

Environmental Sustainability of Hong Kong and the Region: Challenges and Opportunities

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This paper describes the changing role of Hong Kong in the region and outlines the environmental sustainability issues that have arisen. It also examines how Hong Kong can rise to meet with these challenges and turn them into opportunities. The main points are as follows:

1) The regional context

- a) The last decade has witnessed an increasing integration of Hong Kong with the neighboring Pearl River Delta Region (PRD) and Mainland China. There is as yet little coordination in urban development and infrastructure building between Hong Kong and the neighboring region resulting in duplication of efforts and resources.
- b) The phenomenal economic growth has resulted in a spatial displacement and differentiation process with Hong Kong changing her role from a production-based to a service-based economy.
- c) This spatial development pattern has decoupled economic production with environmental costs and disconnected the consumers from producers.

2) Environmental Challenges

- a) Future development of the region will be constrained by the limited land, water and ecological resources and deteriorating water and air quality. They have already brought about significant health impacts as well as economic and business losses.
- b) Many of the environmental problems are cross-boundary in space, cross-media in form and interlocked in nature. The air quality issue, for instance, is interwoven with increasing energy demand, escalating use of private transport and shifting industrial base in the region.
- c) The demand for environmental quality is driven not only by increasing affluence but also by external forces such as trade liberalization, green protectionism and globalization.
- d) China is not unaware of the problems and has responded positively to international calls to reduce green house gas emission and is scrutinizing her development programs, energy efficiency

opportunities and resource scarcity issue to assure long-term sustainability.

3) Hong Kong’s Obligation

- a) Hong Kong contributes to the problems in the region through her investment in the PRD and consumption of various environmental and ecological resources taken from the region.
- b) Hong Kong can be part of the solution through promotion of clean production technologies and exerting her influence down the supply chain.

4) Turning Challenges into Opportunities

- a) To maintain the competitive advantage, Hong Kong and the neighboring region have to attune to the changing ecological demand of the international market and to differentiate their products in terms of quality and image.
- b) Embracing the concept of sustainability fosters partnership with neighbors and opens business opportunities.
- c) Accordingly, it is high time for Hong Kong to:
 - i) Envision becoming the model green city of the region
 - ii) Embrace a new paradigm of growth that accords priority to the quality of life
 - iii) Facilitate development of innovative technologies and knowledge economy