

Developing Hong Kong's creative industries – An action-oriented strategy
Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce
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Introduction

1. In the 2003 Policy Address Chief Executive Mr Tung Chee Hwa stated that the SAR government would “inject a new dimension and vigour into our economy by actively promoting creative industries” (para 19). To that end, “the Secretary for Home Affairs, the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology, and relevant bureaux and departments will work together to devise a concrete plan and create the necessary favourable environment to promote and facilitate the development of these creative industries.”
2. “Creative industries” embody a wide array of activities – the Policy Address names the performing arts, film and television, publishing, art and antique markets, music, architecture, advertising, digital entertainment, computer software development, animation production, and fashion and product design. Already the government has committed to implement new initiatives to help the film and fashion design industries, but a coherent strategy to promote creative industries as a whole is still wanting.
3. In developing such a strategy, one must be wary of the instinct to “throw money at the problem” by considering another government fund. A venture-capital type fund from the private sector would no doubt boost the sector but our feeling is that the time has not yet come; the private sector fund providers are not ready yet and arm-twisting them now would be counter-productive.
4. In our view, what is needed now is not vision – which has already been clearly articulated by the Chief Executive – but a coherent strategy supported by a package of concrete actions. This paper is to contribute the HKGCC's thinking into the formulation of an action-oriented strategy to promote creative industries.

Institution building: establishing a focal point

5. Many different organisations are promoting various aspects of creative industries in some way. Collectively, they should serve two major functions:
 - *Advocacy*: strong think-tank capability and lobbying skills.
 - *Promotion*: to publicise the creative industries and to help practitioners seek opportunities for business and for further development.
6. In the case of the business sector, the HKGCC is an example of an organisation that takes up a leadership role in both advocacy and promotion. There are numerous other groups which take on the respective roles in one way or another, for example, the Trade Development Council is a promotional body, while the Employers Federation acts more as an advocacy group.
7. Likewise, for the creative industries, already a number of organisations are each serving their respective constituents; for instance, the Hong Kong Institute of

Contemporary Culture sometimes acts as a think-tank, while the Art Development Council undertakes some promotional tasks. There should be a programme to strengthen the capacity of these groups so as to help them function better.

8. Nevertheless, currently no single body is representative of creative industries as a whole. A focal point needs to be established to engage various stakeholders in a productive dialogue, so as to achieve consensus over strategy.

9. Should this body be an informal (albeit high-level) coordinating task force, like the coordinating group of the nine professions (the predecessor to the Hong Kong Coalition of Professional Services), or an adequately-resourced promotional agency with a well-defined mission, such as Creative Business Network in the UK? We are inclined to support the latter, which should be launched as a joint venture between government and the business sector; however, we draw no conclusion yet and we remain open-minded.

10. Whatever model is adopted, the key is for clear leadership to be displayed. An important mark of leadership is to have a clear vision and strategy, and an actionable plan. Below are some ideas on a possible package of actions.

Brand-name projects

11. Any initiative to promote creative industries will have to materialise in the form of some events and activities. It will be particularly useful to develop representative “brand-name projects”. Two types of such activities can be contemplated.

(a) *Big conference.* A major conference can be organised as an event to draw together stakeholders and the wider community.

- A conference is a very appropriate means to launch a new initiative. What is needed is not a one-off event, but a more lasting forum which is recognised as the representative event for the creative industries. Thus it should be different from the ideas-seminar currently being organised by the CPU.
- That conference should be a “signature event” for the creative industries. It will have to be very well prepared if it were not to become a one-off. The UK’s Creative Conference could be one useful model for reference. It could be held once a year or once every two years.
- The ambition should be for Hong Kong to develop this event into “Asia’s creative industries conference”.

(b) *Flagship projects.* Singapore is developing “MediaLab” as one of her showcase projects for creative industries. Hong Kong should have our own flagships. These do not have to be created anew; instead they can be built upon some existing projects.

- i. The West Kowloon art and cultural district can be promoted well in advance, to heighten expectation. However, it will take many years to materialise, so other flagships with more immediate results should also be developed.
- ii. A possibility is to assist the newly created Design Centre to become a renowned institution among similar organisations in Asia. There is much motivation and drive among practitioners to help the Design Centre excel,

and this should be leveraged upon. A more ambitious strategic plan and a marketing plan for the Design Centre would be a good first step. Another possible project is to build upon the Cattle Depot Art Village and to “take it to a higher level”, making it a unique icon of Hong Kong.

The Cattle Depot Art Village

In the short time since it was established, the Cattle Depot Art Village is already making tremendous contributions to Hong Kong’s creative industries. But it is not yet “mature” as an institutional of truly territorial standing, and much less in the wider regional and global scene. Its development is constrained by a number of factors:

- The connection between the artists and the public, whether local or the wider community, is not strong. There is little identification yet of the Art Village as a significant attraction of Hong Kong.
- The artists there experience the same lack of support in development and outreach, which is shared by the wider art community.
- The Cattle Depot’s heritage value has not been leveraged upon, making it little different from, say, an unused industrial building allocated to artists.
- Apart from a few occasional events, there is no public activity in the Cattle Depot, thus further detaching from the community.
- There is little room for expansion in future.

However, the problems are not insurmountable. Given that the Cattle Depot houses a major agglomeration of creative industries practitioners, there is potential to develop it into an icon of high standing in Hong Kong.

- The art administrators should be engaged in a capacity-building programme to support the artists. This should include training in administration, marketing and management, as well as a possible institution-building programme – a commune system, or a corporatisation programme – to enhance solidarity and develop commercial interest.
- More events involving the artists and the community should be organised. For example, the French Chamber of Commerce recently hosted a seminar in the Art Village entitled “Hong Kong, A Cultural World City?”, which was very well received by the international business community.
- In Macau, the Amah House art village is marketed as a tourist destination. The Cattle Depot should have the capability to be as attractive, if not more. The Hong Kong Tourism Board should be involved in an appropriate programme to bring tourists there.
- For future development, the Cattle Depot should establish itself as an anchor supported by branches elsewhere in the territory. A good prospective resource is the impending re-development of the tenement blocks opposite the Cattle Depot by the Urban Renewal Authority. Besides residential and commercial development, there will be opportunities for communal and social activities. Such activities could be integrated with the Cattle Depot, so that the “social space” across the street becomes a de facto extension of the Art Village. Close coordination with the URA will be required to bring that about.

Regular programmes

13. Big events aside, the creative industries initiative should be supported by a series of regular programmes. Already many activities are being organised by individual sectors on their own, but the challenge is to coordinate and sustain these activities to build up a cumulative impact. This, again, highlights the need for a body to act as focal point to lead the initiative and coordinate efforts.

14. The following are some ideas for these programmes:

- i. A job-placement scheme for individual creative industries practitioners, such as artists and designers, to undertake small-scale jobs required by the

- business or public sectors. The Design Centre could be invited to administer this project.
- ii. A public art initiative with the District Councils.
 - iii. Blending in with the “local industries” 本土經濟 initiative. Creative industries can be made a theme in all related schemes, e.g. establishing a “creative industries corner” with an emphasis is on creativity, district character and local context. The support and involvement of NGOs from “the third sector” should also be sought.
 - iv. Promoting creative industries to youngsters, starting with the “C Generation” workshop on creative industries organised by the Home Affairs Bureau.
 - v. External promotion: There is not yet any overseas outreach programme for our creative industries. A useful first step would be to arrange an informal roundtable discussion with the following:
 - Trade Development Council, for export promotion;
 - Invest HK, for “reputation” promotion;
 - Hong Kong Tourism Board, for promotion to tourists.

Promoting local public art

A programme can be devised to involve the local community, through District Councils, to promote public art. Such a project can integrate art promotion with local community development, environmental improvement, heritage promotion, culture and youth development, thus killing several birds with one stone.

- District Council resources can be utilised in promoting creative talents, thus reducing the pressure on government resources.
- As community-based activities, the promotion of creative industries will have solid grassroots backing.
- Opportunities will be provided for artists, designers, performers and other creative talents, especially individual practitioners and small groups.
- Activities of different districts should be coordinated but there is no requirement for uniformity. Instead each district should be encouraged to be innovative and to employ creative talents to reinforce their unique district character.
- One example of such a programme would be to create a nature and heritage trail in every district, to promote culture and sustainable development. The implementation of these local trails will offer many opportunities for small projects employing creative industries.

Development projects

15. Individual sectors of the creative industries should be encouraged to plan and execute their own development programmes, making use of existing funding schemes such as that of the Art Development Council, the SME Development Fund, and the Community Development Fund. The bureaucracy around these funding schemes may present an obstacle, hence it is important to have a champion for creative industries among the various funding departments, to lobby for the inclusion of the “creative industries” concept in the funding guidelines of these schemes.

16. For the longer term, a major groundwork required is to define the needs and identify opportunities and challenges for the sector as a whole. Besides the current study by the Central Policy Unit, a full-scale research is needed on the market opportunities, the needs of the respective sectors, the role of different stakeholder groups.