

**CENTRAL POLICY UNIT**  
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**THE PATTERN OF URBAN LIFE IN HONG KONG: A DISTRICT**  
**LEVEL COMMUNITY STUDY OF SHAM SHUI PO**

**THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **1. Introduction**

This research was commissioned by the Central Policy Unit of the HKSAR Government in response to the growing public concern over the socio-economic problems and urban decay in Sham Shui Po (hereafter as SSP). Studies on the urban life revolving SSP have been spasmodic. It is only until the mid-2000s that academics and the public began to put more attention to the district. At the moment, there is a modicum of studies already conducted, and the public seems to have developed stereotypes of the district, which is widely seen as a dilapidated and hopeless geographical area. Building on the existing studies, this research is intended to take a fresh look and systematically analyze the pattern of urban life in SSP, the socio-economic problems in the district and the ways in which such problems can be possibly tackled. The pattern of people's life and the 'SSP problems' are complex and multi-dimensional. Social issues and economics are mingled with politics and physical environments. For this reason, the research adopts an integrated approach, drawing on different disciplines such as politics, geography, social work, architecture and cultural studies in order to examine the pattern of urban life in SSP.

### **2. Research Puzzle**

SSP is one of the oldest districts in Hong Kong. Similar to other old districts, SSP is afflicted with urban decay. To add to the complication, SSP is stricken with a range of social and economic maladies. For example, in 2008 the median household monthly income of SSP (HKD\$13,800) is the lowest among all District Council districts (HKD\$18,000) (Census and Statistical Department, 2008). Likewise, the labor force participation rate of SSP (56.3 percent) is also the lowest among all districts in Hong Kong. SSP is not only concentrated with low income families and unemployed, but also with new immigrants and the aged. To all appearances, the quality of life (hereafter as QoL) is expected to be rather low in SSP, in view of the fact that the residents there have little more than meager resources in their life. Against the odds, however, the life satisfaction index reported by the residents of SSP (0.2075 within the range from -2 to 2) does not fare particularly worse than the average score (0.2461) which covers all the districts in Hong Kong. This apparent discrepancy undoubtedly justifies detailed investigation. It is believed that by means of delving into the discrepancy we are able to develop a better understanding of people's life in SSP and the ways in which their life satisfaction can be enhanced. This is a major theme cutting through the entire report.

### **3. Research Objectives**

The major theme of this research can be unraveled into a number of specific objectives:

- 3.1 To examine the overall picture concerning QoL in SSP, and to break down the overall picture into the particular levels facing various socio-economic groups. This research seeks to examine the factors contributing to people's QoL, in the hope that the pattern of urban life in SSP can be fully understood.
- 3.2 To trace the background and historical contexts for urban life in SSP; especially to examine social exclusion and poverty situation of the households, so that we have a better understanding as regards how their current predicament came about.
- 3.3 To study social capital among residents and between civic organizations to see the extent to which it can address the problem of poverty and social exclusion by fostering trust and mutual help in SSP.
- 3.4 To study the manners in which public organizations such as the Home Affairs Bureau, the Labor and Welfare Bureau, the Urban Renewal Authority and the District Council may help fostering social assets in SSP.
- 3.5 To evaluate the role of civic associations such as community organizations, social services organizations, advocacy groups and political parties in enhancing social capital, aggregating demands, mediating conflicts and/or facilitating mobilization.
- 3.6 To examine the level of civic participation of residents living in SSP. In particular, this research sets out to study the driving forces behind socio-political participation, and to understand the significance of civic participation to the running of community at district level and life satisfaction at individual level.

- 3.7 To examine the social relations between different groups (residents of different housing types and geographical clusters) in SSP. Rigorous research is conducted on whether and why social divisions exist, and the ways in which these social divisions affect a sense of ‘we-ness’ and the concomitant of civic participation and mutual help.
- 3.8 To explore and explain the relationship between the place of SSP and the ways of life that its residents lead in an urban community. More specifically, this research seeks to understand the manners in which the local residents relate themselves to the places they live and how they derive life satisfaction as a result.

Undoubtedly our research on life satisfaction, social capital, civic associations, government agencies, social divisions and land use is able to generate a comprehensive picture about the pattern of urban life in SSP. It may also help guide public policies on housing, urban renewal, social welfare and home affairs.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Central to our research is to seek understanding of social divisions along the line of housing types, people’s perception of place as well as their implications for life satisfaction, social capital and civic participation. In line with our research focus and the limitation of sample size, it is deemed inappropriate to study the whole district by means of complete random sampling, which is likely to result in a sample heavily tilted towards

public housing estate dwellers, in light of the demographic structure in SSP. For the same reason, it is equally inappropriate to confine ourselves to the study of a single geographical area concentrated with a particular housing class. In parallel with the research focus, our approach is to choose three geographical clusters that are characterized by differences in housing types, socio-economic backgrounds and location in relation to the central part of SSP (see Fig. 1). Their differences enable the researchers to examine whether and how the housing types and geographical locations influence the pattern of urban life.

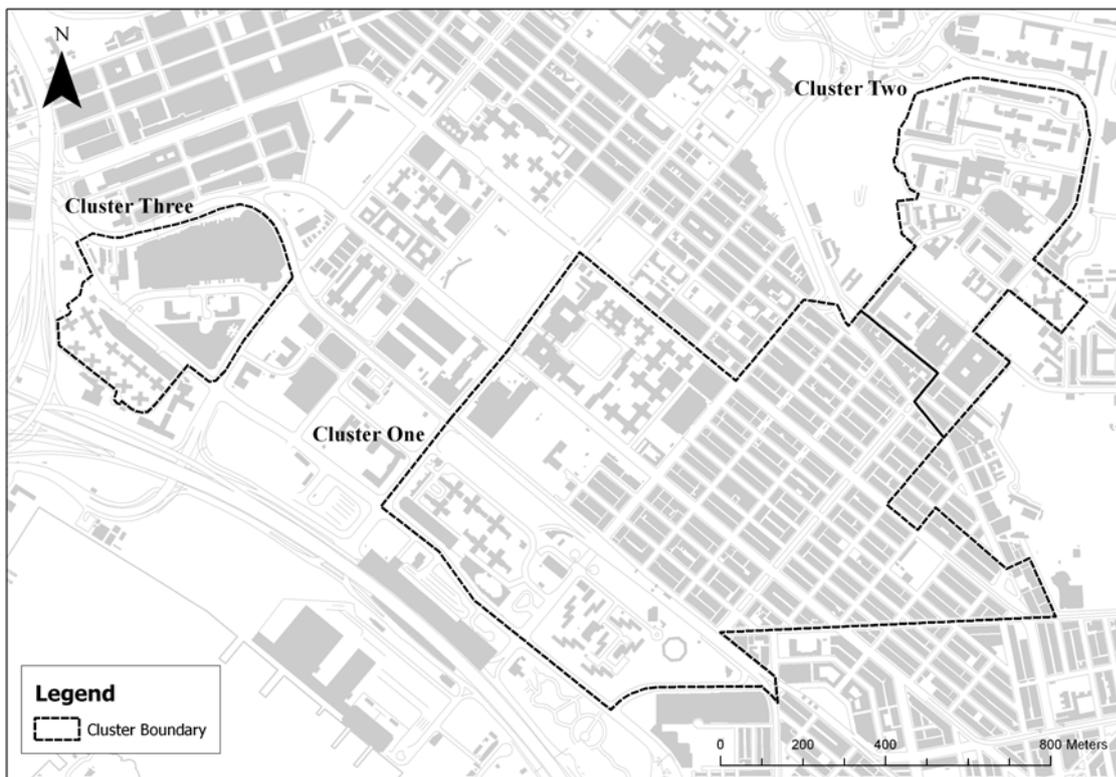


Fig. 1 Three clusters under study

The characteristics of these clusters are as follows:

4.1 Cluster One: Bounded by Cheung Sha Wan Road, Nam Cheong Street, Sham Mong Street, Tonkin Street, Cluster One includes Central Sham Shui Po and the reclamation area across the West Kowloon Corridor. This area represents the commercial heart of Sham Shui Po. It contains two dominant types of housing. The first is the typical Sham Shui Po pre-war and postwar Chinese-style buildings - “tong lau”. The second is the public housing estates constructed between 1980s and 2000s. They include Lai Kok and Lai On Estates in the central area, as well as Nam Cheong and Fu Cheong Estate across the West Kowloon Corridor.

4.2 Cluster Two: Bounded by Nam Cheong Road, and the hillslopes of Shek Kip Mei, Cluster Two includes two public housing estates, notably Pak Tin and Shek Ki Mei Estates. Constructed in 1975, Pak Tin is the oldest existing public housing estate in SSP. With 8400 households, and an estimated population of 24,200, it is also the largest housing estate with many population groups. Constructed in 1976, Shek Kip Mei Estate is located close to Central Sham Shui Po. It contains early linear slab blocks designed to enclose a public open space, a market and other amenities.

4.3 Cluster Three: Located between Kwai Chung Road and West Kowloon Highway, and between Cheung Sha Wan and Mei Foo, Cluster Three is the newest area of SSP. It contains two types of high-rise housing. The first is a group of four private

development projects for middle-class population variously known as ‘Four Dragons’, notably Banyan Garden, Liberte, the Pacifica, and Aqua Marine. The second, Hoi Lai Estate built in 2004, is one of the newest public housing estates. Both types of housing are located relatively far from old urban centers.

This research has used four data collection methods. They include:

4.4 First, a secondary analysis of existing statistical data from the 2001 Population Census and the 2006 Population Bi-census that are related to SSP, as well as the Population and Household Statistics analyzed by District Council districts. This set of data allows the researchers to have a basic understanding of the socio-economic features of SSP, especially the current predicament afflicting the local residents.

4.5 Second, a secondary analysis of cartographic materials such as aerial photos capturing the geographical features of SSP. With this information, the researchers are able to trace the geographical changes of SSP throughout the last century, and how these geographical changes such as land reclamation, land use and urban planning are related to the current predicament facing the district.

4.6 Third, a questionnaire survey conducted in the three geographical clusters as abovementioned. The questionnaire survey provides the researchers with a great

deal of first-hand information about social capital, civic participation, perception of place, social divisions and life satisfaction in SSP. This information has not been collected and analyzed in any systematic and rigorous manner by existing studies.

4.7 Fourth, in-depth interviews with the people of SSP. Two kinds of interviews have been used in this research. On the one hand, we have conducted elite interviews with social leaders such as government officials, District Councilors and NGO organizers. On the other hand, we have undertaken focus-group interviews with ordinary residents. The combination of elite interviews and focus group interviews allows us to achieve triangulation of data. In addition, learning from the experiences of local residents enables us to supplement the statistical data, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of people's life.

4.8 The target population of this research is adults who live in public housing, private housing or 'tong lau' in the district. Senior citizens aged over 60 are included in the research, because they constitute a considerable proportion of people living in SSP. In such regard, there is no real reason to rule them out if the overall picture concerning urban life in SSP can be grasped.

4.9 A random sample of addresses was drawn from the three geographical clusters as mentioned above. For the purpose of statistical analysis, we set a target of

completing at least 1000 successful cases, with around 333 cases from each geographical cluster. In line with the research focus on social divisions, we also set a target of completing at least 150 successful cases from each housing type, having taken into account the difficulty of accessing the private housing estates.

4.10 On top of random sampling of addresses based on the three geographical clusters, one qualified household member was selected from each address by using the Kish Grid. This member was then interviewed by our trained interviewers.

4.11 The questionnaire survey was executed by the telephone laboratory of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The fieldwork for this research was mainly conducted by student helpers recruited, trained and managed by the Institute. The survey started in mid-July 2010 and was completed in April 2011. A total of 1114 face-to-face interviews were successfully undertaken. The response rate for Cluster One, Cluster Two and Cluster Three is 47.41 percent, 46.27 percent and 38.08 percent respectively.

4.12 A total of 25 elite interviews and 16 focus group interviews were conducted. The interviewees were comprised of (1) government officials closely related to local governance; (2) District Councilors; (3) social leaders in charge of civic associations; and (4) ordinary residents of SSP. To fit into our research focus, the interviewees

were designed to come from as broad the social-economic backgrounds as possible, cutting across housing types, geographical clusters, age groups, gender, employment status, birth places and ethnicities.

## **5. The Survey Sample**

For reference, the followings are the brief description of our sample:

- 5.1 In our questionnaire survey, 1,114 cases have been completed and scrutinized as valid and successful. Among them, 495 cases (44.4 percent) were conducted in Cluster One, 340 cases (30.5 percent) in cluster Two, and 279 cases (25 percent) in Cluster Three.
  
- 5.2 In terms of housing type, 58.8 percent of our respondents come from public housing, 29 percent come from private housing (i.e. 'Four Dragons' and Home Ownership Scheme), and 12.2 percent of respondents are "tong lau" (i.e. cubicle apartment, "tong lau" unit and suite) residents.
  
- 5.3 Of the 1,114 successfully interviewed, 59.2 percent are female and 40.8 percent are male. In terms of age distribution, 14 percent of our sample are aged 18-29, 56.5 percent are aged 30-59, and 29.2 percent are aged 60 or above. In addition, 41.1

percent of these respondents were born in Hong Kong. It means that more than half of the respondents were immigrants. Among them, 81.6 percent have lived in Hong Kong for more than 7 years. In addition, 94.6 percent of them had lived in the Mainland China/Macau/Taiwan before they moved to Hong Kong.

5.4 In terms of the highest education level obtained, 32 percent of the respondents have “no-schooling/pre-primary/primary” level, 48.8 percent have obtained “secondary” level and 18.8 percent have obtained “tertiary” level.

5.5 In our sample, 50.2 percent of the respondents have a paid job while 49.7 percent of them do not. Among those who have a paid job, 77 percent work full-time while 22.6 percent work part-time. The remaining 0.4 percent of respondents work both full-time and part-time.

5.6 In terms of average household monthly income, 19.7 percent of the respondents have an income below HKD\$6,000, while only 7.6 percent of them have an income of HKD\$40,000 or above. The majority of them have a household income somewhere in between. Specifically, 26.7 percent of them have a household monthly income ranging from HKD\$6000 to HKD\$14,999, while 21.0 percent have a household income ranging from HKD\$15,000 to HKD\$39,999.

## **6. Main Findings from the Analysis of Second-Hand Data**

With the analysis of information contained in the 2006 Population By-census, the Population and Household Statistics compiled by District Council districts and a range of cartographic materials, a number of geographical and socio-economic features, trends and the resultant challenges in relation to SSP have been identified:

- 6.1 The development of central SSP, which is characterized by the concentration of ‘tong lau’, can be traced back as far as to the 1920s. Yet most of the ‘shop-houses’ that remain intact today were built in the 1940s and 1950s. After the WWII, SSP attracted a large number of refugees across the border. As a consequence, the district saw the rebuilding of pre-war ‘tong lau’ into taller five to six-storey buildings.
  
- 6.2 The greatest change of SSP took place between the 1950s and 1970s. Driven by public policies for social and economic development, many of the changes occurred in areas outside Central SSP, such as Cheung Sha Wan and Shek Kip Mei. The changes included the building of roads, industrial estates (e.g. Cheung Sha Wan Factory Estate), public facilities, open spaces and public housing (e.g. So Uk Estate, Shek Kip Mei Estate, and Pak Tin Estate). As a result, SSP became one of the industrial and residential hubs in Hong Kong.

- 6.3 With economic globalization and the opening up of China, most of the industries in Hong Kong have been relocated. Hence, the 1980s and 1990s saw the closure of factories in Shek Kip Mei and Cheung Sha Wan. The Shek Kip Mei Factory Building was converted into the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre in 2008. The sites of the Cheung Sha Wan Factory Estate were cleared around 2002, and are currently being re-developed into public housing estates.
- 6.4 From 1990 onwards, transformation of SSP has continued. The significant growth of this period included further land reclamation and the completion of the West Kowloon Highway (1997). On the reclaimed land were two new public housing estates, notably Fu Cheong Estate (2001) and Hoi Lai Estate (2004). The two public housing estates were located far away from the central SSP. In addition, the building of four large-scale private housing projects (known as ‘Four Dragons’) brought a number of middle-class residents to the district.
- 6.5 As the physical development of SSP can be traced back as far as to the 1920s, and the greatest change of the district took place between the 1950s and 1960s, one of the problems facing the district is the physical deterioration of buildings. Re-development programs have been undertaken on public housing estates. More challenging to the public organizations seems to be the older ‘tong lau’ which house a diverse and low-income group of residents. Large-scale clearance may be

impractical because these buildings accommodate a large number of poor people who are unable to find a living place either through the private housing market or the public housing scheme.

6.6 Due to urban decay, SSP has been listed as a key area of urban renewal by the Urban Renewal Authority and the Hong Kong Housing Society. Replacing the old buildings is often by forty to fifty storied luxurious towers on top of a shopping podium, and by rebuilding of public housing. The re-development programs have resulted in geographical and sociological re-shuffling of the district. New residents have moved in, whereas a considerable proportion of old residents have moved out. This may have resulted in adverse effects on the well-established social networks embedded in the urban fabric and the public memories of the community. How the SSP can be renewed without losing its history, identity and community would be the challenge in the coming decades.

6.7 On top of challenges to social networks and community identity, urban renewal tends to lead to the problem of gentrification. In other words, the redeveloped higher-class housing properties, especially the so-called 'Four Dragons', have attracted wealthier people moving in, which may result in the informal eviction of the less well-off inhabitants.

6.8 The emergence of re-developed higher-class housing properties on the periphery of SSP can easily lead to the social and spatial segregation between people living in different types of quarters within the district. To be fair, the social and spatial segregation may have existed well before the emergence of ‘Four Dragons’. Traditionally, the connections and exchanges between the middle class residential areas (e.g. Yau Yat Chuen and Mei Foo Sun Chuen) and the less well-off regions (e.g. central SSP and public housing areas) have been minimal. However, the emergence of re-developed middle-class housing properties on the periphery of the district (e.g. Aqua Marine and Banyan Garden) seems to have exaggerated the segregation problem. Part of the explanation lies in the physical design of land use. The road networks in the new reclamation area, with about three lanes in each direction, can easily isolate the new private housing properties and the Hoi Lai Estate nearby from central SSP. Another reason lies in the differences in housing types, which tend to result in different lifestyles, demands and identities. Hence, the residents of ‘Four Dragons’ are apt to distance themselves from the residents of public housing and ‘tong lau’.

6.9 In line with urban decay and de-industrialization, SSP has been stricken with a range of socio-economic problems throughout the last decade. For example, in terms of monthly household income, SSP has remained the poorest from 2000 to 2010, compared with the other seventeen districts in Hong Kong.

6.10 The district of SSP has also been afflicted with serious aging problems. SSP is one of the districts having the highest ratio of old-age population (those at the age of 65 or above) in the territory. Whereas the old-age residents have constituted around 16 percent of the population of SSP throughout the last decade, the average in Hong Kong has been about 12 percent only.

6.11 SSP has a labor participation rate (59.7 percent in 2010) significantly lower than the average of Hong Kong (55 percent in 2010). This means that the fraction of labor force which cannot be absorbed by the jobs market is higher than the other districts of Hong Kong. In this aspect, again, SSP has registered either the worst or the second worst among all districts throughout the period from 2003 to 2010.

6.12 Closely related to the low rate of labor participation is the low educational level facing the residents of SSP. The educational attainment of SSP residents has continuously been one of the lowest in Hong Kong. To put statistically, 75 percent of SSP residents have attained secondary education in 2010, while the figure for Hong Kong in average for the same period is 77.7 percent. However, it is important to point out that there are an increasing proportion of SSP residents with secondary educational level in 2009 and 2010. This may be the consequence of newly-emerging middle classes who moved in those redeveloped private housing properties on the periphery of SSP.

6.13 SSP is characterized by the high concentration of new immigrants from Mainland China. New immigrants from Mainland China constitute 5.7 percent of the population of SSP, which is considerably higher than the average of 3.2 percent in Hong Kong. It is also remarkable that 9 percent of the total population of new arrivals from Mainland China are concentrated in SSP. This was the case in 2001 and 2006.

## **7. Main Findings from the Analysis of Survey and Interview Data**

By all measures, people residing in SSP should be fretful about their living standards. However, as demonstrated in our survey and similar studies conducted by other institutes, the SSP residents express a comparatively high satisfaction with their life. By drawing on a range of perspectives and concepts, this research sets out to understand their life satisfaction and the pattern of urban life in SSP as a whole.

### **7.1 Social capital**

7.1.1 It is clear that social networks are important in explaining people's perception of their life in SSP. In our questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked to state the number of friends they have in the district on the one hand. On the other hand, the

respondents were asked to state their perception of QoL. The causal relationship between the variables is eminent ( $P < 0.05$ ). In general, the respondents with greater the scope of social networks tends to have a more positive attitude towards their QoL. There is no interruption in the upward trend. The only exception rests with people who indicate the absence of any friend in the district. This exception can be explained by analyzing their interaction with the place they live and perceive.

7.1.2 The ways in which social networks affect quality of life are easily comprehensible.

For those people who are afflicted with mishaps and suffer from a great deal of stress and depression as a result, the social networks may act as a domain to which they can turn for solace and emotional support. Central to these networks are faith and trust. In this sense, a bonding network may not necessarily be less desirable than a bridging network. Homogeneity is conducive to the development of trust.

7.1.3 Besides the provision of emotional support, a social network may bring together a number of people who have the same hobby. In other words, the network may serve as a recreational group, from which people can derive a great deal of joy and pleasure.

7.1.4 SSP is a district stricken with a variety of socio-economic problems. In such regard, compared with the emergence of bonding networks, the development of

bridging networks is equally important for SSP residents to live a decent life. The evidence of our statistical data corroborates the effect of bridging networks, exemplified by the range of economic support, on how the residents perceive their life. Simply put, those respondents who are able to seek economic help from ‘many friends’ tend to hold their life in the most positive light, compared with those respondents who have either ‘no friend’ or ‘few friends’ in this respect.

7.1.5 The results of our questionnaire survey bear out the causal relationship between social cohesion and QoL. In the survey, the respondents were asked about how they feel about the social relations in SSP as a whole, along the lines of social class, age group, new immigrant and ethnicity. Their responses to four separate questions were then re-compiled to form a single index indicating their general attitude towards ‘strangers’ in the district. It is found that there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) relationship between people’s attitude towards ‘strangers’ and their life satisfaction. The overall pattern is that an increase in QoL exists alongside an increase in people’s satisfaction with the social relations in SSP as a whole.

7.1.6 Given its importance, it is pivotal to examine the general pattern of social capital in SSP. The analysis of our quantitative and qualitative evidence debunks the conventional myth that SSP is a district marked by close human touch. For example, over half of respondents (51.8 percent) reported that they have either ‘no’ or ‘few’

friends in the whole territory. By contrast, only an embarrassingly meager number of respondents (7.1 percent) considered that they have ‘many’ friends in Hong Kong. These figures suggest that the social contact of SSP residents is quite restricted.

7.1.7 For the residents of SSP, their narrow scope of territory-wide social contact is replicated at the local level – and even worse. In our questionnaire survey, as many as 60.5 percent of respondents who thought that within SSP they have either ‘no’ or ‘few’ friends. By contrast, only 5.4 percent of respondents considered that they have ‘many’ friends in the district. The number of respondents basking in a broad range of social networks at the district level is way smaller than the number of respondents being confined to a small circle of social contact.

7.1.8 At issue is not the extent but the closeness of social networks, some may argue. However, even the nature of social networks is not encouraging in SSP. Turning to the trust measures, we find that 92.7 percent and 78.9 percent of respondents claimed that they have a great deal of trust in their family members and relatives respectively. However, there are only 55.3 percent and 49 percent of respondents who respectively stated that they have a sense of trust in friends and neighbors at the district level. The lack of trust can probably dilute people’s willingness to contact friends and neighbors when they need somebody for companionship and/or bump

into troubles, which in turn cramps their ability to derive a sense of comfort and security from horizontal networks.

7.1.9 The lack of willingness to contact friends and neighbors for companionship is already evident in the results of our questionnaire survey. There are merely 36.8 percent and 8.8 percent of respondents who respectively claimed that they either ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ go out with friends in leisure times, while a remarkably higher proportion of people, notably 65.5 percent and 42.6 percent of respondents, claimed that they either ‘sometimes or ‘often’ go out with family members and relatives in leisure times.

7.1.10 The weakness of social networks is not restricted to the gloomy levels of trust and contact. It is also epitomized in the levels of support that people can obtain from their social networks. In our questionnaire survey, a mere 35.1 percent of SSP respondents indicated that they are able to seek help from others if they cannot squeeze out time for dealing with workaday issues. Among such group of respondents, the majority of support tends to come from family members (18 percent) and relatives (6.4 percent). Merely 10.1 percent and 6.9 percent of respondents indicated their ability to seek help from friends and neighbors respectively.

7.1.11 The same pattern, to some extent a bleaker pattern, applies to the situation of having bumped into intractable difficulties such as being in emergent need of financial support. In SSP, a mere 27.7 percent of respondents indicated their ability to seek help from others in face of serious problems, while 61.3 percent did not have that kind of luck. If we break down the sources of assistance, the frailty of social support base is all the more telling. As intractable difficulties occur, the majority of those who indicated that they are able to seek help would turn to family members (18.3 percent) and relatives (7.4 percent) for assistance. By contrast, there are merely 9.8 percent and 1.3 percent of respondents who respectively reported that they would have friends and neighbors to tide them over.

7.1.12 The frailty of social support base begs the question regarding why the social networks surrounding SSP residents have not grown into a more resourceful domain. The primary explanation seems to lie in the fact that their social networks remain excessively homogenous. In our questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked whether they have friends who belong to different socio-economic classes from themselves. For those who have friends in the district, nearly half of them (40.6 percent) disclosed that all of their friends come from the socio-economic background tantamount to them.

7.1.13 While both the bonding and bridging networks in the district turn out to be weak and certainly a matter of concern, people may take some solace from the overall situation of social cohesion in SSP. According to the results of our questionnaire survey, the vast majority of local residents consider that people from different classes, age groups, ethnicities and birth places can live harmoniously and amicably with each other in the district. Nevertheless, these results have to be understood with caution. It is because a considerable number of people have expressed uncertainty about the situation.

7.1.14 After breaking down and analyzing the quantitative data, it is found that a number of groups are at particular risk. The first group that warrants particular concern is the new immigrants. They have the narrowest scope of social networks, compared with the residents born in Hong Kong and the people who have already obtained Hong Kong permanent citizenship. The second group is the low income families (with household monthly income less than HKD\$6,000). Although they do not fare especially worse in terms of social networks, their trust in friends registers one of the lowest scores among different income groups. It is important to point out that the low income families and new immigrants are precisely the people who can easily be embroiled in socio-economic hardships. They tend to be in desperate need of other people's help, material and non-material alike. However, they are exactly the people who have little access to social capital inherent in the district.

7.1.15 The third group to stand out concerns the people living in ‘tong lau’ for a number of reasons. First, ‘tong lau’ is the type of accommodation highly concentrated with new immigrants, who often find it difficult to settle into the new environment of Hong Kong straightaway. Second, the ‘tong lau’ residents are conspicuous by their low educational level. Third, the ‘tong lau’ in SSP is the type of accommodation concentrated with the unemployed. Fourth, the residents of ‘tong lau’ deserve particular attention because they have to put up with an abysmal level of household income. The combination of a variety of socio-economic problems leads to the fact that social capital is of great importance to them. Paradoxically, the social capital available to them, in either the form of bonding and bridging networks, does not come in abundance.

7.1.16 Why does the social capital in SSP remain so weak? This question justifies detailed investigation. Only then will it be possible to provide useful suggestions so that the social capital and in turn the QoL in SSP can be enhanced. At the start, this research sets out to examine the paucity of social capital by focusing on the membership and type of civic associations. Quite surprisingly, the results of our questionnaire survey demonstrate the absence of any statistically significant relationship between the membership and type of civic associations on the one hand, and the development of networks, reciprocity and trust on the other.

7.1.17 Instead, the analysis of interview data suggests that the (under)development of social networks and reciprocity lies in the structure of civic associations. In particular, the civic associations that have operation in SSP tend to take a paternalistic approach to dealing with their relationship with their members, supporters and clients. The paternalistic approach denotes an attitude reminiscent of the hierarchical structure within a bureaucratic organization. The consequence of such an approach is that the members, supporters and clients can easily become dependent on the NGO leaders. They tend not to have developed any horizontal networks with other members and clients who may help them tackle the upcoming problems beyond the end of the service programs offered by the voluntary organizations involved.

7.1.18 In analyzing the structure of civic associations operating in SSP, another feature stands out. In terms of exchanging information, manpower and organizational resources, the horizontal connection between civic associations is rather weak. Despite the fact that in our elite interviews quite a few NGO leaders repeatedly stressed the existence of their close linkage with a wide range of voluntary organizations, their replies to our question regarding the external structure of their organizations smack of inconsistency. On the one hand, they stressed the importance of fostering the horizontal linkage with other groups, which may help them develop a holistic approach to socio-economic problems besieging the residents of SSP. On

the other hand, however, they equally put a great deal of emphasis on division of labor cutting across different civic associations.

7.1.19 Structural fragmentation undoubtedly hampers the development of bridging networks, which is so important in affecting people's quality of life as discussed above. Given the fissure between people with different socio-economic backgrounds, it stretches credulity to have hopes pinned on the spontaneous development of bridging networks. In whatever circumstances, external intervention is necessary. One of which is the overlapping connection between different types and forms of civic associations. People may not trust 'strangers'. Yet they have a great deal of trust (54.6 percent) on civic associations. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that the overlapping connection between various groups can set up a platform on which the bridging networks can be fostered. Alas, the structural fragmentation dims our hopes.

7.1.20 A number of reasons can be advanced to explain the organizational disarticulation. One of the reasons seems to lie in the values and beliefs inherent in civic associations. Different civic associations tend to have different values and belief as regards their operation and the problems facing the district, which in turn affects their decisions on the social groups with which they tend to have connection and cooperation.

7.1.21 The lack of financial and manpower resources is another reason why civic associations do not put in a great deal of effort bridging the boundaries between different groups and different people. In our elite interviews, a number of NGO leaders are cognizant of the need for developing cross-cutting connections. However, as they pointed out, to develop and maintain organizational connections severely taxes their already hard-pressed financial and personnel resources. After all, the result tends to be uncertain.

7.1.22 The process of resource allocation by government is likely to vitiate the intention and effort of civic associations to bridge the organizational fissures. It is because, for government, resources are normally put aside for particular target populations. To fall in line, the social service organizations and community groups also draw a mechanistic boundary singling out their target populations. Closely related to the above situation is the establishment of a market framework in the third sector. In the market framework resources are allocated through competitive processes. Competition undercuts collaboration, solidarity and mutuality. In the context of competition for resources, there is no surprise that civic associations have little incentive to cooperate, thereby hindering the development of bridging capital among local residents.

## **7.2 Social and political participation**

7.2.1 For the proper running of a community and the generation of a sense of empowerment, civic participation is important. However, generally speaking, the social and political participation in SSP is by no means high, both in absolute and comparative terms. In this research report, social and political participation refers to the level of participation in social affairs and political activities. It includes collective action to influence the decisions of the government as well as direct action to improve their own livelihood and issues of their concern.

7.2.2 In terms of non-institutional means, it is found in our questionnaire survey that signature campaign is the most popular form of public participation. This is not surprising given the low cost of participating in signature campaign. Even so, however, only 31.2 percent of the respondents said that they had participated in any signature campaign in the past year, whereas 68.5 percent of the respondents said otherwise.

7.2.3 It may be insufficient and premature to conclude the level by purely looking at the non-institutional means of participation. However, the overall pattern concerning the institutional means of participation is by no means more encouraging. The results of our survey indicate that the level of SSP residents attending the meetings of local

organizations, such as mutual aid committees and 'kai fong' associations, is not high. Around 92 percent of the respondents have never attended such meetings for the past year. Among the 3.7 percent of respondents who have managed to attend, only 0.7 percent of them often attended the meetings.

7.2.4 Likewise, about 96 percent of the respondents have never attended local consultation of government agencies for the past year. Only 1.5 percent of the respondents have sometimes or often attended those meetings. The same pattern is replicated when it comes to analyzing people's participation in meeting with Legislative Councilors and/or District Councilors. 97.9 percent and 93.9 percent of the respondents reported that they have never met with any Legislative Councilors and District Councilors respectively for the past year. All of this demonstrates that the low level of participation is not the consequence of ebbs and flows of the particular organization involved.

7.2.5 By comparison with the overall picture in Hong Kong, it is apparent that civic participation is particularly worse in SSP. For example, as high as 10 percent of Hong Kong citizens have participated in protest, but our survey shows that only 5.7 percent of the respondents have done so. The gap in participation not only exists in the non-institutional means, but also in the institutional ones. For instance, up to 10 percent of Hong Kong citizens have contacted Legislative Councilors for help and

expressing opinions. In our survey, however, merely 2.1 percent of the respondents have followed suit.

7.2.6 Again, despite the rise of e-government as a result of advancement in information technology, the overall participation of SSP residents through this channel is low in both absolute and comparative terms. In terms of e-information, a mere 31.4 percent of our respondents have accessed the government websites for information. On the other hand, another household survey found that in 2009, 58 percent of the people in Hong Kong have already done so. In terms of e-services, only 22.2 percent of our respondents have obtained services from the government through the Internet while the household survey found that 50.1 percent of the citizens in Hong Kong have done so. In terms of e-engagement, only 3.1 percent of our respondents have contacted the government through the Internet to voice out their concerns and opinions. Although there is no comparable data from the other household surveys, 3.1 percent is still a very tiny number.

7.2.7 In line with the pattern of alienation, the percentage of registered voters in SSP (about 46 percent) is lower than the overall percentage of registered voters in Hong Kong (about 60 percent). Yet surprisingly, the voting rate of the SSP respondents at the level of 56 percent is remarkably higher than the overall voting rate in the 2007 District Council election in Hong Kong (38.83 percent). The high voting rate may

be understood in the context that voter registration in SSP is relatively low. In such regard, those who did register would be more willing and determined to cast their vote.

7.2.8 Trust can be an important factor in promoting more participation. People are more willing to participate in public affairs if they trust that the authorities or organizations they are dealing with are serious and sincere in addressing their needs and concerns. Besides civic associations, the organization our respondents trust the most is the HKSAR Government (47.8 percent), followed by the LegCo (33 percent) and the District Council (34.9 percent). Political parties, however they are located in the political landscape, turn out to be the organizations of which the respondents distrust the most. All of these figures suggest that there is the absence of any organization in SSP which can integrate or mobilize the residents in a large scale.

7.2.9 What is interesting is the seemingly contradictory result about the HKSAR government. It is the most trusted organization but is also ranked among the top as one of the most distrusted organizations. It may be the case that the HKSAR government is ranked at the top because of its level of authority. However, for people who have contacts with them, their experience is not as satisfying as they expect, which explain why they are also one of the most distrusted organizations. Indeed, this situation is echoed by a number of informants in our interviews. The

distrust of government hampers people's willingness to contact government officials for help and expressing opinions.

7.2.10 Consistent with the rest of this report is the disparities in SSP. The local residents with different socio-economic backgrounds tend to manifest different levels of civic participation. In particular, the level of participation is found to be affected by the variables of education, family income and place of birth. People with higher levels of education, higher levels of household income and Hong Kong as their birth place tend to participate more in social and political affairs. As a result, it is envisaged that their sense of empowerment and identity would be higher.

### **7.3 Social Divisions in SSP**

7.3.1 It has been argued that in SSP the weakness of social capital and civic participation is a function of disarticulation between organizations (e.g. civic associations, government agencies, political parties, District Council and Legislative Council) and society on the one hand, and between the organizations themselves on the other. To venture further, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of our data demonstrates that there is a number of structural factors leading to the divisions and even tensions within the district of SSP. The structural analysis revolves around the effect of

socio-economic variables and housing types on social capital, civic participation and social conflicts.

7.3.2 In our survey, the respondents were asked how many friends they have in Hong Kong as a whole and in SSP in particular. With regard to Hong Kong as a whole, the scope of social networks available to ‘tong lau’ residents and public housing residents is similar to that of private housing residents. However, when it comes to SSP in particular, the cohorts of ‘tong lau’ and public housing have relatively denser social networks than the cohort of private housing. In other words, the newly-emerging middle classes in SSP seem like a self-contained community. They have yet been integrated into the district to a large extent.

7.3.3 Overall speaking, the level of social participation is low in SSP. However, our survey data shows that the SSP residents of different housing types have different patterns of social participation. Compared with public housing dwellers and ‘tong lau’ residents, private housing dwellers are more likely to be members of civic associations. For private housing dwellers, 14.0 percent of respondents said that they had been associational members, while merely 8.8 percent of public housing residents and 6.9 percent of ‘tong lau’ residents said so.

7.3.4 The same pattern applies to political participation. Generally speaking, the level of political participation is low in SSP, in both absolute and comparative terms. However, the local residents with different socio-economic backgrounds manifest different levels of political participation. In short, the higher the income level and educational level of the respondents, the higher rate of participation in political activities. By the same token, the new immigrants who have not resided in Hong Kong for a full seven-year time are rather passive in terms of political participation.

7.3.5 According to the results of our survey, it is clear that political participation is associated with trust in government. The deeper the mistrust of government, the higher the participation rate in political activities. Trust in government is important.

7.3.6 That said, it is important to point out that behind the trust the socio-economic factors and housing types tend to be the driving forces. In other words, trust in government varies alongside the variables of income, education and housing type. The SSP residents tend not to trust the government if they have a higher level of income and educational attainment. To some surprise, the 'tong lau' residents have the lowest level of trust in government, compared with the residents of other housing types, although they tend to have low educational and income levels. This shows that the socio-economic features and housing types are two different concepts, thereby leading to different patterns of urban life in SSP.

7.3.7 Despite the fact that the ‘tong lau’ residents tend to distrust the government, they are not active in participating in political affairs. This is the case probably because they have a weak sense of political efficacy. Our interview data shows that quite a number of ‘tong lau’ residents do not believe their ability to change their predicament by their own. Nor do they consider that the government would make the move to accommodate their needs. They see no alternative but to put up with the current situation.

7.3.8 Respondents of the questionnaire survey manifest a high sense of belonging to the community of SSP. Nearly half of them indicate a medium level of attachment to the community, while about one-third of them have a strong attachment. Besides the rather high sense of community identity, our survey data demonstrates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the sense of community identity and the perception of QoL. Those residents who have a low sense of belonging to SSP tend to have a low degree of life satisfaction.

7.3.9 Community identity is strong in SSP. It is important to note, however, that the concept of ‘community’ carries different meanings to different people, especially across the line of housing type. It is common for the local residents to associate SSP with poverty. Given this connotation, 33 percent and 53.9 percent of the survey respondents consider that the ‘Four Dragons’ and Mei Foo Shu Cheun are not part

of the district respectively, although they actually are component parts of the district according to the administrative district demarcation. In return, the residents of ‘Four Dragons’ tend not to identify themselves with the central SSP, because the appearance and economic activities of central SSP are vastly different to those of the ‘Four Dragons’, according to our informants in focus group interviews. In short, community identity may help enhancing QoL. Yet community identity does not have the same magical effect when it comes to social integration as long as different people tend to have their own boundaries of community.

7.3.10 Even worse, there are potential conflicts between the SSP residents who live in different types of housing. According to our interview data, dwellers of the ‘Four Dragons’ and Hoi Lai Estate may come into minor conflicts due to their different lifestyles. It is like the residents of ‘Four Dragons’ tend to approach District Councilors, complaining that the Hoi Lai Estate residents often dry clothing in public areas. Meanwhile, the major confrontation seems to exist as a result of their different demands and interests in terms of land use. The controversy over the development of NWKR Site 6 is an illustrative case.

#### **7.4 Place and Urban Life**

This section explicates the relationship between the places of SSP and the ways of life that the residents lead in the urban community. The major findings are as follows:

- 7.4.1 The SSP residents derive satisfaction from the places of the district, especially the central market place, in their urban lives, because the places facilitate the provision of low costs of living, and are freely accessible to them.
- 7.4.2 The lower-class people of SSP are more dependent on the central market place for satisfying their basic daily needs (purchasing daily accessories, having leisure and entertainment).
- 7.4.3 Due to their reliance on Central SSP in satisfying their basic needs, people of the less privileged groups living in the peripheral regions of the district are frustrated with the deficient transportation linkages between the regions they dwell and the central market place.
- 7.4.4 Tong Lau residents are discontented with the community environment of SSP. Yet, there are still ample of reasons for them to settle down in the district, e.g. low living costs, convenient transportation, etc.
- 7.4.5 Because of their dependence on the vernacular places of SSP in satisfying their daily needs, residents of SSP identify most with landmarks that are closely related to their daily lives.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Weakening Social Capital**

8.1.1 Social capital and civic associations in SSP are not as strong as expected. The reshuffling of residency, coupled with the inflow of new immigrants and new middle class, means that the pre-existing neighborhood has been waning. The social fabrics in SSP do not manifest a high degree of networks and trust as expected. Social contact of SSP residents is quite restricted district-wide and territory-wide. Trust still remains within core and extended family while trust in friends and neighbors is comparatively weak.

8.1.2 Our study demonstrates the positive function of social capital and civic association on perceptions of QoL in SSP. People with greater scopes of social networks, in the forms of bonding and bridging alike, tend to have a more positive attitude towards their QoL. Moreover, increase in QoL exists alongside an increase in people's satisfaction with the social relations in SSP as a whole.

8.1.3 Bonding social capital, according to our finding, provides emotional support, comfort and joy. Trust can be easily developed among this homogenous network.

However, bonding social capital is generally weak in the district of SSP. The same pattern applies to bridging capital, in that social support networks in SSP do not operate any better than those in TSW. Social networks for residents of SSP remain excessively homogenous. In other words, the bridging type of networks is weak in the district, which makes it difficult for local residents to tap into the resources inherent in the classes different to them.

8.1.4 Though all residents in SSP do not have strong social capital, some particular vulnerable groups have even weaker networks than the average which may need our attention. New immigrants have the narrowest scope of social networks. Low income families have the lowest social trust in friends. For the ‘tong lau’ residents, the bridging type of social capital is in particular short supply.

8.1.5 Civic associations have major pitfalls, structurally and operationally, and these drawbacks scupper their effort in fostering social capital in the district. In particular, the civic associations in SSP tend to adopt the paternalistic approach to dealing with their members, supporters and clients. As a result, the members and clients do not have the willingness and ability to develop horizontal networks among themselves, which can sustain after the end of a particular service program. In addition, there often seems to be a structural disarticulation between civic associations. Part of the explanation lies in the market framework used for resource allocation. With such organizational fragmentation, any effort to foster bridging capital can easily be upset

in the applearcort. Most importantly, the organizational fragmentation dents the hope that social assets enshrined in the newly-emerging middle class can be transferred and complementary to the worse-off in the district.

## **8.2 Recommendations to Strengthen Social capital**

8.2.1 To rebuild and strengthen the bonding social capital is one of the major strategies.

More specifically, it is suggested to extend emotional support from family to friends and neighbors by promoting self-help & mutual-help activities and groups like elderly volunteer groups, single parent groups and neighbor-watch programs. Adequate funding and place should be set up to encourage civic associations to initiate more self-help and mutual-help activities.

8.2.2 As face-to-face interaction is one of the most important elements to create trust, the Government should provide more public space in SSP like small gardens and covered playgrounds in order to facilitate more gathering and then informal interactions among the SSP residents. The town planning should give priority to this public space on top of residential or commercial areas.

8.2.3 To enhance the bridging capital is the other strategy central to our recommendations. Bridging social capital can be built up naturally and easily in economic exchange activities covering a wide range of different classes. The

Government and the District Council can support old and new community economic projects like second-hand shops and consumer cooperatives for green products to facilitate cross-housing class exchanges and interaction.

8.2.4 External intervention in the form of voluntary organizations is required for the local residents to come together, which provides a platform for social capital to develop and sustain. However, in view of organizational fragmentation, the promotion of civic associations may not be sufficient in developing bridging social capital. In such regard, it is suggested to establish new initiatives in addition to the existing District Level Community Development, by employing social workers of NGOs to fill in the gap of the structural holes between civic associations as well as between different classes, ethnicities and communities.

8.2.5 For the development of bridging social capital, we suggest a “Residents Space” model. The key idea of the “Residents’ Space (RS)” is that it is not simply another community “centre”, which just focuses on organized groups and organized activities. Nor is it another “community hall” which provides meeting rooms or sport venues. Our concept of a RS is a mix of the Pei Ho Street Market and Dragon Centre (i.e. the combination of wet market, sports facilities, free air-conditioned space, open space, small shops and stalls), which will be turned into the most representative “landmark” for the residents in SSP. The function of the space is to provide meeting place, information channels and a place of various attractions.

Community halls and community centers can be redeveloped along the RS model and to be managed and used by local people.

### **8.3 Widening Socio-Spatial Divisions**

8.3.1 SSP is a heterogeneous and fragmented district. It is true that in SSP social capital and civic participation are low in both absolute and comparative terms. This is the general pattern of urban life in the district. However, it is important to point out that social capital and civic participation are also a function of socio-economic features and housing types. The SSP residents who are better educated and well-paid tend to participate more in social and political activities.

8.3.2 In terms of housing type, it is clear that the region of “Four Dragons”, as the opposite extreme to “tong lau” residents in the socio-spatial division, is a protected and exclusionary enclave. It has a clearly-defined boundary in the outskirts of SSP and strict security as a physical means of exclusion. It is also a self-contained community that further diminishes its external contact. The gentrified appearance of the “Four Dragons” is a social means of exclusion that alienate its neighborhoods. Inadequacy of public facilities is a common concern of the “Four Dragons” and Hoi Lai Estate dwellers, but inter-classes and inter-communities connections are notably rare in that cluster.

#### **8.4 Recommendations to Narrow Socio-Spatial Divisions**

8.4.1 A coherence and solidarity of community image can, to some extent, alleviate the fragmentation and disparity among the residents in SSP. The attachment to community can be improved by an asset-based and strength-based perspective in studying and understanding the people living in SSP, which rectifies the limitation of the traditional problem-based and need-based approach. Likewise, it is important to promote the appreciation of the local characteristics and culture, which can be facilitated by local cultural and heritage tour, oral history projects as well as setting up a local museum.

8.4.2 Recreational facilities that suit the needs of the residents of SSP should be provided. More indoor playgrounds modeled after the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor of Pei Ho Street Municipal Services Building should be built in the district so that the deprived groups, especially those dwelling in the cramped ‘tong lau’ suites can spend their leisure time in the air-conditioned, pleasant environment.

8.4.3 In central SSP, public facilities like community library, children playground and small park can be built not only to fulfill the leisure and recreational need of the residents, but also to provide public space and ambience to enhance inter-classes and inter-communities interactions and connections.

8.4.4 Staff of the Home Affairs Department may organize more area-wise activities and events to facilitate connections between the NGOs in the Hoi Lai Estate and the Home Owners' Committee of the Four Dragons so that the bridging type of social capital can be fostered.

## **8.5 Recommendations on Land Use**

8.5.1 The lower housing class residents (i.e. public housing and 'tong lau' residents) tend to be dependent on central SSP for purchasing daily accessories more than the higher housing class people (i.e. private housing residents) do. People from the lower housing class (i.e. 'tong lau' and public housing residents), because of their lower physical mobility and weaker connection with other districts, show lower tendency to purchase daily accessories and have the needs for leisure and entertainment satisfied outside SSP.

8.5.2 As the residents of SSP are dependent on the central SSP in satisfying their basic daily needs, special care should be taken in implementing urban renewal. If possible, no major reconstruction should be carried out in the central part of SSP, because it would have grave effect on the place of SSP and hence the lives of the less privileged people.

8.5.3 The "gentrification" process and rise of land rent would push the urban poor out

of SSP and they can no longer enjoy living in the city hub which is well connected by public transportation. As the rent of land may probably shove up alongside any large scale reconstruction, the market place now selling daily accessories at low prices is unlikely to be sustained easily. Street life in SSP will be undermined following the restructuring of flea markets. Hence, we recommend a “Renewal” rather than a “Demolish and Rebuild” strategy for urban renewal projects in central SSP, which underpins the common image of SSP and the livable environment to sustain people’s livelihood.

8.5.4 In view of the importance of central SSP for the residents throughout the district, it is suggested to strengthen the transport system within the district. Transportation linking up the peripheral regions of the district, notably the Hoi Lai Estate, Fu Cheong Estate, Shek Kip Mei Estate, Pak Tin Estate and Chak On Estate, with the central part of SSP has to be improved. Meanwhile, the fares should be kept at an affordable level.

