Hong Kong Today
Public Housing – Improvement in Quality of Life
[Student notes]
Lesson 1: Public Housing – Improvement in Quality of Life

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Major teaching areas

**Liberal Studies: Module 2 Hong Kong Today**

- Theme 1: Quality of life
- Theme 2: Rule of law and socio-political participation

Related teaching areas

**Liberal Studies: Module 6 Energy Technology and Environment**

- Theme 2: The environment and sustainable development

Interdisciplinarity teaching areas

**Design and Applied Technology:**

- Strand 1 Design and Innovation
- Strand 3 Value and Impact

Learning objectives

- To understand the need for public housing in Hong Kong
- To understand the development of public housing block design as it relates to social needs and economic growth
- To learn the Government’s public housing policy
- To evaluate public housing conditions in Hong Kong

Learning plan

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</table>
| Lesson 1 History of Public Housing in Hong Kong | • 1.1 Principles of public housing  
• 1.2 Needs for public housing in Hong Kong  
• 1.3 Building design of a public residential block  
• 1.4 The new generation of public housing design |
| Class activity Debate on public housing amongst stakeholders | • Discuss various concerns related to public housing through role play  
• Summarize views raised by different parties during role play as conclusion of the topic |
Lesson 1
Public Housing – Improvement in Quality of Life

1.1 Public housing to provide affordable living

Public housing provides affordable living places for the lower to middle income portion of the population. In Hong Kong, it is usually constructed by the Hong Kong Housing Authority for non-profit purposes and is rented at a subsidized price.

“Hong Kong’s public housing programme dates back to the 1950s. It has been addressing the housing needs of low-income families for over half a century and has contributed to the city’s social cohesion and stability.”
— Hong Kong Housing Authority

1.2 Public housing to meet population explosion

1.2.1 What happened in the 1940s and 1950s?

By 1951, the population had grown to over 2 million.

1945

1949

1953
1.2.2 How did people live in the 1950s?

[Discussion]

1. What did the Government do to help these homeless and lower income people?
1.2.3 The Hong Kong Housing Authority

Beginning in 1954, two government organizations — the Resettlement Department and the former Housing Authority — worked together on public housing projects for nearly 20 years.

In 1973, a new Housing Authority and a unified Housing Department were established to replace the earlier fragmented groups under a new Housing Ordinance. The Housing Department become the executive arm of the Hong Kong Housing Authority, which is a statutory organisation tasked with developing and implementing a public housing programme to help the Government achieve its policy objectives for public housing.

Public housing sites are government land. The Housing Authority is exempted from the statutory process of the Buildings Ordinance for the execution of public housing projects.

Vision
- To help all families in need to gain access to adequate and affordable housing

Mission
- To provide affordable quality housing, management, maintenance and other housing related services in a proactive and caring manner
- To utilise public resources on a cost-effective and rational base
- To execute housing policies as a competent, dedicated and performance-oriented team
(Source: Housing Authority & ‘Fifty Years of Public Housing in Hong Kong’, 2003)

1.2.4 The Hong Kong Housing Society

The Hong Kong Housing Society is a non-government and non-profit housing organization established in 1948 and incorporated by ‘Hong Kong Ordinance Chapter 1059’ in 1951. The Housing Society provides complementary housing through a number of its own innovative schemes. As a partner of the Government, the Housing Society builds self-contained homes for the people in need at non-prohibitive rates.

Vision
- To serve the needs of the Hong Kong community in housing and related services
- To put customer, quality, talent and prudence as the core values

Mission
- To provide and innovate a world-class housing solution with leadership in quality, value for money and management
(Source: Hong Kong Housing Society)

Verbana Height in Tseung Kwan O is a public housing estate built by the Housing Society.
1.3 Public housing to meet changing society

From the 1950s to 1980s, there were generations of building designs for resettlement and rental residential blocks: Mark I to Mark VI, twin tower, slab block, cruciform and H block. Starting from the 1980s, rental residential blocks were built in the trident “Harmony” and “Concord” styles. Building design was further improved to provide sustainable, healthy and safe living environments in 2000.

With reference to teacher’s instruction, please state the architectural characteristics related to each housing type.

1.3.1 Functional Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Architectural layout</th>
<th>Living conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Since 1954 | Mark I Residential Block      | • How do occupants access to their flats?  
• What facility is provided within each domestic unit? | • How are the living conditions and hygiene?  
• What amenities are provided within the estate?  
• Are there any community facilities? |

© Hong Kong Housing Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late 1950s</th>
<th>Mark II Residential Block</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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© Hong Kong Housing Authority
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Architectural characteristics</th>
<th>Living conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early 1960</td>
<td>Mark III Residential Block</td>
<td>![Mark III Residential Block](© Hong Kong Housing Authority)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1960</td>
<td>Mark IV Residential Block</td>
<td>![Mark IV Residential Block](© Hong Kong Housing Authority)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1960</td>
<td>Mark V Residential Block</td>
<td>![Mark V Residential Block](© Hong Kong Housing Authority)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1960</td>
<td>Mark VI Residential Block</td>
<td>![Mark VI Residential Block](© Hong Kong Housing Authority)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What were the historical events, or social and economic changes that triggered the evolution of public housing since 1954?

- Wah Fu Estate was completed in 1971. The buildings were built in slab-shaped and twin-tower residential block design.
- It was the first public housing estate promoting self-contained community in Hong Kong.
- It contained a shopping arcade, schools, bus terminals and other amenities.
## 1.4 The New Generation of Public Housing in Hong Kong

### 1.4.1 Design for Quality

The single-room concept of the past three decades was replaced by multi-room residential units. Public housing design has become more site-specific since the late 1980s, with a focus on providing natural lighting and cross-ventilation. With reference to teacher’s instruction, please state the architectural characteristics related to each housing type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Architectural characteristics</th>
<th>Living conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Twin Tower</td>
<td>• How does the type accommodate different kinds of site and users?</td>
<td>• How are the living conditions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How is the efficiency of the construction improved?</td>
<td>• Is there any public space?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Harmony block</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How is the provision of public facilities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How is the indoor and outdoor environment of the estate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Concord block</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4.2 Humanistic, Functional and Cost-effective Design

Site-specific Style since the 2000s

In the first decade of the 21st century, the Hong Kong Housing Authority developed a new design strategy, adopting a modular flat and site-specific design for public customization in public rental housing to assure quality, cost effectiveness, consistency and suitability in core standards. Principles include

- making the best use of valuable land resources,
- substantive improvement to the built environment,
- buildability,
- cost effectiveness,
- user-friendliness,
- adopting findings from Resident Surveys.

Example: Redevelopment of Upper and Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate

(Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority)

[Discussion]

1. Please state the pros and cons of this Modular Flat Design.

The redeveloped Upper Ngau Tau Kok Estate:

1. Overall master planning
2. Outdoor open space
3. Universal design of flats for elderly
Summary

The Housing Authority aims at providing affordable and pleasant housing to lower and middle income people. The idea of providing public housing started in the 1950s due to a population boom. Over the past decades, living quality has been gradually improved in public housing through evolving design for residential blocks.

Key words

Hong Kong Housing Authority
Hong Kong Housing Society
Squatter settlement
Public housing estate
Resettlement residential block
Sustainable design
Universal design

Further reading

1. Website of the Hong Kong Housing Authority
2. Website of Hong Kong Housing Society
   www.hkhs.com
3. Website of the Hong Kong Planning and Infrastructure Exhibition Gallery
4. Website of Housing & Development Board, Singapore Government
   http://www.hdb.gov.sg
Class Activity:
Debate on Housing Issues in Hong Kong

Suggested flow
Assign students to role play as follows. Referring to the government policy on public housing, three groups of stakeholders of housing issues in Hong Kong will explain their rationale and opinions on the construction of public housing and justify their suggestions.

The rest of the class will act as the jury, judging and evaluating the debate on the housing policy. The jury will comment on the points of view of different stakeholders and give suggestions on public housing policy after reviewing the pros and cons proposed by different stakeholders.

Divide the class into four groups:

Representatives of the Housing Authority (3 students)
- one representing an architect
- two representing policy makers

Tenants of the PRH flats (3 students)
- one representing a low-income retired person
- one representing a family with increasing household income
- one representing a family that wish to own their home

Applicants awaiting for the PRH flat allocation (3 students)
- one representing a low-income retired person living in a cage home
- one representing a family of 5 living in a sub-divided unit
- one representing a person who wants to own his/her own flat but his/her income slightly exceeds the prescribed limit for PRH flat

Jury (the rest of the class)
- commenting on their points of view from the three groups of stakeholders
- suggesting what public housing policy should be made

▼ Old Ngau Tau Kok public housing estate
A Profile of Hong Kong’s Public Housing Policy

In 1961, the Government Low-Cost Housing Programme was implemented.

In 1976, the Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) was introduced to encourage lower-income families and Public Rental Housing (PRH) tenants to acquire their own homes. In 1978, the Private Sector Participation Scheme (PSPS) was introduced to speed up the building process for HOS.

In 1987, the Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS) was introduced for the development of housing until 2001, aiming at
- increasing private home ownership;
- satisfying and shortening the waiting list for PRH flats; and
- redeveloping resettlement estates and old-style housing estates.

In 1988, the Home Purchase Loan Scheme was launched to assist eligible families in acquiring home ownership in the private market.

In 1996, the Policy on Safeguarding Rational Allocation of Public Housing Resources was introduced, whereby well-off tenants would be required to pay market rents or even vacate their PRH flats.

In 1998, the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) was launched to allow tenants to purchase the PRH flat they were living in at a very affordable price.

In 1999, the Buy or Rent Option was introduced to facilitate applicants on the PRH Waiting List to acquire early home ownership.

In 2002, the Housing Authority announced that it would cease the production and sale of HOS and PSPS flats from 2003 onwards, and would terminate the TPS after the launch of the Phase 6 sale.

Mission statement of the Hong Kong Housing Authority:
- To provide affordable quality housing, management, maintenance and other housing-related services in a proactive and caring manner
- To utilise public resources on a cost-effective and rational base
- To execute housing policies as a competent, dedicated and performance-oriented team

In 2003, the Home Assistance Load Scheme was launched to replace the Home Purchase Load Scheme of the Housing Authority and the Home Starter Load Scheme of the Housing Society.

In 2004, the Home Assistance Loan Scheme was terminated.

In 2007, a new rent adjustment mechanism for PRH was established based on changes in the household income of tenants. Shek Kip Mei redevelopment project was the first public housing estate that adopted Universal Design for elderly tenants. Environmental sustainability is also beginning to be addressed.

(Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority website)
My role in making public housing policy

My role is

My main concern on housing policy is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal design</th>
<th>Elderly</th>
<th>Barrier-free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Sustainable Design</td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

My comments on different roles making public housing policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Points of view</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of the Housing Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jury</td>
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Public Housing in Singapore

The Housing & Development Board (HDB) was set up on 1 February 1960, during a housing crisis. At that time, many were living in unhygienic slums and crowded squatter settlements. Only 9 percent of Singaporeans lived in government flats.

Taking over from its predecessor, the Singapore Improvement Trust, HDB was tasked with solving the nation’s housing crisis. HDB built 21,000 flats in less than three years. By 1965, it had built 54,000 flats and within 10 years of its formation the board had successfully resolved the housing problem. Today, about 82 percent of Singaporeans live in HDB flats. Singapore’s public-housing policy is based on three important fundamentals:

Firstly, the concept of a sole agency in charge of public housing enabled more effective resource planning and allocation. This concept made it possible for HDB to secure land, raw materials and manpower for large-scale construction to optimize results and achieve economies of scale.

Secondly, a holistic approach to housing was adopted, from planning and design to land assembly and construction. The overall housing policy was viewed as a comprehensive strategy through allocation, management and maintenance.

Lastly, strong government support in the form of political and financial commitment and legislation helped put the early public housing programme on the right track to housing the nation.

(Source: Housing & Development Board, 2012)

[External reference]

Housing & Development Board, Singapore — Public housing history and typology in Singapore