

HONG KONG

URBAN PLANNING

CHANGE HOUSING POLICY OR RISK HAVING GHETTOS

That's the warning from an academic who says Hong Kong risks creating Paris-style estates at its fringes for the poor and jobless, such as in Tin Shui Wai

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Hong Kong risks creating "Parisian-style" ghettos unless the government changes its public housing policy, according to an academic who has mapped the spread of the city's unemployed by housing estates.

Urban economics expert Dr Paavo Monkkonen, from the University of Hong Kong's urban planning and design department, says a clear warning sign is Tin Shui Wai, dubbed the "city of sadness" because of high rates of violent crime, suicide and child abuse.

Using 2006 census data, Monkkonen found a "spatial mismatch" between public housing tenants and unemployment.

The research, partly funded by the University Grants Council, showed that public housing tenants were 3 per cent more likely to be jobless for every 10 per cent further they lived from the city centre.

For example, in Sha Tin (19 kilometres from Central), the jobless rate was 7 per cent among public housing tenants but this figure doubled in North district, home to Fanling and Sheung Shui (41 kilometres from Central). In Yuen Long (37 kilometres from Central), the jobless rate was 12 per cent compared to the 4 per cent in Central and Western district.

An exception was Yau Tsim Mong district (Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui, and Mong Kok; eight kilometres from Central) which had an unemployment rate of 17 per cent. This district was traditionally home to manufacturing jobs but most of these enterprises have moved to the mainland.

The unemployment rate in Hong Kong for March to May was 3.5 per cent, seasonally adjusted.

"Traditionally, Hong Kong is considered a very successful case of public housing, but now some of the problems in Europe are starting to appear here," Monkkonen said.

He urged the government to shift from a supply system (building subsidised housing) to a means-tested housing voucher system or risk creating stigmatised ghettos. "The problems with the Hong Kong system are

more similar with the French system, so rather than inner-city public housing it's suburban.

"Tin Shui Wai is a case of a ghetto. The French system has been there for a while and the problems have got worse, so looking forward, how can the government avoid ghettos? In the long run, what can they do?"

Monkkonen said the 2005 riots that erupted in many of the public housing estates on the outskirts of Paris were possible in Hong Kong.

"There were all these immigrants in public housing very far from the city, like the Tin Shui Wai case."

To avoid this, policy changes should include giving public housing tenants a choice of where to live and for companies, foreign and local, to decentralise back-office work to areas outside Central.

"To get from Tin Shui Wai to Hong Kong Island, it's about HK\$30 per round trip. Before the minimum wage, security guards were making HK\$21 an hour ... it's almost not worth it."

Twenty years ago, people in public rental housing were only slightly more likely to be unemployed and less educated. "Now, they are twice as likely to be unemployed, they are much less educated and much more likely to be born on the mainland," Monkkonen said.

The shift from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy also affected the jobless rate among public housing tenants, he said.

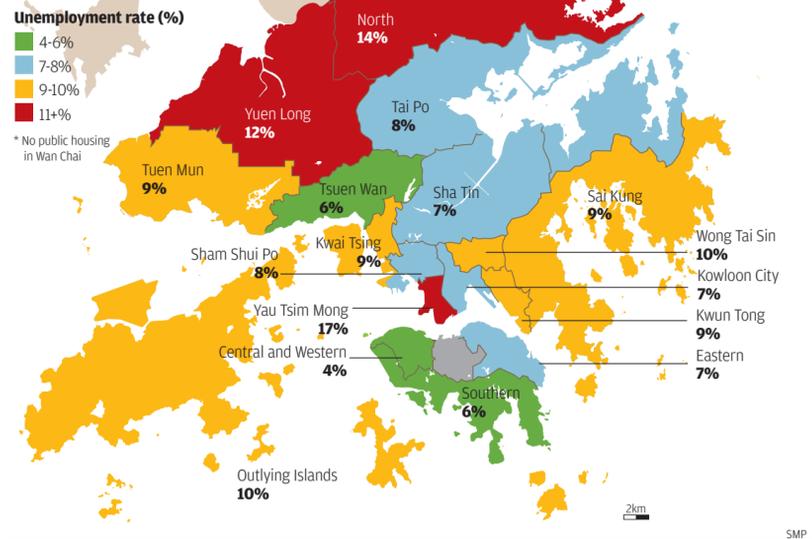
One in every two people in Hong Kong lives in public housing, either renting or owning a government-subsidised flat.

Tin Shui Wai is a case of a ghetto. The French system has been there for a while ... problems have got worse

DR PAAVO MONKKONEN

Ghettos of the jobless?

By and large, the further away from Central public housing tenants live, the more likely they are to be unemployed



GOOD FOOD



Michael Leung, creative director of HK Honey, checks the bees on his studio rooftop in Wan Chai. He harvests monthly. Photos: Jonathan Wong

Urban beehives are a sweet success

If you thought the concrete jungle was no place to raise bees, the insects themselves will prove you wrong

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A snow-covered Scandinavian forest is an unlikely setting for a budding beekeeper to find his vocation, but after one taste of the honey from his Swedish friend's hive, Hong Kong-based interior designer Michael Leung knew he was on to something good.

Now, a year and a half after his first encounter with bees, Leung has set up 11 beehives in another unlikely place – the concrete jungle of Hong Kong. His hives are spread around the city in locations as diverse as a rooftop in Wan Chai, a balcony in Pok Fu Lam, the industrial area of Kwun Tong and rural Tai Po.

Whereas the city's lack of flowers and trees might seem to present a problem, the bees have the answer.

"You would be surprised at the places where bees can survive and thrive," Leung said. "They can fly up

to five kilometres away from their hives to find pollen. They also have a natural GPS (Global Positioning) system and communication pattern that enable them to share news about where to find food.

"It may take longer for bees [in Hong Kong] to fill their combs, but it's completely possible." High up on the rooftop of an old building in the heart of Wan Chai, British-born-and-educated Leung showed the *Sunday Morning Post* his bustling beehive – four 50-by-75-centimetre wooden frames where 10,000 bees build combs and store honey – which he set up in collaboration with independent bookstore and cafe ACO. He harvests his honey once a month, and the hive produces enough for the Hennessy Street cafe's needs.

Apart from providing a natural, healthy source of food, Leung sees beekeeping as a way of spreading awareness of food issues in an increasingly globalised market. He says beekeeping and harvesting taught him the importance of local communities and local production in building a cohesive society.

"Food becomes a means of connecting people," he said. "In a busy city like Hong Kong where people are growing increasingly isolated and lost, it's nice to build a community. I'd rather buy an egg from a local egg

People also appreciate food more if they see where it comes from and take part in harvesting it

MICHAEL LEUNG, HK HONEY

farmer who I know farms responsibly than one carrying an 'organic' stamp from somewhere far away.

"People also appreciate food more if they see where it comes from and take part in harvesting it."

Leung's social enterprise, HK Honey, aims to promote local production and spread awareness and appreciation of food. It sells local honey, conducts tours of the beehives and runs workshops on honey harvesting and candle-making.

He said beekeeping and honey harvesting "changed my perspective on the food on my plate".

He also believes it is important to respect the bees. When harvesting his honey, he adopts the "Chinese" way – using no smoke to sedate the bees and wearing no protective clothing. "If we don't startle the bees, they are harmless and friendly," Leung said. And he always leaves half the honey behind for the bees to eat.

This is only the beginning for the urban beekeeper.

Leung hopes to introduce beekeeping into schools and even corporations with rooftops to spare. He also plans to apply to keep a dozen or more beehives in the new West Kowloon Cultural District, to promote local culture and farming.

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When harvesting his honey, Leung adopts the "Chinese" way.

Church demands hospital pay triple rent

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In the latest move in an unlikely tenancy battle between a Central hospital and a church, the religious group is now demanding the hospital pay triple the reduced monthly rent the hospital had been recently paying – and more.

Hong Kong Central Hospital has been renting and operating out of a single Lower Albert Road building owned by Sheng Kung Hui Anglican Church, but the hospital failed to vacate the premises after the lease ended on June 14, and is still in the church's building.

A writ filed last week states the church is requiring the hospital pay the original HK\$262,900 per month (or "the rate equivalent to the current market rate") plus interest, both backdated to June 15, the first day the hospital overstayed the lease.

The hospital had been paying a third of that – HK\$87,633 – since March, when the two parties agreed on reduced rent, and when the church gave notice that it would not extend the lease beyond June 14. The parties had been in a two-year lease agreement since June 15 2009, with a monthly rent of HK\$262,900.

Dr Cheng Chun-ho, the hospital's medical superintendent, received a copy of the writ on Thursday evening.

The church plans to develop the Lower Albert Road building, and claims the hospital's failure to leave at the end of the lease has caused the church substantial losses.

The church issued a series of notifications to the hospital throughout the spring, including one on June 10, notifying the hospital that it needed to vacate by June 14.

ANIMAL WELFARE

5,000 back end to dog racing in Macau

Simon Parry

More than 5,000 people have signed an online petition calling for an end to greyhound racing in Macau amid an international outcry over the mass death of dogs in the territory.

The petition was started after a *Sunday Morning Post* investigation last month found that dogs were being put down at the rate of more than one a day at the Macau Canidrome, Asia's only legal dog track.

A total of 383 greyhounds from Australia were put down by injection at the Canidrome last year. In March of this year alone, 45 dogs were destroyed; nearly all were healthy and no more than five years old.

The greyhounds are imported at the age of two or three and kept within the Canidrome to run in the four-times-a-week races, but are usually put down if they fail to finish in the top three for five consecutive races.

Because the Canidrome does not allow retired greyhounds to be taken on as pets and because anti-rabies quarantine restrictions prevent their export to Hong Kong, there is no hope of a life after retirement for the dogs, as there is in other greyhound racing countries.

The *Post* story has been circulated by animal-welfare groups worldwide and anti-greyhound-racing group Grey2K USA collected 5,200 signatures in an online petition calling for an end to the sport in Macau.

The petition, addressed to the Macau government, quotes figures from the *Sunday Morning Post* investigation and says Grey2K USA helped draft legislation to stop greyhound racing on the Pacific island of Guam. It argues: "As long as greyhound racing continues, greyhounds will suffer. Please help end this terrible cruelty in Macau."

Hundreds of supporters from around the world added comments to the petition. One of them, Lynn Sajdak, described the sport as "shameful to Macau". Another wrote: "Macau is full of casinos. Why, oh why do they need to gamble on dogs as well?"

The online petition comes after a letter signed by 24 animal-welfare groups in China was sent to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard calling for an immediate halt to the export of greyhounds to Macau.

The letter was signed by groups in

Beijing, Chengdu (成都), Xian (西安), Dalian (大连), Shandong (山东) and Guangzhou, who are also concerned over tentative plans to open dog tracks across China in association with greyhound-racing experts from Ireland.

Helen Stevens, co-ordinator of the UK-based group Greyhound Crusaders, said of the online petition: "We are delighted with this response, as it shows the wealth of feeling from people across the world for these innocent dogs, whose lives have been cut short for the price of a bet."

"We have written twice to the Macau Canidrome asking for their response to our calls for a closure of the track and have received no reply, so we can only assume it is business as usual for them."

"But while greyhounds are dying every week at the track, caring people across the world will do everything they can to help these innocent dogs whose lives are wretched."

Sandy Macalister, executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Hong Kong, said: "We are encouraged by the number of people who have taken an interest in this issue, but we believe the ones who are most likely to effect change and who have the responsibility to do so are those at the source of supply, in Australia."

The Macau Canidrome did not respond to phone calls and e-mails from the *Sunday Morning Post* asking for comment on the controversy.

340m
Revenue last year, in patacas, from dog racing in Macau
• The Canidrome is taxed at a lower rate than the city's casinos

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