sector in Hong Kong since the mid eighties and the beginning of the nineties.

(fig 25 - Sino British Joint Declaration)

Especially the Sino-British Joint Declaration marks a key moment in this period when Margaret Thatcher ratified the declaration to hand over Hong Kong to the PRC by 1997. This agreement which was connected in accordance with the 'one country, two systems policy, aspired by Deng Xiaoping, led already to a series of institutional and economic changes and to a first upswing of the real estate market. The introduction of Xiaoping's new economic policy and the establishment of the SEZ – especially in the border city of Shenzhen – allowed the outsourcing of production to the mainland and offered the possibility for foreign direct investments. This new condition marked a major turning point in the economical development of Hong Kong – changing from a manufactured based economy to a service based economy.

(fig. 26 - Housing Synopsis)

The private housing market started to increase due to the growing wealth of the rising middle-class or so-called 'sandwich society' as a consequence to HK's economic success. Additionally political factors eventually played out an important role in fostering the privatisation strategy. The gradual shift from the strong involvement of the government in public housing programs toward a more liberal attitude in the private market is reflected in this illustration, showing the development of the different housing typologies in the public- and private sector. After the very rational and linearly organised 'gallery types', such as the so called Mark-Generations, the public housing typologies gradually changed into more efficient 'cruciform types', but still using corridors for distribution and circulation. While the public housing types didn't develop to further improvements, the private housing estates simultaneously adopted since the seventies and early eighties the features of the public housing and became highly 'parameterised' until today.

(fig. 27 - Parameterised private housing-types)

When Castells and his colleagues concluded their study by proposing an "economic model interpretative of

Hong Kong's growth in which industrial production, capital accumulation and collective consumption are inextricably related in a series of positive linkages", they could hardly speculate on the forthcoming development and how political changes would eventually affect the urbanisation model. Meanwhile many aspects of this model have mutated toward higher economic efficiency, others have completely changed its modes, and additional energies and forces were added to culminate in very sophisticated development mechanisms and new urban typologies.

(fig. 28 - Synopsis – Institutions for Public Transport)

Of large importance is here the role of the public transport system, which was introduced in 1979 with the first metro line in Hong Kong. The establishment of a few institutional organisations and policies again fostered the implementation of the transport-network in order to activate new urban developments. Among other developing paths, the stations or nodes of the network system were the main origins that would eventually generate a new urban and architecture typology, the *mega node* and its architecture manifestation the *podium type*.

(fig. 29 - Kowloon Station)

The picture shows Kowloon-Station, one of the large scale 'mega-nodes' - finalised in 2008. I will explain the typology and its development processes more precisely in the following. The image more emblematises the current stage of the highly capitalist development, which is nonetheless still very much under the control of the government. This short excursion into the historical development shows the increasing interdependence of different factors like infrastructure, land management, housing policies, and economic production responsible for HK's current urban transformation process. This process may be comprehended as a very elaborated urbanisation model - a 'machine' that aims towards its 'perfection' through the achievement of maximised efficiencies by gradually combining and accumulating its previously developed expertise - to refer once again to Li Shiqiao's concept of expert knowledge.

3. The state as entrepreneur

Infrastructure and public transport as urban generator

After the investigations of Studio Basel in 2004 on the surface characteristics of HK, the analysis of 2008 was an attempt to concentrate on the mechanisms behind the urban transformational processes and the roles of its various involved actors.

(fig. 30 - report transport system)

One of the research projects analysed infrastructure planning strategies and the role of public transport as a key player in the urban transformation process.⁴

Since the increasing participation of private development and the slow-down of the land reclamation projects due to environmental reasons certainly affected the urban development practices, it seems that the 'system of generating urban development through a public transport network' became a very valuable principle.

(fig. 31 - 90% public transport)

The work investigates the various economic, geographic and demographic conditions that evolved into the current system of public transport, such as density, scarcity of land or existing modalities.

The fact that public transport in Hong Kong covers 90% of the whole territory's transport modalities was one of the initial starting point for entering the analysis.

(fig. 32 - Node network)

Quintessential hypothesis of the project is that the direct relationship between infrastructure and property development - conducted by the government and in concordance with the *Mass Transit Railway Corporation MTRC* and private developers - eventually led toward a new and highly profitable urban typology: the infrastructure node. This node-network-system and its typology serve the government today as a device to generate high land value through accessibility and high density of vertically organised programmes. Accompanied with the urban developments in the new territories in the late seventies and the subsequent introduction of the public transport infrastructure in the early 80ies, the performance of the metro stations and their relationship with the urbanised areas underwent a continuous transformation.

(fig. 33 - Horizontal to vertical)

⁴ The research project 'City within a City - Public Transport as Urban Generator' was developed by the Students Manuel Gut and Chasper Schmidlin in the Hong Kong semester 2008

The 'network-node' developed from a 'simple railway-station' toward a very independent concentration of a 'complete' city-part which is facilitated with all kind of commercial programs, health stations, schools and of course dwellings.

(fig. 34 - Horizontal to vertical II)

This gradual transformation of the node-typologies evolved within about thirty to forty years along with the construction of the different metro lines from a fully 'city-integrated' metro station - expanding horizontally into the city fabric - toward an 'isolated and self-sufficient super-node' comprising of various concentrated programs.

(fig. 35 - Node-scheme)

This vertical organisation of the node is highly attractive to private developers and its inhabitants, due to its position in proximity to the station. The podium, a table-like structure on top of the station allows relative flexibility in the arrangement of the housing towers, while offering various additional integrated programs to its dwellers. The diagram shows the main conceptual elements of such a node: the circle around the station that influences the development of its immediate context also defines the distances between the stations.

(fig. 36 - Kowloon-Bay station)

Telford Garden was one of the early private housing schemes built as podium typology with integrated shopping centre etc.

(fig. 37 - Eco-gravitation and housing)

The nucleus of the node itself is not yet lucrative for the government; the railway company MTRC is basically financing the massive infrastructural features of a station via the directly linked private developments and commercial programs. In a long term perspective the area in a circumference of around 400m walking distance to the station is becoming very attractive land for additional private housing development and hence generates the main revenues for the government caused by the rising land prices.

The statistic is showing that housing is becoming one of the main programmatic features that is guaranteeing economical profit for the station projects of the most recent metro lines.

(fig. 38 - Actors and win-win-win scheme)

The MTRC, basically a private corporation with 76% share owned by the government, is propagating here the so-called win-win-win situation from which all the three main actors take ostensibly a financial benefit. Obviously the question appears; which part of the society does this highly capitalist accumulation process

disadvantage?

(fig. 39 - Development process)

The very complex and iterative station-development-process takes about 20 to 30 years starting with the decision of the government for a new metro/railway line and is elaborated together with the MTRC. A master-plan, based on the governmentally implemented zoning plan, builds the basis for the joint-venture agreement between MTRC and private developers. After the payment of the land-premium to the government, each of the private developers continues with the planning execution phase, while simultaneously starting an extensive real-estate marketing campaign.

(fig. 40 - Lohas Park, Google earth 2010)

One of the most recent projects exemplifying this complicated process is *Lohas Park*, a condensed and isolated 'city-island' of 800m circumferences. This project will provide accommodation for about 50'000 inhabitants in the near future, and is built on top of the 'train-depot' of the final station of the youngest metro-line.

(fig. 41 - Promotion model and marketing rendering)

The real-estate marketing campaign is of course highly important for the success of such a project. As in other cases, Lohas Park is promoted in a showroom where costly models and commercials are displayed to allure the private clients. The rendering and model shows the first phase of the development, promoted via the image of a housing development embedded in a clean and healthy natural environment with emphasis on the direct access to the metro system. Small detail: the render-image certainly doesn't show the enormous corpus of the train-depot of about 30 meters height.

(fig. 42 - Packages)

The top of the podium is developed and built within different packages and phases by different developers. Together these different clusters are building one single entity in the final stage of the project. The strategy of the so-called 'privately owned public space' is crucial to deal with the usage and occupation of the in-between spaces on the podium. Incentives are given to the developers in the form of a *Bonus Plot Ratio* if they co-invest in 'public' service facilities on the podium.

(fig. 43 - Model)

The MTRC claims that the podium will be open to the public and can be used by everyone. It remains to be seen what is meant with the notion of public. The gradual privatisation of public areas is obviously a convenient possibility for the government to surrender the expensive maintenance of public areas to private

owners. This does not only apply for the spaces on the podium but also for a large number of squares in front of shopping malls and footbridges connecting commercial spaces in the interiorised world of the system.

(fig. 44 - From connected to isolated nodes)

By looking again on the node-development process since the first stations were built, we cannot only observe the transformation from horizontally to vertically organised node-typologies. Eventually there is also an increasing degree of isolation and exclusion to be recognised.

(fig. 45 - Node network - layer)

The network of nodes that functions increasingly autonomous and disconnected from the rest of the city, could be conceived as concept of a second urban layer, superimposed on the existing city but gradually detached from its existing condition. The notion of the 'city within a city' - that was applied in the students-research - was in that respect not only used to describe this overlaying urban network-system. It can also include the role of the many recently built 'mega-structures' which are almost working as autonomous city parts, containing all kind of urban programs but in the same time generate a high level of exclusion.

(fig. 46 - Interiorised city)

This condition of a network of labyrinthine mega-structures in combination with the exigencies of HK's hot tropical climate increasingly generates a sort of interiorised artificial climatic and urban condition that is continuously expanding to a point where it seemingly offers all the facilities for every-day life usage

4. Conclusions

The disappearance of the informal or a search for HK's postcolonial identity

I would like to try to conclude these explanations and the previous ones by referring to a book written by cultural theorist *Ackbar Abbas* mainly because I think his thoughts are still highly interesting and relevant to understand the present controversial condition of conflicts in Hong Kong.

(fig. 47 - Book Ackbar Abbas)

The book entitled *Hong Kong – Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*⁵ was written and published exactly in the time before the Hand-Over. Abbas identified this period as a time of *cultural self-invention* in the view of this forthcoming political event, manifested through what he calls the *space of disappearance*. Ackbar analyses and theorises on the manifold relationships between cultural forms in Hong Kong, particular cinema, architecture and writing - and the changing cultural space of the city. In simple terms, he describes the *space of disappearance* as changing cultural space in the transition from colonialism to the capitalist condition of a global city. This transition phase is identified as the period between the Sino British-Joint Declaration in 1984 and the Hand-Over in 1997 and describes a first attempt of Hong Kong's society to find its own cultural-identity within this era of uncertainty.

(fig. 48 - illegal-bamboo construction, sixties modernism, colonial architecture)

Abbas doesn't understand disappearance as non-appearance, but rather misrecognition - to recognise a thing as something else than it is. This is certainly reflected in the role of architecture, which is very often misunderstood of its symbolic meaning in order to support debates regarding questions of 'local' identity for instance. One might ask what means local in the context of HK: the 19th century traditional Chinese architecture, the colonialist architecture, the rationalist sixties-modernism, or even the informal layer of illegally built constructions?

According to Abbas disappearance means also the denial or ignorance of the ephemeral; in terms of architecture and urban notions this poses the question of the role of the pre-existing 'informal urban phenomena'. Today many of the 'informal constructions' so typically for the urban image of Hong Kong - such as squatter settlements, typhoon shelters, street hawkers and illegal bamboo-balcony-constructions seem to be continuously erased from the city fabric.

(fig. 49 - Wong Kar-Wai - Chungking express)

To show this other side of the 'disappearance', the hidden cultural identity behind Hong Kong's continuous progressive and aggressive economic development was Wong Kar-Wai's big achievements in his early films. Such as *Chungking Express* in which the large complex of Chungking Mansions is plaid out as a space in which this 'otherness' is allowed to take action.

⁵ Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance, Ackbar Abbas, University of Minnesota Press, 1997

This 'otherness', constitutes to a large extent the urban and cultural identity of Hong Kong, also in terms of its software, the everyday life activities in the city. In the current mentality for the sake of profit development, these elements are becoming recently also more and more expelled under the disguise of heritage and preservation of the colonial architecture as a mean to retain 'collective memory'. In truth, this strategy is very often used to implement urban renewal projects and gentrifications processes of inner-city areas in order to attract real estate developers.

(fig. 50 - . Kowloon walled-city vs. Kowloon Station)

Many cities that Studio Basel has investigated in the recent years often mutated from rather formal planning mentalities toward highly sophisticated forms of illegal and informal developments. In contrary to that Hong Kong had developed gradually, and in only fifty years, from a colonial city - characteristic for its spontaneous and informal urban growth - to a highly controlled and formalised urbanisation model, simultaneously and continuously involving neo-liberal strategies. This coupling of liberalism and control might seem, on a first glance, contradictory, especially since capitalist liberalism is very often associated with a 'laissez-faire' attitude; in the case of Hong Kong, "the coupling of control and laissez-faire" eventually became the true economically successful strategy for the post-colonial government. It has generated new radical forms of urbanisation of which one might ask how far can this development reach and whether it can be possible to let Hong Kong's society participate in its advantages as a whole. The very well organised and affordable public transport system might carry out an exemplary role in this regard.