Fung Scholars Network Newsletter

27

Thinking About Sustainability in Systems

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Thinking About Sustainability in Systems

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Letter from the Editor

Too often, efforts to address sustainability focus on isolated problems rather than the larger systems in which they exist. Yet the world is interconnected: people, institutions, policies, businesses, technological advancements, and infrastructure all shape one another. Low-tech approaches and shifts in social practices can be equally, if not more, consequential than technological interventions in advancing sustainability goals. How might thinking in systems enable us to move toward a more sustainable future?

As Fung Scholars, we bring together a unique richness of global perspectives across disciplines and professions. The ambition of this issue of the Fung Scholars Newsletter is to collect examples of how understanding sustainability as a system of interconnected decisions can help us identify networked solutions. The contributions to this issue can be divided into two broad categories: the design of things and the design of behavior.

The design of things examines sustainability across scales, from the object to the planet. Wesam Al Asali explores the social history of craft as an alternative to engineered solutions; I argue for the importance of distributed networks of social infrastructure for a sustainable urbanism; Jie Feng stresses that urban regeneration should preserve existing social connections rather than treat the city as a tabula rasa; Ella Liang draws a connection between tourism, economic well-being, and the prevention of illegal mining; and Dr. Lai-Ha Chan examines the challenges of the international governance of deep-sea mining.

The design of behavior considers how changes in individual and collective practices contribute to more sustainable systems. Amy Lee examines how institutional decision-making can be improved by strengthening individual agency; Zoi Lau questions the sustainability of contemporary design workplaces; Joscelin Yeung uses improv to raise awareness of the unequal impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities; Leann Wong proposes a business that equips schools with curricula centered on future-ready creative thinking; Deanna Xu reflects on youth climate activism; and Yaki Wo offers an antidote to AI-generated writing.

This issue also coincides with the Fung Foundation's 20th anniversary. Since 2006, the Foundation has supported leadership, learning, and global exchange through scholarships and research partnerships with universities around the world. As Fung Scholars and Fellows, we are privileged to be part of this network. I would like to thank the Fung Foundation for its commitment to supporting people at the early stages of their careers. By placing trust in us to pursue research endeavors whose outcomes are yet to be proven, the Foundation gives us the freedom to experiment, test and refine our ideas, and grow through the process.

Robin Albrecht (FS 2021/22, Harvard University)



Wesam Al Asali:
Weaving Hinna in the street of Mit Kinana, Cultures of Making 2026.

Photo: Kareem Osama Ahmed

Wesam Al Asali:
Cooperative food provisioning in Sweida, women work together to produce large quantities of Mune (Provisioning), Cultures of Making, Rose Breik 2026.

Photo: Rose Bariek



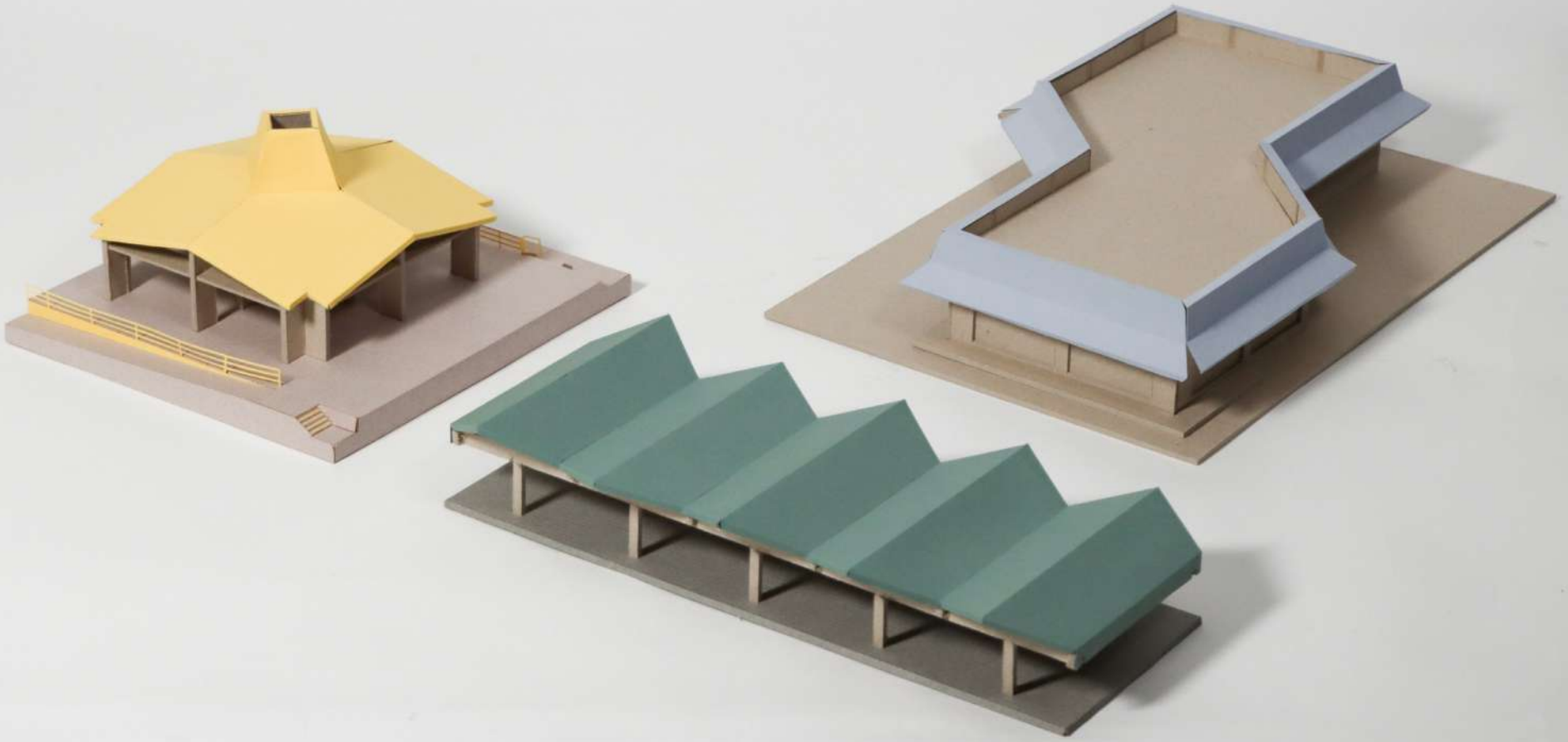
Wesam Al Asali:
Vendor's cart making in Syria, a catalog of different carts made by Abu al Nur in Damascus.

Photo: Wesam Al Asali



Robin Albrecht:
Completed between 1974 and 1975, Oi Man Estate in Hong Kong was an early example of an integrated public housing model that combined residential buildings with commercial and community facilities. The photograph shows the estate's market housed in a freestanding building between residential blocks, illustrating how everyday social infrastructure was incorporated into the estate's urban fabric.

Photo: Robin Albrecht



Robin Albrecht:
Three examples of small-scale food infrastructure in Hong Kong's public housing estates illustrate the diversity of architectural forms and uses: the iconic mushroom pavilion, a traditional cooked-food pavilion at Cheung Shan Estate in Tsuen Wan (completed in 1978), and a McDonald's restaurant at Tai Wo Estate in Tai Po (completed in 1989).

Photo: Robin Albrecht



Robin Albrecht:
Small-scale community infrastructure can continue to play an important role in the development of future housing estates. This proposal for a public library in a new housing estate in Kwu Tung, part of Hong Kong's Northern Metropolis, proposes that modestly scaled civic spaces can be integrated into large-scale residential developments to support everyday social life and community interaction.

Design: Robin Albrecht
Image: Joe Russel



Ella Liang:
Vinicunca, as known as Rainbow Mountain, located in the Peruvian Andes at the altitude of about 5,036 metres. Its colourful slopes, which formed over millions of years by layers of rock and minerals, making it one of Peru's most distinctive and famous natural landscapes.

Photo: Ella Liang



Ella Liang:
In Patacancha, a traditional Andean community in Peru's Sacred Valley, local residents welcomed us with a traditional dance and invited us to wear their traditional clothing. During our visit, we also learned about local farming practices, traditional medicine and weaving, gaining a better understanding of the community's cultural heritage and everyday life.

Photo: Ella Liang



Ella Liang:
Lake Titicaca, which is one of the highest navigable lakes in the world located between Peru and Bolivia, sitting at about 3,812 metres above sea level. The lake is home to Indigenous communities, including the Uros people, who are well-known for using Totora reeds to build floating islands.

Photo: Ella Liang



Jie Feng:
These are images of one project I worked on in Shanghai. It is called West Bund Media City, you can tell the difference between the old industrial elements on site with the new urban complex.

Photo: Shanghai West Bund Development Group



Jie Feng:
This area was once a cradle of 20th-century national industry. Since 2008, guided by the philosophy of a "city for the people" and leveraging the opportunities presented by the World Expo and the opening up of the Huangpu River waterfront, the area has adopted a global perspective, benchmarking itself against world-class standards. This has turned a "rust belt" of industrial sites into a vibrant "living belt" and a hub for scientific and technological innovation, a "belt of innovation."

Photo: Shanghai West Bund Development Group



Jie Feng:
A high-quality foundation has been established: by installing tiered flood-control walls and raising road elevations, the area now features Shanghai's only scenic thoroughfare where one can enjoy river views while driving. An 8.95-kilometer continuous network of paths has been completed, alongside 500,000 square meters of open space and 100,000 square meters of waterfront platforms.

Photo: Shanghai West Bund Development Group

Systems of Making

Wesam Al Asali

Much of today's sustainability discourse focuses on discovering new technological possibilities. It seeks solutions through increasingly sophisticated digital tools and therefore tends to rely on a wide range of technological opportunities. *Cultures of Making: Crafts, Scarcity, and Environment in the Arab Region* began from a different question:[1] what if sustainability already exists within systems of making that have evolved over generations?

Cultures of Making is a six-year research and documentation project recently published as a book by ArchiTangle. The project explores the architectural, environmental, and social dimensions of craft across the Arab region, where making is understood not simply as cultural production, but as a strategy for adaptation, continuity, and survival. Through 21 practices—from mud construction and weaving to food preservation, olive pressing, and wooden boatbuilding—the book documents how knowledge is sustained and transformed through people, materials, movement, and exchange. Drawing on archival research, workshops, interviews, and fieldwork, Cultures of Making assembles a visual archive of drawings, maps, diagrams, and photographs that seeks to reveal local craft practices under pressure while rethinking documentation itself as a creative and design-oriented methodology.

Rather than approaching these practices through

1 Wesam Al Asali, Cultures of Making: Crafts, Scarcity, and the Environment in the Arab Region (ArchiTangle, 2026), https://architangle.com/book/cultures-of-making

nostalgia, the project emerged from contemporary questions surrounding local and sustainable ways of building and inhabiting. It returns to the original meaning of the word sustain: ways of living and outliving a changing world. This position also questions the way sustainability in architecture, design, and craft studies is often framed as a choice between "high-tech" and "low-tech." Contemporary environmental discourse frequently celebrates robotics, digital fabrication, and advanced materials, while traditional practices are treated either as heritage to preserve or as picturesque luxuries accessible only to a few. Yet, across the Arab region, this distinction rarely exists in practice. The question is not whether a technology is advanced or traditional, but whether it responds appropriately to its social, environmental, and material context. Rather than producing isolated objects, each craft became an entry point into much larger networks of people, materials, infrastructures, and landscapes.

One of these systems appears in the relationship between dwelling and making. More specifically, these spaces emerge through the book as interlaced systems of labor and the urban sphere. They are understood to extend beyond workshops into domestic, public, and social environments. In Mit Kinana village in Egypt, entire neighborhoods weave hinna wood (branches of the hinna plant) during the agricultural off-season. Streets become temporary workshops, building corners become storage areas and soaking basins, and roofs become drying spaces. Everyone weaves something at some point in the village. Public space itself becomes part of the manufacturing process, allowing communities to produce everyday objects collectively and on a remarkable scale.

Another example emerges through food. In Syria, the practice of mūneh—the seasonal preservation of food—is often understood as a domestic activity. Yet,

following its ramifications reveals an entire system of provisioning operating on a much larger scale. This system follows food from orchards and agricultural fields into houses, where families peel, dry, ferment, and preserve it. It then continues through mills, olive presses, communal kitchens, storage spaces, and, in some cases, cooperative production and small factories manufacturing olive oil, soap, and other food products. What appears to be a collection of household recipes is, in fact, an environmental infrastructure linking agriculture, domestic labor, shared facilities, and seasonal rhythms. This system becomes visible only when the movement of food is followed rather than when examining any individual product.

A third system concerns the traces of craft within the city. It emerges through the changing relationship between craft, industry, and urban life. Vendor-cart making, a traditional craft in Damascus, flourished during the mid-twentieth century, when mobile vending expanded alongside train stations, bus stations, boulevards, and new public spaces. Since the 2000s, however, the craft has steadily declined under increasingly restrictive municipal regulations and the saturation of public space. While many assumed that the craft had disappeared, the research revealed that it had instead transformed. Carpenters who once specialized in vendor carts now produce foosball tables using the same construction methods, joinery, and decorative language. Rather than representing separate worlds of "traditional craft" and "modern industry," these transformations reveal different scales within the same system of making.

Following these interconnected systems gradually became the methodology of Cultures of Making. Sustainability appeared less as an environmental objective than as a web of relationships that continuously adapts through cooperation, scarcity, repair, and exchange. Tracing these systems also became a drawing

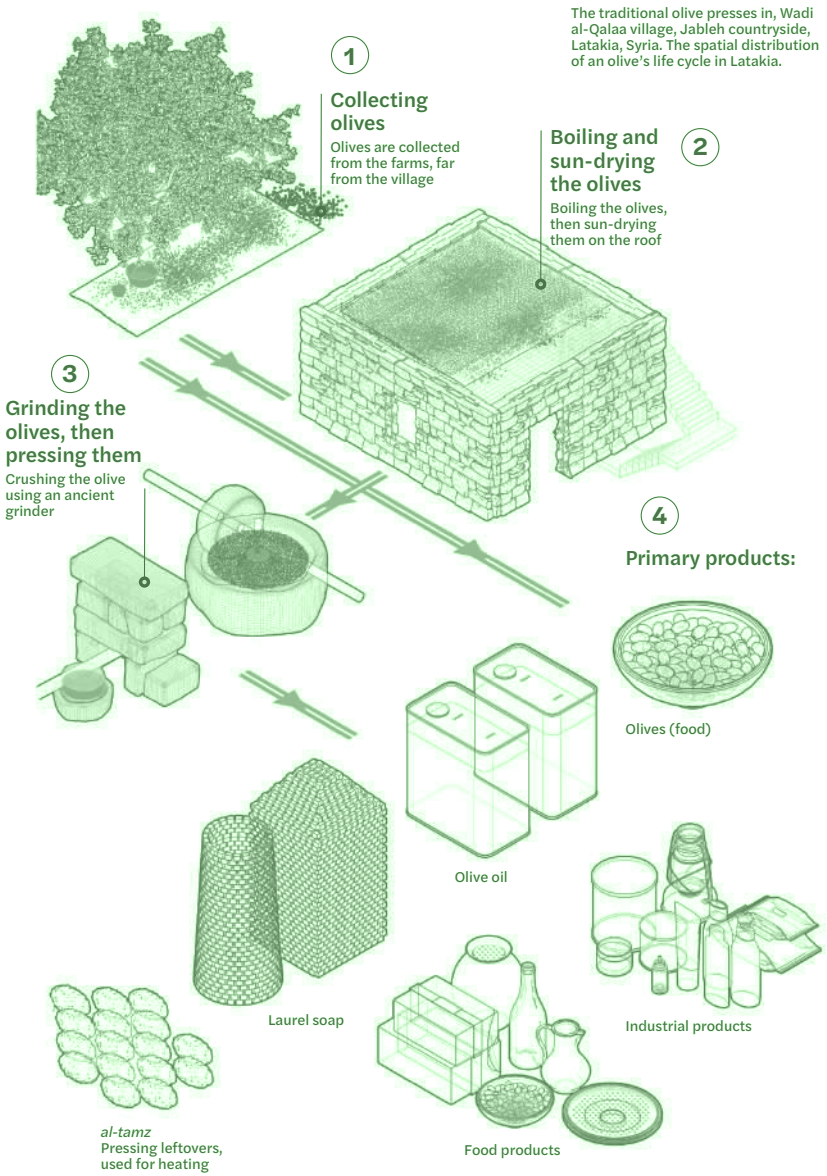


Fig 1. The traditional olive presses in, Wadi al-Qalaa village, Jableh countryside, Latakia, Syria. The spatial distribution of an olive's life cycle in Latakia.

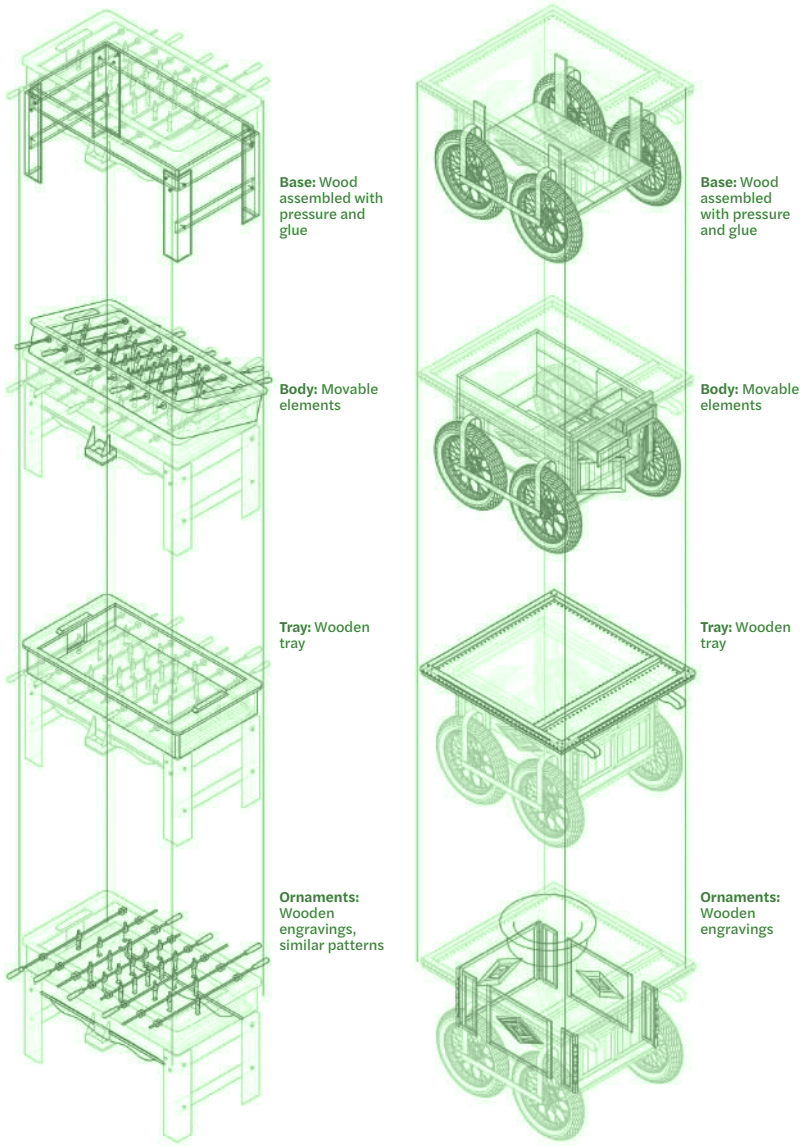
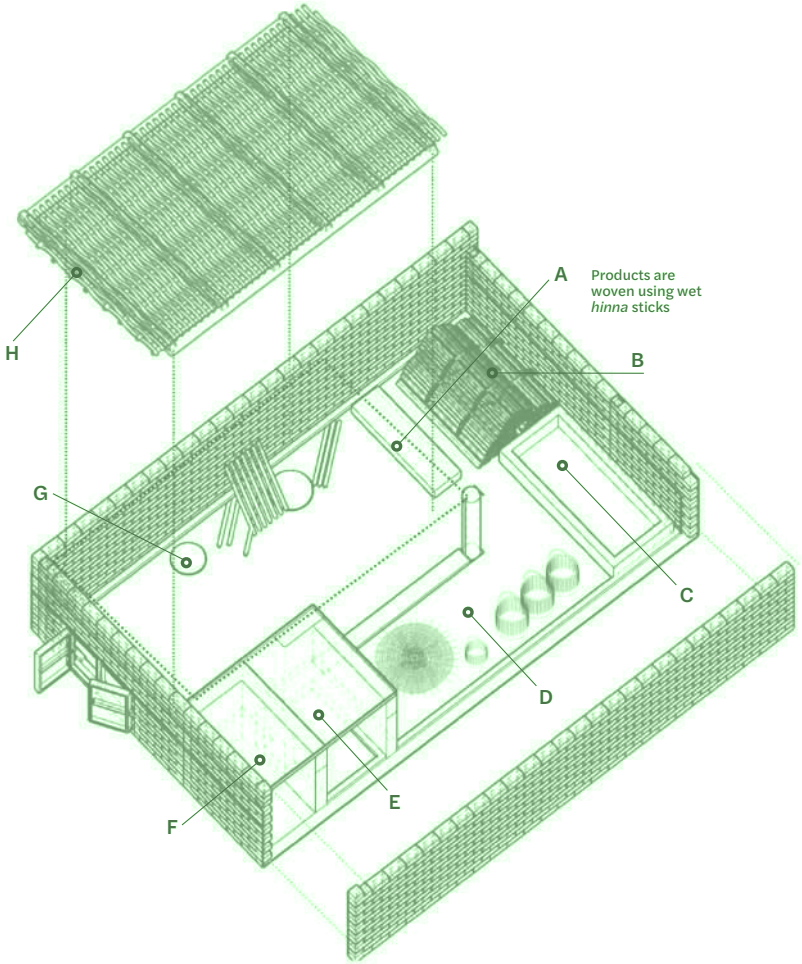


Fig 2. Components of cart versus foosball table in comparison: table (top to bottom): base, body, tray, ornaments/engravings



Kareem Reda's weaving workshop in Mit Kinana:
A | Storage for soaked *hinna*. B | Storage for dry *hinna*. C | Soaking tub.
D | Product display. E | Kitchen. F | WC. G | Covered workspace.
H | *Hinna* woven ceiling.

Fig 3. The process and workshops of weaving Hinna in Mit Kinana Village. In *Culture of Making*, 2026.

exercise. Each project produced diagrams mapping flows of materials, labor, energy, and space across multiple scales. Drawing became more than representation; it became a research method through which apparently separate practices could be understood as parts of larger environmental systems.

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from this work is that sustainability requires a closer dialogue between culture and engineering. Bridging these perspectives requires more engaged forms of ethnographic research—ones that document not only what people make, but how systems operate, how materials circulate, how decisions are negotiated, and how knowledge moves between workshops, landscapes, infrastructures, and everyday life. Systems thinking becomes most productive not by separating culture from technology, but by recognizing that culture and engineering have always been part of the same system.

Wesam Al Asali (FF 2021/22, Princeton University) is a Syrian architect, researcher, and educator specializing in building crafts, construction history, and environmental design. He holds a PhD in Architecture from the University of Cambridge and is an Assistant Professor at IE School of Architecture and Design in Madrid. He is the author of Cultures of Making (2026) and co-editor of Arab Modern (2025). His research has received several international awards, including the RIBA President's Award for Research. He also co-founded IWLab and CERCAA, working with artisans and cultural institutions to integrate traditional building knowledge into contemporary architectural practice.

Urban Ground Floor

Robin Albrecht

Much of Hong Kong's contemporary urban development lacks the city's horizontal continuity of public life: its socially activated urban ground. Looking at new urban areas from the past three decades, such as Tseung Kwan O or Nam Cheong, their urban ground functions socially very differently from Hong Kong's urban core: the smaller scale of public life appears to have been value-engineered out. As Hong Kong embarks on its Northern Metropolis, there is an opportunity to reconsider how we design the groundscale of new urban developments.

Hong Kong's early new towns from the 1960s to the 1980s began with the question of how the intensity of public life that characterizes Hong Kong's urban core could be translated into rigidly planned communities. The design of the urban ground of housing estates from this time invented spatial typologies that sought to translate Hong Kong's existing systems of spatial intelligence, which successfully accommodate high public density, diverse activities, and informal social interactions, into the planning of new towns. Apparent informality was translated into the New Town's urban context by accommodating a mixture of scales across residential, civic, and commercial programs. The small scale, in particular, played a critical role in reproducing the intensity of Hong Kong's urban core.

At Oi Man Estate, completed between 1974 and 1975, a market is situated in a freestanding pavilion between two residential blocks, embedding everyday commerce within the estate's public realm. Elsewhere, single-story mushroom-shaped pavilions, cooked-food stalls, or even

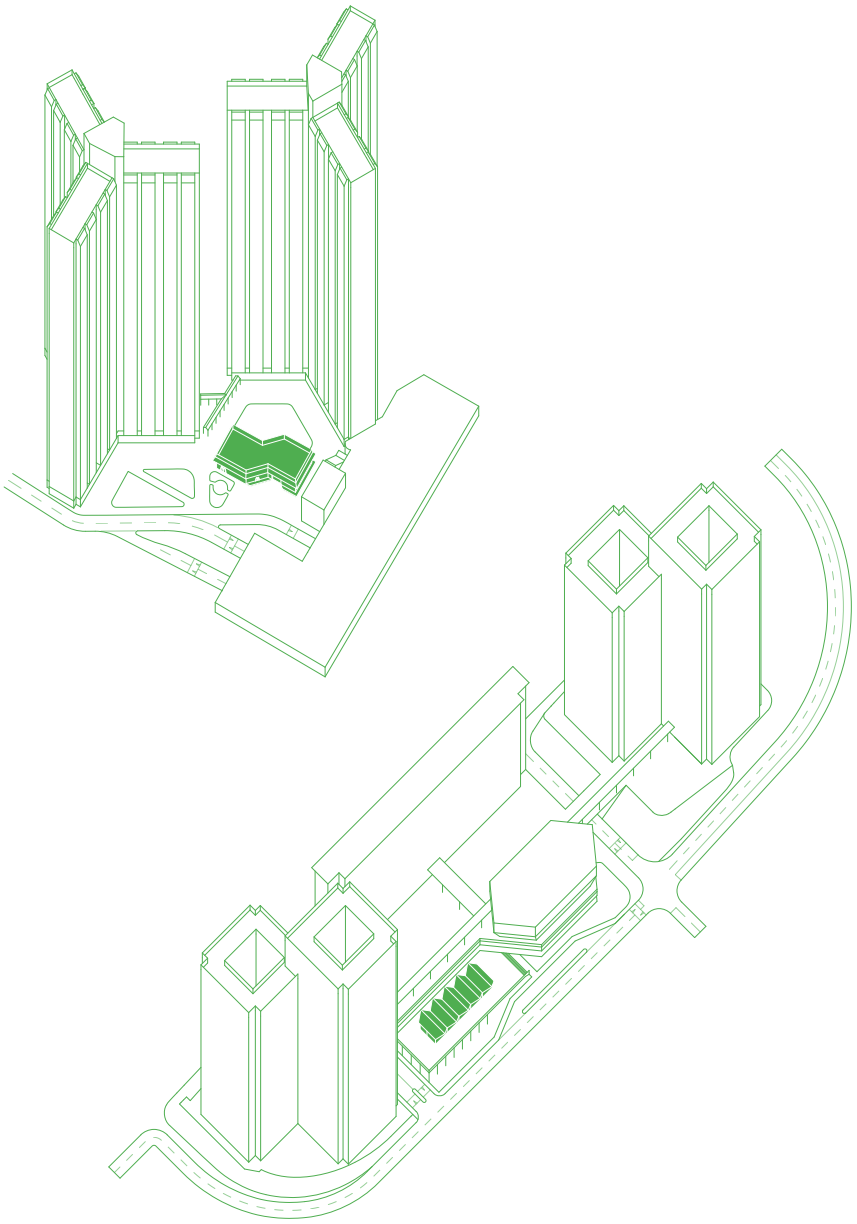


Fig 1. A McDonald's restaurant at Tai Wo Estate (1989, top left) and a cooked-food stall at Cheung Shan Estate (1978, bottom right) illustrate how small-scale structures accommodate different forms of commerce, dining, and informal gathering. Despite their modest scale, they contribute to the social activation of the urban ground.

McDonald's restaurants provide places for everyday encounters and informal gatherings.

Subsequent urban development appears to have value-engineered out this smaller scale. In Kwu Tung, one of the first neighborhoods of the Northern Metropolis, civic services are proposed to be consolidated within a single integrated building rather than distributed across the district. As is typical of framework-planned contemporary neighborhoods worldwide, the proposed urban fabric thus risks eroding the small-scale spaces essential to everyday public life.

But why should this be the case? Could we insert a distributed network of small-scale urban catalysts—non-domestic social spaces—into the larger urban framework of new neighborhoods as a prototype for instigating public life? These catalysts could accommodate markets, libraries, sports facilities, and eateries, thus providing social environments for informal gatherings and chance encounters. Hong Kong's robust public institutions, including post offices, the libraries, or recycling centers could offer opportunities to distribute civic programs throughout new neighborhoods. Rather than concentrating public amenities in a single spot, these smaller structures could anchor new communities in their urban ground while giving the larger development a more cohesive and legible public presence.

Robin Albrecht (FS 2021/22, Harvard University) holds a Master of Architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and an undergraduate degree in Architectural Studies, with a minor in Urban Studies, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is a Junior Designer at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture in New York City. His interests lie at the intersection of the built environment, urban life, and intercultural exchange. With support from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, he conducted independent research on housing and urbanization in Hong Kong and Jakarta.

Beyond Hong Kong's Air-Conditioned Halls: What Peru Teaches Us About Environmental Governance

Ella Liang

In the flooded river basins of the Peruvian Amazon, state authority can feel distant. Standing on the muddy banks of the Madre de Dios River, far from government offices in Lima, it becomes clear that environmental law depends not only on what is written, but on what can actually be enforced. My 14-day journey across Peru, from the lowland jungles of Puerto Maldonado through the Andean valleys of Cusco to the high-altitude communities of Lake Titicaca, revealed an important lesson about environmental governance. Laws do not work independently. Their success depends on geography, local livelihoods, economic incentives and community rules. More importantly, these factors shape one another, sometimes producing results that policymakers did not intend.

In the Amazon, the state has limited resources to patrol millions of hectares of forest. Rivers provide the main transport routes, so authorities focus on policing key entry points to protected areas such as Sandoval Lake.[1] Checkpoints, visitor registration and daily quotas help manage tourism at relatively low cost. However, this approach has clear limits. While authorities can monitor some tourist routes, illegal mining and logging may continue along remote tributaries that are harder to reach. The problem is not only enforcement. Residents are expected to protect the forest without necessarily gaining enough from its conservation. If legal tourism

1 **Sandoval Lake** is located in the Madre de Dios region of southeastern Peru, near the city of Puerto Maldonado. Surrounded by the Amazon rainforest, the lake is home to many kinds of wildlife, including giant river otters, monkeys and tropical birds. It is also a popular place for visitors to experience the natural environment of the Peruvian Amazon.

cannot provide a reliable income, illegal mining or logging may become more attractive. Unequal revenue distribution weakens the conservation efforts that tourism is supposed to support. Conservation is more likely to last when local residents benefit from protecting the forest. If forest degradation continues, the area may become less attractive to tourists, reducing the income that local communities can earn from conservation. This could make activities such as illegal mining more appealing and put further pressure on the forest. It's a doomed cycle: environmental damage and economic insecurity reinforce each other.

Moving towards Cusco and the Sacred Valley,[2] state authority becomes much more visible. At Machu Picchu, electronic ticketing, timed entry, designated walking circuits and regulated transport help control visitor flows and generate tourism revenue. However, strong regulation does not automatically produce fair or sustainable outcomes. While tourism brings income to the region, its benefits and costs are not always shared equally. Communities along tourist routes face increasing waste, pressure on infrastructure and rising living costs without receiving a fair share of the revenue. The places and communities that attract visitors may also bear many of the costs of their arrival.

In Rainbow Mountain,[3] as tourist demand has grown, regulation and infrastructure have struggled to keep pace, contributing to pressure on fragile mountain landscapes and trail erosion. This shows that both strong

2 **Cusco** is a city in southeastern Peru that was once the capital of the Inca Empire. The **Sacred Valley**, located near Cusco, is known for its mountains, traditional villages and Inca archaeological sites. The area remains an important part of Peru's cultural heritage and attracts visitors interested in its history and local communities.

3 **Rainbow Mountain**, also known as Vinicunca, is a mountain in the Andes of southern Peru, near Cusco. It is famous for its colourful layers of red, yellow, green and other shades, which were formed by different minerals in the ground. Located at a high altitude, the mountain has become a popular destination for visitors interested in Peru's natural landscapes.

and weak regulation create difficulties when policies fail to consider wider economic and environmental effects. Some local communities have responded by developing traditional weaving cooperatives and farm-to-table experiences, including in Patacancha.[4] By selling their products and services directly, residents keep more income locally and gain greater control over tourism. These initiatives suggest that fairer economic opportunities can encourage communities to maintain the cultural and natural assets on which tourism depends. The challenge in Cusco is not simply to regulate tourism, but also to manage the relationship between visitor numbers, revenue distribution and environmental pressure. Controlling access to tourist attractions is important, but it is only part of the solution. If tourism revenue is not used to address local needs, the costs of tourism may continue to grow even when visitor numbers are carefully managed. This shows why environmental policy must consider not only how tourism is controlled, but also who benefits from it and who bears its costs.

The limits of state capacity are more visible on Amantaní Island,[5] on Lake Titicaca. Compared with major tourist centers, access to public services and government support can be limited. Many visitors stay with local families instead of in hotels. These host families provide accommodation and meals, allowing them to earn money from tourism. During my field stay, I talked with a local host family that expressed their frustration: "El gobierno no hace nada por nosotros," meaning that

4 **Patacancha** is a small Andean community in the Cusco region of Peru, near the town of Ollantaytambo. It is known for its traditional way of life, especially its weaving skills and colourful textiles made using techniques passed down through generations. The community offers a glimpse into how local people maintain their cultural traditions and connection to the land.

5 **Amantaní Island** is located on Lake Titicaca in southeastern Peru, near the border with Bolivia. The island is home to local Quechua-speaking communities, many of whom maintain traditional farming practices and cultural customs. Visitors can learn about local life and experience the strong connection between the community, the lake and the surrounding landscape.

the government does nothing for us. However, the people in Amantaní also shows how communities can develop their own systems of governance. To distribute tourism income more fairly, islanders use a “sistema de rotación,” or homestay rotation system. Instead of allowing families to compete freely for visitors, a local committee assigns tourists to households in turn. This arrangement not only helps share income but also encourages families to follow common rules. In this way, economic incentives and community rules encourage cooperation. The rules foster a shared interest among families in keeping the system fair. If visitors and income are distributed more evenly, more households may be willing to support the arrangement. Their cooperation, in turn, helps the rules continue to work. However, there are examples on Amantaní Island that show how communities can develop their own system of governance. If some families benefit more than others, trust may weaken and the system could become harder to maintain.

Striking a balance between forest protection and tourism shows that there is no one-size-fits-it-all solution to environmental governance. In the Amazon, limited state capacity and unequal tourism income can make forest protection difficult. In Cusco, stronger regulation helps manage visitor numbers, but it does not automatically ensure that local communities benefit fairly or that environmental pressure is reduced. On Amantaní Island, community rules help distribute tourism income and encourage cooperation, although the system also depends on trust and a sense of fairness. Together, these cases show that environmental policies can have effects beyond their immediate goals. They can influence who earns money, how communities cooperate and how much pressure is placed on natural resources. Lasting conservation, therefore, requires policies that respond to local conditions and give communities a meaningful role in protecting the environments they depend on.

Ella Liang (FS 2026/27, Lingnan University) is studying Government and International Affairs at Lingnan University. Her interests lie in intercultural exchange, international development, and understanding the everyday experiences of communities around the world. She has conducted field research in Peru, visiting communities across the Amazon, the Andes, and Lake Titicaca. Through her involvement in international projects and programs, she seeks to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and learn from their experiences. She aspires to pursue a career that bridges cultures and contributes to international development.

Urban Regeneration

Jie Feng

From thinking about design as an aesthetic exercise to understanding it as a strategic, multi-scalar discipline, whether working on a neighborhood master plan or a regional transit strategy, I constantly ask: How do these systems interact? Who benefits? What are the second-order effects?

Urban regeneration is the process of revitalizing existing urban areas by addressing their physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions. Rather than simply replacing aging buildings or introducing new infrastructure, it seeks to improve how neighborhoods function as interconnected systems. It is here that design and systems thinking reveal their greatest value. Looking at an aging neighborhood in isolation, one might see only dilapidated buildings to demolish or missing facilities to add. But a systems lens perceives more: a web of broken relationships—between residents and employment, the elderly and healthcare, building energy consumption and the power grid, community memory and spatial form.

In practice, a systems approach begins by mapping the neighborhood's relational fabric: daily activity flows, the distribution of community assets, informal social networks, and vacant and underused spaces. The goal is not to produce a comprehensive redevelopment plan, but to identify leverage points—small, strategic interventions that can reactivate multiple relationships at once. This might mean converting a disused factory into a community hub, opening a long-blocked pedestrian link, or, crucially, protecting a street market that anchors

both local commerce and social interaction. The planner's first question is not "What should we build?" but "Which relationships, once restored, will generate the most positive ripple effects?"

I argue strongly for incremental regeneration over wholesale demolition. A neighborhood is a living system; demolishing it is analogous to killing the organism and attempting to reinstall a new one. Incremental, phased renewal allows the community to continue functioning during transformation, preserves the social networks that constitute its resilience, and creates space for feedback—planners can observe how each small intervention plays out and adjust subsequent actions accordingly. This turns regeneration from a one-off project into an ongoing process of learning and adaptation.

Equally important is the role of residents as active participants in the system, not passive recipients of planning decisions. Residents possess granular knowledge of their neighborhood—its rhythms, its informal economies, its unspoken rules—that no dataset or site survey can fully capture. Systems-oriented regeneration, therefore, embeds participatory design mechanisms, such as community planner programs and co-design workshops, not as token consultation but as genuine knowledge integration. The process of planning itself becomes an opportunity to repair social bonds, rebuild trust, and strengthen the community's capacity to manage future change.

In essence, systems thinking reframes urban regeneration from a physical construction task into a practice of relational healing. The measure of success is not the number of new buildings delivered, but whether the neighborhood's web of relationships—social, economic, ecological, and spatial—emerges more connected, more adaptable, and more capable of

sustaining itself over time.

This relational understanding of urban regeneration is not confined to the planning profession. It naturally extends to the broader work of investing in and building systems—whether in healthcare, biotechnology, or the built environment. In each domain, the most durable value emerges not from isolated interventions, but from strengthening the connections that allow a system to heal, adapt, and endure. The neighborhood, like the organism, is never finished; it is always becoming. The planner's task—and, I would argue, the investor's and the citizen's alike—is to create the conditions in which that becoming can continue, long after the final drawing is filed and the last scaffold is removed.

This, ultimately, is why urban regeneration matters beyond the boundaries of any single neighborhood. Cities are the largest and most complex systems humanity has ever built, and they are constantly being remade by markets, migration, climate, and the quiet accumulation of everyday choices. To intervene in that process deliberately and humbly is to accept a simple truth: we are not the first to shape a city, nor will we be the last. What we can do is leave behind not only buildings, but relationships that are stronger than we found them—between people and place, between memory and possibility, between the city as it is and the city as it might yet become. That is a legacy measured not in square meters, but in resilience.

Jie Feng (FS 2007–09, Harvard University) holds a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard University and is an investor specializing in biotechnology and healthcare innovation. He began his career in real estate and urban development, contributing to projects including Shanghai's West Bund Media City and Shenzhen's Qianhai district. He subsequently held senior investment positions at Country Garden and co-founded a private equity fund, advising companies on their Hong Kong IPO processes. Since 2019, his work has focused on early-stage investments in technology companies, particularly those developing medical devices and innovative pharmaceuticals.

Why Deep-Sea Mining Governance Requires Systems Thinking About International Politics

Dr Lai-Ha Chan

Deep-sea mining (DSM) has attracted growing attention,[1] due to intensifying competition for critical minerals, especially between the two great powers, China and the United States. DSM is the process of extracting mineral deposits from the deep seabed, which technically speaking refers to water depths greater than 200 meters (below sea level). However, the operational definition of DSM does not concern depth; it may occur in two areas: within a coastal state's national jurisdiction and in the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction (the Area).[2] One area that has generated particular interest is the Clarion–Clipperton Zone in the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean between Mexico and Hawaii, which is believed to contain vast deposits of critical minerals.

The debate over deep-sea mining is often framed as a choice between protecting the ocean and securing the critical minerals needed for the energy and digital transitions. However, DSM sits within a much larger interconnected system that involves the ocean ecosystem, geopolitics, and global governance. My research examines DSM from a global politics perspective, particularly the possibility of managing it through a global governance framework.

1 For example, see "The Last Untouched Place on Earth: Unwind to Ocean Science," podcast episode, Spotify, August 11, 2026, https://open.spotify.com/episode/5L3gmqoQz2ZeSXVaUNFoWp (accessed October 10, 2026).

2 Lai-Ha Chan and Pak K. Lee, Who Governs Deep-Sea Mining? A Battle Between Global Governance and National Governance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026), 2, https://www.cambridge.org/core/elements/abs/who-governs-deepsea-mining/3D3195EE9CF48AB616A53755EA9BEAF8

Established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Seabed Authority is mandated to develop rules, regulations, and procedures governing the commercial-scale exploitation of the mineral resources in the Area. However, an international regulatory regime or a Mining Code for DSM has remained under protracted negotiations for years.

Under Part XI of UNCLOS, the deep seabed and its mineral resources are designated as the "common heritage of humankind (CHH; Rénlèi gòngtóng yíchun, 人類共同遺產). This means that the benefits derived from exploiting these resources should be equitably shared for the benefit of all humanity. However, not all countries agree with this broad, socially constructed principle. There is a battle between global and national governance over the commercial exploitation of deep-sea minerals.

A key challenge for the International Seabed Authority in establishing an international regime is how to implement the principle of equity within the CHH framework, particularly regarding benefit-sharing and environmental responsibility. While 172 parties worldwide have ratified UNCLOS and are members of the International Seabed Authority, the United States is not a party to it and has long been skeptical of the CHH and the organisation's authority. This position became particularly significant in 2025, when President Trump authorized unilateral deep-sea mining activities beyond US national jurisdiction under American domestic law.

On the other hand, China, while advocating for the enactment of a Mining Code for DSM by the International Seabed Authority, also engages in national governance by signing bilateral mining agreements with individual Pacific Island countries that are geographically proximate to the Clarion–Clipperton Zone. When UNCLOS was adopted in the early 1980s, China was

still a developing country and strongly supported the principle of CHH alongside other developing states. However, as a rapidly rising power that now holds the largest number of ISA exploration contracts, China's continued interpretation of this principle remains an open question. A debatable issue is whether China is now willing to equitably share the benefits of mining with other developing countries.

From a scholarly point of view, DSM has been a subject of international law and environmental science, with little contribution from International Relations scholars yet. Governing DSM in the area, however, is a matter of international politics. The rule-making process is shaped by state preferences amid inter-state negotiations organized by an intergovernmental organization, the International Seabed Authority. It is always state representatives who make the rules. The key political questions of where state preferences come from and how state leaders justify them have remained largely unaddressed in the existing literature. Ultimately, deep-sea mining is not simply about resources or technology, but also about competing ideas of governance, sovereignty, equity, and environmental responsibility. These competing interpretations will play a crucial role in shaping the future of ocean governance.

Lai-Ha Chan (FF 2016/17, Princeton University) is an International Relations scholar specializing in global governance and Indo-Pacific politics. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney and a Research Associate at the Australia-China Relations Institute. Her research focuses on deep-sea mining governance, critical minerals, China–US strategic competition, and middle-power diplomacy. The Fung Global Fellowship at Princeton has deepened her research interest in the governance of global commons. Building on this intellectual foundation, her current research examines the governance of deep-sea mining, focusing on the tensions between global governance frameworks and national interests.



Joscelin Yeung:
Building up psychological safety by using mirroring. How do different temperatures affect your daily activities? This is what our participants find out during this mirroring activity.

Photo: Joscelin Yeung



Joscelin Yeung:
I facilitated the participants to turn insights into action to support the community for climate resilience by applying the 'Yes, and' mindset and providing customized solution for those affected by extreme weather.

Photo: Joscelin Yeung



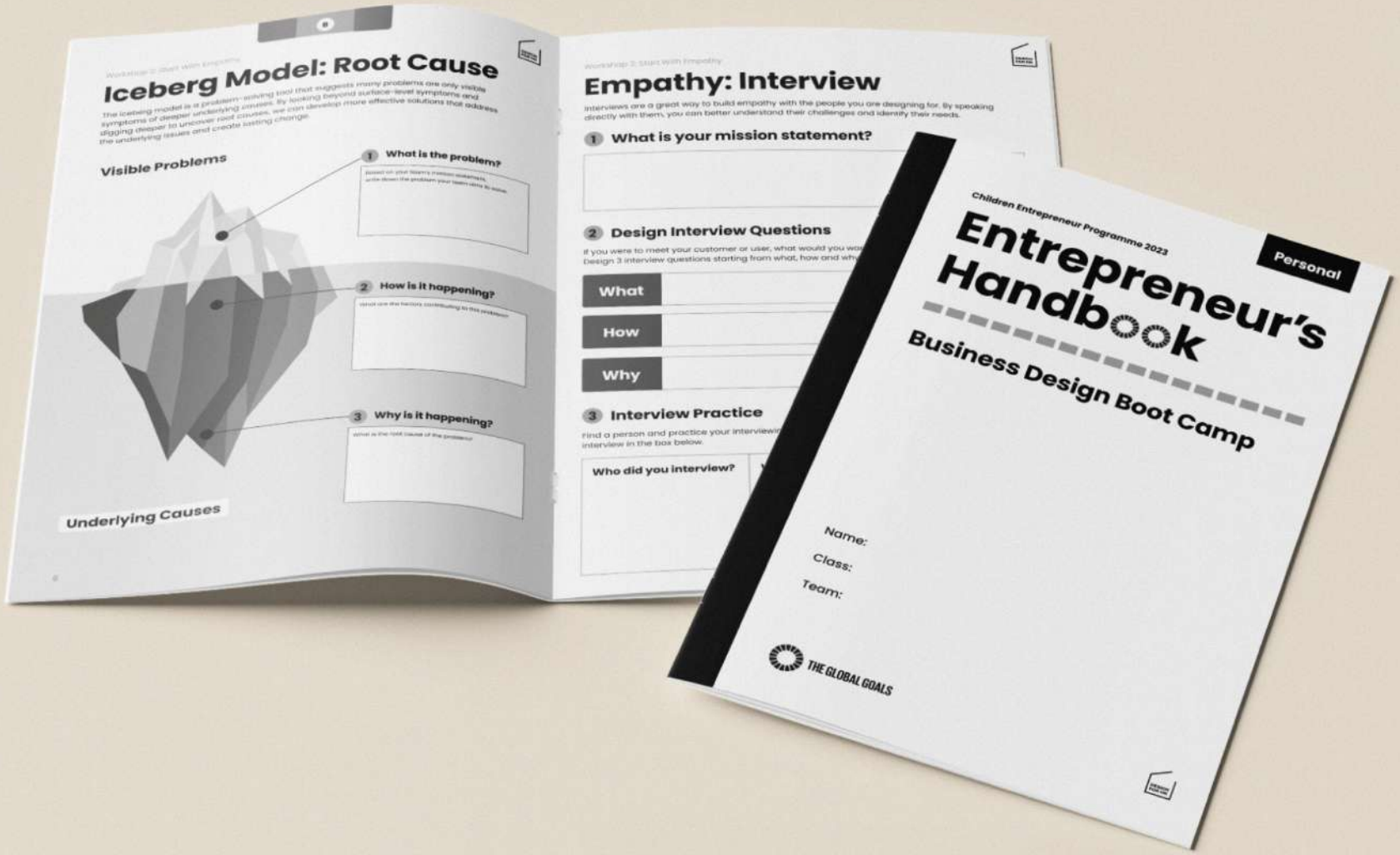
Joscelin Yeung:
Participants are reenacting the challenging choices made in subdivided units. We are considering the intersectionality of climate change, with the activity zooming in on how gender and social class affect our daily decisions.

Photo: Joscelin Yeung



Joscelin Yeung:
Sustainability is not only about data and distant concepts, it is also right in front of us if you look closely. Presenting the quotes from interviews with grassroots women. The quote reads: "By noon, when it starts getting really hot, I have lunch a little earlier and take my son down to the shopping mall to enjoy the air conditioning, or to the sports centre to do his homework, since it's air-conditioned there.
Being a mother means putting in a little extra effort, carrying a few more things or bringing a backpack… There's drinking water at the sports centre, so you can just bring an empty bottle. Buying bottled water outside is really expensive, so you have to bring your own bottle. That way, I can save some money."

Photo: Joscelin Yeung



Leann Wong:
Curriculum design learning booklet.

Photo: Design for Hong Kong



Leann Wong:
Student creative outcomes in entrepreneurship.

Photo: Design for Hong Kong



Leann Wong:
Student creative outcome for people with visual impairment.

Photo: Design for Hong Kong



Deanna Xu:
Induced by Tropical Cyclone Yagi, heavy rains triggered flash floods in September 2024 across Lao PDR's northern provinces of Luang Namtha, Phongsaly, Oudomxay and Bokeo. Rising water levels downstream also affected Luang Prabang, Vientiane Prefecture and Bolikhamxay. In Vientiane Capital, floodwaters rose high enough to submerge the stairs leading down to the amusement park, leaving parts of the site inundated.

Photo: Deanna Xu



Deanna Xu:
Heavy rain in Vientiane triggered a sudden power outage, plunging a local grocery store into darkness. Staff quickly used handheld flashlights, pulled down the hard plastic covers over the freezers to preserve the cold, and guided shoppers out of the building.

Photo: Deanna Xu



Deanna Xu:
As part of the 3rd Lao National Urban Forum, which aimed to raise awareness of sustainable urbanization, UN Habitat Lao PDR recruited university volunteers from institutions across Laos to support the event. This group photo was taken after the first introductory meeting with UN-Habitat Lao PDR colleagues in front of the UN House in Vientiane.

Photo: UN House staff, Vientiane, Lao PDR



Deanna Xu:
Climate Students Movement International hosted its annual Climate Students Conference online in 2025, with the theme "The Connection between Climate Advocacy and Education." The closing group photo captures participants, speakers, and organizers coming together at the end of a day of discussions and exchanges on how youth led climate advocacy can strengthen education systems and inspire collective action.

Screenshot: Deanna Xu



Yaki Wo:
An embodied sense of connection with nature often triggers a sense of awe and is a transformative experience that has the power of awakening the understanding of interconnectedness, the aliveness of our planet, and shifting our sense of being. In the Future+ Regenerative Leadership workshop in Sichuan, we practiced tea meditation in front of the sacred Mount Gongga in Sichuan as the sun rose.

Photo: Kun Kun



Yaki Wo:
At the Future+ Regenerative Leadership workshop in Bali, I introduced the shift from a "square system" that views the world as a machine, to a "circular system" that senses the world as a living being.

Photo: Dodik Cahyendra



Yaki Wo:
Acknowledging that all living systems are nested, systems change requires "three lines of work:" working on ourselves, working on our relationships with others, and working on the wider world. At our Future+ Regenerative Leadership workshop in Kuching, we spent much of our time engaging in personal reflections and connecting with others. Here we were connecting our hearts in a circle.

Photo: Jane Chang



Yaki Wo:
All of our Future+ Regenerative Leadership workshops feature a practical, group design element. One of the group co-design projects at the Future+ Kuching workshop mapped out the nested and overlapping living systems around our partner organization, Think & Tink. This enabled Think & Tink to have a sense of its ecosystem's health and to focus on cultivating missing links or nurturing critical connections.

Photo: Jane Chang

From 0 to 1 — and Then 1 to 100

Amy Lee

I was trained in consulting, where you break a big problem into workstreams, give everyone a piece, and stitch the answers together at the end. This approach served me well for years: first as an in-house strategist, then as a product owner building a new line of family-themed hotel rooms from the ground up, concept to launch.

Then came 1 to 100: we had to roll those rooms out across ten more cities. At first, I managed it the way I knew best. Each team member "owned" a few projects. But that ownership was thinner than it looked. They tracked the files, yet many decisions still came back to me. The product existed, but each location needed its own adaptation. How many rooms per floor should be converted? Which themes or features to add? Every city brought a thousand local details. My calendar filled up, and progress slowed as people waited for answers. I had become the operating system, and, unhelpfully, its slowest processor.

When people hear "system," they imagine flowcharts, responsibility matrices, and instruction manuals. A multi-city rollout is too context-heavy for a checklist. What needed scaling was not the tasks; it was the judgment behind them. So, instead of trying to systemize every task, I began to systemize decision-making.

It started with how we took meeting notes. Most summaries capture only final decisions and next steps. Ours began to tell the whole story: the context, the options, the disagreement, and why we landed where

we did. When a project called for an exception, we asked whether it should become a new rule to guide the next project.

Over time, those notes turned into a playbook. My team began leading conversations and making calls, explaining why a case fit or did not. Progress reviews got shorter because the reasoning was already on the page. When something did need me, they came with a recommendation, not just a question.

For me, sustainability in a business is not only about materials and emissions. It is also about whether a way of working can last. It is sustainable when knowledge and judgment do not live in one person's head but allow good decisions to travel across teams and markets without becoming rigid.[1]

I have since carried that lesson somewhere much more personal: I now work as a wedding strategist, helping Hong Kong couples shape their big day. The setting could not be more different, but the problem is familiar.

Couples tend to stall on decisions when no one has helped them frame them. They read widely online and visit wedding expos, but there is too much information, too many tempting options, and every source says something different. Parents and relatives have views too, so couples end up juggling expectations and managing communications on top of everything else.

I try to help them build a way to choose and to explain their choices to the people around them. Take a couple torn between a stunning eight-table venue and a fifteen-

1 For further discussion of institutional decision-making, see, for example, Jennifer S. Lerner, "Leadership Decision Making: From Individuals to Institutions," course MLD-308, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, https://www.hks.harvard.edu/courses/leadership-decision-making-individuals-institutions.

table one at a more convenient location. They can spend weeks comparing venues, but the real question comes first: who needs to be there for the day to feel right? Once that's named, the venue follows, and so does the conversation with their parents.

Try this with your next major decision: write what you are trying to achieve, what you are turning down, and what would make you revisit it. This approach has made my own working life more sustainable. More importantly, it has helped others act with greater confidence: my former team and, now, couples navigating one of the most personal projects of their lives. The goal was never to remove complexity. It is to give people a better way to make sense of it, together.

Amy Lee (FS 2007/08, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) spent over a decade working in corporate strategy at organizations including BCG, Mattel, Schneider Electric, and Shangri-La. She holds an MBA from The Wharton School and an undergraduate degree in Global Business and Finance from HKUST. Having recently stepped away from corporate life, she now pursues her interests in travel, wedding planning, volunteering, and career coaching. Inspired by her academic exchanges in the United States and Germany, she aspires to visit at least one new country per year and has traveled to 72 countries so far. She also aims to support 100 NGOs and programs across Hong Kong and enjoys sharing her professional experiences and career insights with students and fellow professionals.

Beyond Green Aesthetics: A Systems View of Creative Practice

Zoi Lau

In visual design and advertising, sustainability is too often treated as purely aesthetic. But when we look at the creative industry through a systems lens, it becomes clear that isolated choices, like opting for recycled materials, only scratch the surface of our true impact.

A systems approach asks us to examine the entire interconnected web we operate within: from the energy footprints of our digital tools, to the cultural norms our campaigns reinforce, and critically, how we sustain our human creative capacity within the ecosystem itself.

Three thoughts:

The Invisible Footprint of Digital Production:
While replacing physical shoots with digital workflows or AI-generated content may appear to reduce travel and material waste, digital creation carries an invisible energy cost. High-resolution asset libraries, continuous cloud rendering, and complex visual software rely on server networks that consume substantial amounts of power and water, which we often neglect. Applying systems thinking to digital design means designing energy-efficient digital experiences and considering the carbon footprint of data storage at every stage of production.

Shaping Culture and Consumption:
Perhaps the most powerful external leverage point in the creative industry is our influence over culture, trends, and desire. Advertising and visual media actively shape what society considers aspirational. When we move past standalone “green campaigns” and integrate sustainable

behaviors such as easy repair over replacement, circular ownership, and transparent communication into everyday visual storytelling, we help shift consumer norms at scale.

Sustaining the Human Engine, Creative Longevity:
A truly sustainable creative system cannot exist if the human engine driving it is depleted. In an industry driven by rapid turnaround times, constant digital connectivity, and high burnout rates, sustainability must also mean protecting our internal capacity for long-term ideation. When workflows rely on perpetual urgency, creative output degrades into repetitive formulas and shallow trends. Treating creative energy as a finite resource requires building studio ecosystems that support cognitive space, cross-disciplinary curiosity, and sustainable working rhythms. Just as an ecological system needs periods of fallow soil to remain fertile, creatives need time for synthesis and rest to generate original, breakthrough ideas over the long term.

From Linear Deliverables to Circular Responsibility:
What often gets missed in the conversation is what happens after the file is delivered. A systems approach asks us to stay in the loop. How long will this campaign live? Does it encourage disposability or durability? Are we designing assets that can be reused, adapted, and repaired by clients, or are we building single-use visuals destined for the archive after one season? Shifting from a linear model of brief-to-deliverable to a circular model of stewardship means designing with an afterlife in mind—creating modular systems, open-source toolkits, and visual languages that reduce the need to remake from scratch constantly. It is less about producing less, and more about producing to last.

True sustainability in creative work isn't just about making things look green or reducing physical waste. It requires recognizing that every brief, digital pipeline,

cultural narrative, and human mind is part of an interconnected framework and designing systems that allow both our planet and our creative capacity to endure.

Zoi Lau (FS 2024/25, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) holds a Bachelor of Arts in Advertising Design with a minor in European Studies from the University. She is currently developing her career at Publicis, pursuing her interests in communication, design, and visual storytelling. With support from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, she participated in an academic exchange in Copenhagen, Denmark. This experience broadened her international perspective and played an important role in shaping her creative direction and professional aspirations.

Beyond the Spreadsheet: How Applied Improv Turns Climate Data into Action

Joscelin Yeung

I have sat through countless polished sustainability lectures. Experts stand at the podium with slides on rising global temperatures, carbon offsets, and net-zero targets. The audience nods, takes notes, and packs their bags. Then, nothing changes.

The reality is simple: humans are emotional, embodied creatures. Static numbers and abstract percentages rarely spark deep behavioral change. When climate change remains trapped inside spreadsheets and corporate reports, it loses its human pulse. My work with the Climate Resilience Lab started with a fundamental question:[1] What happens when we replace one-way lectures with experiential, embodied learning to address the human side of climate resilience?

The Unseen Intersectionality: Eco vs. Survival Anxiety: To explore climate resilience through a human-centered lens, I partnered with the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres (HKFWC) to interview women living in subdivided flats (tong1 fong4, 劏房) and rooftop shacks (liu4 uk1, 寮屋) across Hong Kong. In global financial hubs, climate change is often discussed in terms of abstract environmental, social, and governance metrics or framed as a distant future risk. Yet, sitting inside a cramped, metal-walled subdivided flat in July reveals a crisis of survival. While corporate professionals

1 **The Climate Resilience Network** is an initiative aimed at strengthening public awareness of climate-related risks, fostering collaboration among local stakeholders, and promoting community-based approaches to climate adaptation and resilience in Hong Kong. The initiative is supported by the Hong Kong Climate Action Network for Youth (HK-CANY) Small Grant, which provides funding for youth-led projects addressing climate change.

deliberate over long-term “Eco-Anxiety,” grassroots families face daily “Survival Anxiety.”

The interviews uncovered raw realities that no dataset can capture:

Air conditioning units are often installed, but women dared not switch them on due to the cost of electricity. As one resident shared: “The moment I see the electricity bill, my heart starts to beat faster than the heat. Every extra dollar for the AC is a dollar less for the fees of my child’s extracurriculars.”

Another interviewee shared about DIY heat-relief tactics. To survive sweltering nights, residents improvised solutions like the “Midnight Switch” (shutting the AC off at midnight and sealing windows with fans) or clamping iced cans under their armpits. She explained: “When the fans just push hot air, I take a cooled can from the fridge—sometimes a soda, sometimes pineapple—wrap it in a towel, and clamp it under my armpit to lower my core temperature just enough to drift off.”

Some also revealed gendered & psychological strain. Residents shared that extreme heat is not just physical; it is a mental health crisis as well. Women reported feeling unable to wear lighter clothing at home due to cramped, shared living spaces and a lack of privacy, while chronic heat disrupted cooking, children’s homework, and family harmony.

Climate change is not an isolated environmental metric—it sits at the intersection of gender, poverty, and human survival.

Applied Improvisation:
The Body as a Somatic Lens: When corporate leaders confront complex challenges, the analytical brain builds cognitive defenses—we retreat into technical jargon,

policy frameworks, or a sense of helplessness. One-way lectures do not break these defenses.

Applied Improvisation uses the body as a “Somatic Lens” to bypass cognitive chatter and activate mirror neurons. Instead of passive absorption, participants physically embody the sensory reality into their bodies. This fosters psychological safety, creating a space where leaders can drop their professional armor and explore sensitive human realities without fear of judgment.

By replacing static slide decks, the lab transforms learning into an active “Survival Sandbox” across three phases:

The first phase is the ‘Unfreeze,’ which breaks down the participants’ defenses. Through this, participants quiet their internal analytical chatter and enter present-moment awareness, shedding professional defenses.

The second phase is ‘Synthesize,’ the main part of the Survival Sandbox. We used forum theatre techniques, in which participants step into unscripted, high-pressure scenarios based on real grassroots testimonies. For example, a corporate executive physically pretends to be a grassroots single mother making the choice between electricity bills and childcare.

The last phase is Embody & Intervene, which includes prototyping the real solutions. Participants don’t just observe; they physically jump into the scene to test real-time interventions. When they experience how challenging it is for the protagonist, it helps to transform their abstract sympathy into active problem-solving.

What began as a funded initiative quickly gained momentum, engaging over 60 youths and industry representatives at the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY Hong Kong) and earning the Grand Prize for Poster

Presentation at the Hong Kong Baptist University International Climate Resilience Symposium. When I asked a symposium judge why an experiential workshop stood out among traditional academic research, he affirmed that similar embodied practices are gaining traction in Australia. He recognized that experiential facilitation is not merely an alternative format, but a globally validated frontier in climate communication and organizational learning.

Voices from the Field: Shifting Mindsets:
The true proof of somatic retention lies in the mindset shifts that occurred inside the room: One of the mindset shifts was how the participant connected environmental strategy to reality. Here are some excerpts of the participants' feedback: A Sustainability Manager from a local conglomerate noted, "Tpractice brought environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations and climate issues remarkably close to us." She also added some food for thought: "Beyond chasing new ESG trends, how can our corporate operations provide tangible choices and relief for grassroots citizens?"

A financial professional commented, "We are so accustomed to looking at macro data—sea levels, numbers, compliance. We completely overlook human needs. This experience highlighted that missing dimension."

A representative from a local women's group shared: "It challenged us to view climate action through a gender lens—asking what unarticulated needs women face that they themselves might not realize during daily survival pressure."

One participant shared: "It is impossible to ignore a story you have physically lived." Empathy without action is incomplete. By stepping into the lived realities of

grassroots communities, leaders move from passive listening to active partnership.

When decision-makers experience the system somatically, tangible interventions emerge to address the problem from different angles.

Firstly, organizations will be able to provide more targeted corporate relief by directing more corporate social responsibility resources towards thermal-insulation improvements, utility relief, or community "Cooling Hours" co-created with local businesses. Also, there will be more consideration in designing business operations and public services that explicitly account for marginalized stakeholders rather than focusing solely on carbon disclosures. Lastly, by recognizing that grassroots women are experts in their own survival, equipping them with resources to address thermal stress and family mental health.

By leveraging Applied Improvisation, we replace passive lectures with somatic memory. We enable leaders to feel the challenge, inhabit the system, and design human-centered solutions. Ultimately, true systemic change happens when strategic rigor meets genuine, embodied empathy.

Joscelin Yeung (FS 2014/15, Hong Kong Baptist University) holds a Bachelor's degree in Government and International Studies from Hong Kong Baptist University and a Master of Science in Public Management and Governance from the London School of Economics. She is the Founder of Stage Lab HK, which specializes in organizational change, intercultural collaboration, and experiential learning. Drawing on her experience with UN Women and grassroots NGOs, she develops learning programs using applied improvisation and live visual synthesis. She is also a three-time TEDx Speaker Coach and creator of the award-winning Climate Resilience Lab, which connects social and environmental challenges with corporate learning and strategy.

Designing Education as a System with Design-Based Learning

Leann Wong

Education is shifting away from recitation and knowledge retention towards the ability to integrate multiple disciplines, recognize real-world problems, and design solutions. Design-Based Learning (DBL) directly responds to these evolving needs. This article looks at DBL as a system: how business, education and curriculum shape each other (Fig. 1), and how people and AI co-work to deliver it (Fig. 4).

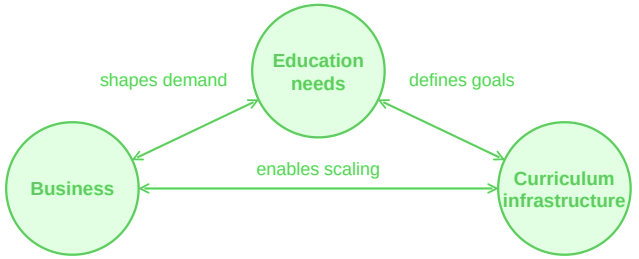


Fig 1. Business, education needs and curriculum infrastructure shape one another.

DBL fuses hard domain knowledge with future-ready capabilities through hands-on practice. Instead of isolating subject matter from practical execution, DBL requires students to master core academic concepts by applying them to real-world constraints. As they engineer solutions, they naturally build empathy, force meaningful collaboration, and practice iterative resilience. Students retain subject knowledge more deeply by applying it effectively under real conditions.

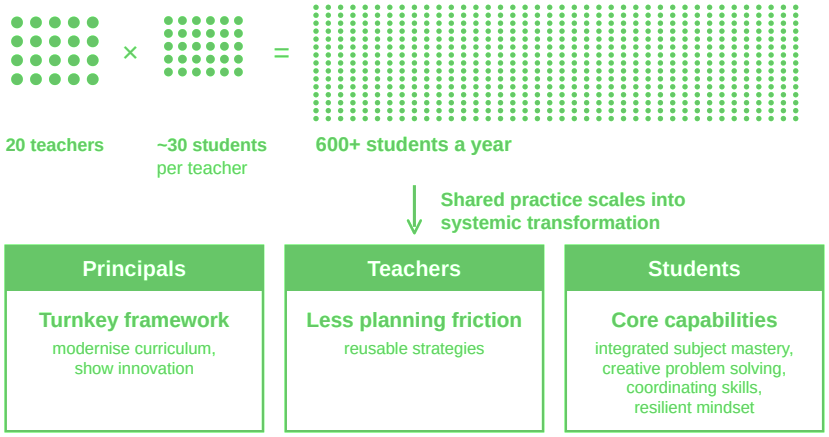


Fig 2. One cohort of 20 trained teachers reaches 600+ students a year; shared practice then scales into systemic transformation.

How education needs shape our business:
In line with the Hong Kong Education Bureau's core applied-learning initiatives, education requires a shift from passive recall to project-based design thinking. Bridging this vision with classroom execution, however, presents a core operational bottleneck: "How to structure a curriculum that balances openended creativity with clear structure, remains systemic enough for teachers to implement consistently, and scales across an entire institution?"

Design for HK responds through scalable products and services for Hong Kong primary schools. These include comprehensive DBL teacher training to build educator confidence, alongside ready-to-use, cross-disciplinary project booklets that simplify classroom implementation. Furthermore, macro-educational values—such as inclusive education and support for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)—inform the underlying pedagogy. By integrating bite-sized learning modules, scaffolded instructions, and multi-modal activities, the curriculum ensures that high-level design thinking remains accessible to diverse learning styles.

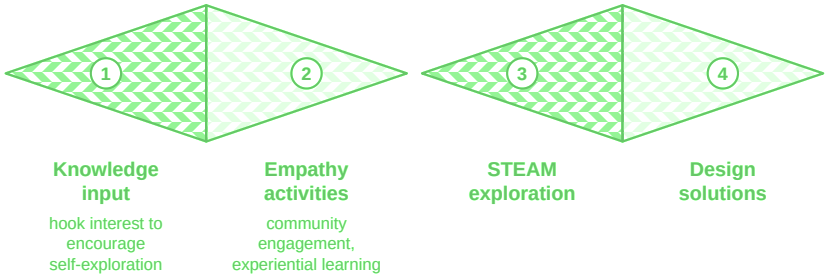


Fig 3. The four phases; the diamonds show rhythm, not lesson time.

How our business influences education:
Delivering structured curriculum products and teacher training goes beyond selling a service—it establishes an instructional model that transforms school culture from within. The primary leverage point is teacher empowerment. Training 20 teachers equips them with DBL mindsets and facilitation tools. The effect compounds over time (Fig. 2). As shared practices spread, classroom success scales into systemic transformation for principals, teachers and students alike (Fig. 2). Principals gain a turnkey framework to modernize curricula, elevate teaching standards, and demonstrate innovation. Teachers benefit from reusable strategies that reduce lesson-planning friction while supporting cross-disciplinary and differentiated instruction. Students, in turn, develop core capabilities, integrated subject mastery, and a resilient problem-solving mindset.

Education and business inform curriculum infrastructure:
Curriculum infrastructure balances pedagogical goals with practical constraints, foremost among them the fixed number of lesson hours per term. To maximize

learning depth within these limited schedules, the framework allocates time across four core phases: knowledge input, empathy activities, STEAM exploration, and design solutions (Fig. 3). Embedding these phases into ready-to-use lesson plans provides schools with a repeatable structure that preserves pedagogical quality within their timetables.

Because personal growth is inherently qualitative, defining, measuring, and scaling success requires continuous reflection. As we iterate on educational products, we must ask ourselves three fundamental questions: How do we measure what truly matters? Does our design evolve with the classroom? How does single-school success ignite systemic shift?

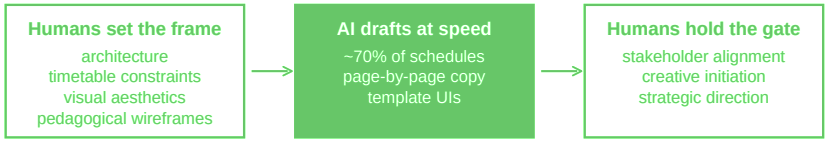


Fig 4. How people and AI split the work.

How People × AI Co-Work:
AI accelerates execution speed while human judgment maintains pedagogical integrity and strategic direction. Human–AI co-working relies on a reverse-engineering workflow: humans set the frame and AI drafts at speed (Fig. 4). Beyond curriculum drafting, this model sharpens internal value statements and offloads manual asset production so designers can focus on core user experience. Ultimately, human intelligence remains non-negotiable at key gatekeeping checkpoints (Fig. 4). Together, these form one system: the business, the classroom and the tools around them keep reshaping one another.

Leann Wong (FS 2022/23, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) holds a Bachelor's degree in Product Design from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. With support from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, she participated in an academic exchange at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, Sweden. Since graduating, she has joined Design For HK and pursued her interests in design, education, and technology, developing innovations for primary education and software-as-a-service (SaaS) products through AI-assisted coding. She also serves as a part-time Teaching Assistant for a design entrepreneurship course at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

A Journey Across Planet, People, and Climate

Deanna Xu

The climate crisis touches every corner of the world, but not equally. This reality exposes deep injustices woven into our global systems. While climate impacts are uneven and unjust, youth around the world have been stepping forward to confront these challenges and redefine the future they wish to see. My four years with the Climate Students Movement International opened my eyes to the global climate regime,[1] proving that sustainability is never an isolated issue. It is a complex web of local, national, regional, and international systems. And within these systems, each of us has a role to play. For me, navigating these interconnected systems has been a journey across the planet, people, and climate.

Planet—Mapping the Underlying System:
Before we can transform a system, we must first map the hidden structures and data that shape it. My background in land surveying and geo-informatics gave me a way of seeing the world beyond what is visible—a framework for noticing the underlying patterns behind complex sustainability challenges. I have always wanted to know more about our world and explore ways to conserve our Mother Earth. With this curiosity, spatial science became my lens for answering a question that has followed me for years: What does sustainability truly mean?

1 **Climate Students Movement International** is a student-led nongovernmental organization (NGO) founded in August 2020 by student groups from Sweden, Kenya, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Its mission is to mobilize, organize, and strengthen student initiatives and organizations to encourage higher education institutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with climate science and the Paris Agreement. For more information, see Climate Students Movement International, https://climate-studentsint.com/.

I soon realized spatial science is far more than measuring land and drawing maps. It is the "science of where," a discipline that reveals how data-driven decisions can drive systemic change. With urban populations projected to reach nearly 70% by 2050,[2] global urban emissions could rise to 40.2 $GtCO^2$-eq under moderate-to-low mitigation efforts.[3] Given this rapid urbanization, simply greening individual buildings or adopting energy-efficient materials will not solve the systemic challenge. Meaningful decarbonization requires fundamentally rethinking how urban spaces, transit networks, and communities interact, which is a scale of change that integrated spatial planning can deliver.

By combining remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems, we can overlay climate hazards with demographic and policy data to identify settlements with higher climate risks and protect vulnerable communities. Supplementing with expert knowledge, spatial analytics pinpoint where interventions matter most, enabling resource-efficient, resilient, and sustainable urban development. This was my first encounter with systems thinking: recognizing that sustainability is not a static goal, but a dynamic outcome of how spatial, social, and environmental systems interact.

People—Activating the Social System:
Identifying areas of concern is only the first step; true impact requires understanding the communities within them. Volunteering has always been my way of understanding the world and connecting with people. When the pandemic shifted two-thirds of my university

2 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision (New York: United Nations, 2019).

3 Shuaib Lwasa et al., "Urban Systems and Other Settlements," in Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change: Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ed. P. R. Shukla et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 861–952, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157926.010.

life online, it unexpectedly gave me the space to rediscover my passion for the environment. I began learning more about circular economy, plastic pollution, ecosystem science, and sustainability through both online and offline volunteer work. For instance, as a plastic-free ocean ambassador, I co-led multiple outreach days for families, combining environmental literacy talks and interactive board games with beach clean-ups and ocean debris surveys. Leading these outreach activities demonstrated the power of experiential education in fostering early environmental awareness. Collaborating with diverse individuals on various causes and service groups made me more observant, grounded, and connected to my community.

During COVID-19, digital volunteering emerged as a new way to engage. A simple search led me to join Climate Students Movement International, a community that transformed how I understood the climate crisis. In 2022, I joined as a volunteer for Sustainability Month, collaborating with teammates from Singapore, the UK, Sweden, and Kenya. Listening to their stories broadened my view of global climate realities: climate anxiety, lack of funding, unclear handovers, unfavorable policies, and more. Despite these challenges, our member groups continued pushing for a more sustainable world by organizing campaigns, planting trees, educating children, and mobilizing communities. Our virtual collaboration was rarely seamless; unstable connections and conflicting time zones were constant hurdles. Yet everyone remained committed, sending emails, designing sessions, and supporting one another through check-ins and check-outs. This supportive environment made me reflect on my role, realizing the power of teamwork and the importance of leadership in driving sustainability through social systems.

Climate—Experiencing the vulnerability:
That connection between spatial analysis and human systems became tangible when I moved from technical planning to fieldwork in the Lao PDR. Eager to build on my climate work after graduation, I sought to ground my technical background in real-world community impact. I was grateful for the opportunity to volunteer at UN-Habitat in Laos, where I saw how climate hazards translate into disasters through governance and institutional gaps.

As a Knowledge Management Assistant at UN-Habitat Lao PDR, I supported multi-layered vulnerability assessments for rapidly emerging cities like Pakse and Kaysone.[4] My role involves integrating spatial data on climate hazards, biodiversity, and socio-economic factors. I observed striking levels of disaster vulnerability there: underdeveloped urban infrastructure, villages lacking climate-resilient measures, and communities passively exposed to extreme weather events. I also experienced firsthand power outages, flooding, and air pollution from slash-and-burn—my first time feeling so close to disasters.

However, the process of addressing these issues in Laos was often complex and prolonged, requiring coordinated efforts from international organizations, governments, and NGOs, unlike Hong Kong's more robust systems. This highlighted the unequal distribution of disaster risk and climate injustice. Experiencing these systemic challenges firsthand deepened my resolve to leverage spatial science and empirical data to design context-sensitive, equitable adaptation strategies.

4 **Pakse and Kaysone Phomvihane** are two major cities in southern Laos. Pakse, the capital of Champasak Province, is located at the confluence of the Mekong and Xe Don Rivers and serves as an important regional commercial and transportation hub. Kaysone Phomvihane, formerly known as Savannakhet, is the capital of Savannakhet Province and a major trading center along the Mekong River, connecting Laos with neighboring Thailand and Vietnam.

Reflecting on these experiences, I see that sustainability is not a set of discrete problems to solve, but a dynamic network of interconnected relationships. My path across spatial science, youth advocacy, and climate adaptation taught me that every challenge sits within a larger structure shaped by governance, inequality, community capacity, and the choices we make every day.

This systems perspective fundamentally transformed how I view my role: I am no longer just an observer or participant in environmental work, but an active node within a global network of youth, practitioners, and communities shaping climate futures. This evolution is what led me to begin my MSc in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation at Lund University. The program allows me to deepen the systems thinking I have been cultivating, integrating spatial analysis, community engagement, and equitable planning into risk-informed strategies that strengthen resilience where it is needed most.

While the climate crisis is systemic and deeply unequal, our collective response can be equally systemic. When we learn to see the system, we learn how to change it, and that is where hope begins.

Deanna Xu (FS 2022/23, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) holds a Bachelor of Science in Land Surveying and Geo-Informatics from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. With support from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, she completed an academic exchange at the Technical University of Munich. She is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation at Lund University in Sweden. Her interests focus on applying geospatial analytics to environmental conservation, sustainability, and climate resilience. She is also a core committee member of Climate Students Movement International, a global network that promotes youth engagement in climate action.

Reconnecting to the Aliveness of Living Systems

Yaki Wo

I decided to write this article as an antidote to the commonplace AI-drafted writing we see these days. I intend to discard the logic found in analytical writing and to manifest my stream of consciousness in a storytelling fashion. At times, this may be hard to follow, as it is not a perfectly polished piece, but I invite you to sit with any discomfort, withhold judgment, and notice any thinking, feeling, and sensing that may come up in your mind and body. I hope it will be clear by the end of this article why I do so.

I want to say up front that what I share is my perspective. Part of the work of systems thinking is being mindful of one's own blind spots and seeing truth through multiple lenses. I invite you to reflect on your own observations and test any ideas presented against your own experience.

Some background: I have spent my whole work life—and that's since 2008—in the "social and environmental change" sector, working with non-profits and foundations on issues from human rights to conservation to climate change. I thought I was engaging in systems thinking when I worked on introducing multiple interventions: top-down policy, bottom-up campaigns, and creating market signals, to decarbonise the entire energy system. But I wasn't. Systems thinking asks more of us than just moving a little upstream.

Things started changing around 2016. My mother, who single-handedly raised me and my brother, became terminally ill. I started going down the "soul searching"

rabbit hole, and somewhere down there, I found Fritjof Capra, a physicist, systems theorist, and deep ecologist.[1] That was the beginning. Over the years, that encounter led me to the Regenesis Institute,[2] where I embarked on my journey as a regenerative practitioner and have since facilitated many regenerative workshops that introduce and deepen our understanding of the living system by engaging our heads, hearts, and hands—thinking, feeling, and doing.

What I have learnt from my time living in Aotearoa, New Zealand, studying Rongoā Māori (Māori medicine) from my teacher Donna Kerridge,[3] is that the many crises we are seeing right now, some call them polycrisis or metacrisis—from climate change to ecological breakdown to loneliness, addiction, violence and mental health issues, to war and conflicts—all stem from the same root cause of disconnection. Disconnection from the self, others, and nature (or the land).

The beginning of this separation, as I learned from Laura Storm,[4] dates back to the Middle Ages and was heightened during the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. During that time we began loosing sight of the "whole" in favour of boxing things into categories and reducing complexity to simpler, more digestible parts, and thus we began to see the world as a

1 **Fritjof Capra** is an Austrian-American physicist, systems theorist, and philosopher renowned for bridging modern physics with Eastern mysticism in his seminal book, The Tao of Physics. He is a pioneer in systems thinking and ecological literacy, advocating for a holistic worldview that views life through interconnected networks and ecological principles.

2 **The Regenesis Institute for Regenerative Practice** is a world-leading educational organization dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of regenerative development and living-systems thinking. Through flagship offerings like The Regenerative Practitioner series, it equips architects, designers, leaders, and change-makers with frameworks to transform how human communities co-evolve with natural ecosystems.

3 **Donna Kerridge** (Ngāti Tahinga, Ngāti Mahuta) is a prominent Aotearoa New Zealand rongoā Māori (traditional Māori healing) practitioner, tutor, and advisor. Grounded in indigenous knowledge, she bridges traditional healing principles with health and community systems to foster holistic well-being, earth connection, and collective healing.

machine. Logic, rational analyses, quantifiable certainty, and linearity were preferred. The Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" mindset is a fitting description of this sentiment. We started liking things that are controllable and manageable, with clear, rigid and even arbitrary boundaries. My colleague and friend, Māori Elder Johnnie Freeland, calls this "square" systems thinking. When the balance tips too far toward the square system, we see the problems we see today: an endless desire for productivity, an obsession with quantitative KPIs, broken relationships, and nature as a resource to be exploited.

So when I, as a regenerative practitioner, talk about systems thinking or systems change, I am talking about a paradigm shift from a mechanistic "square" system to a living "circular" system. This circular system is commonly found in indigenous communities all over the world, and is also in line with regenerative approaches. This circular system is commonly found in indigenous communities all over the world, and is also in line with regenerative approaches that seek to harmonise human systems with natural (more-than-human) systems, enabling life to create more life. Non-linearity, uncertainty, rhythms, cycles, complexity, diversity, fluidity, and chaos mark a circular system. Of equal, if not greater, importance to rational thinking via the mind are body intelligence and intuition. Reciprocal relationships and connections are the air we breathe. "We relate, therefore we are" is the contrasting description I like to use. I reckon we do like a bit of both square and circular systems, and I think, like the Taijitu that depicts yin and yang in a circle, the two complement each other and are never clear-cut—

4 **Laura Storm** is an international speaker, author, and pioneer in the field of sustainability and regenerative leadership. As the founder of Regenerators and co-author of Regenerative Leadership, she works with organizations and leaders globally to design cultures, systems, and living-system models aligned with nature's principles.Zealand rongoā Māori (traditional Māori healing) practitioner, tutor, and advisor. Grounded in indigenous knowledge, she bridges traditional healing principles with health and community systems to foster holistic well-being, earth connection, and collective healing.

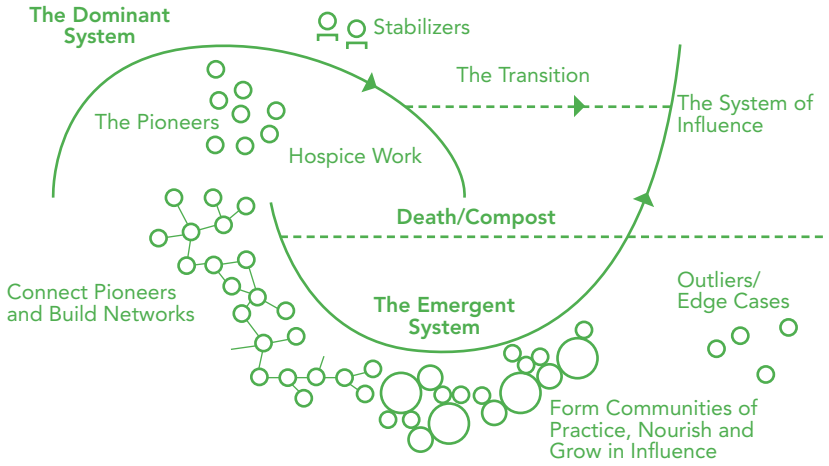


Fig 1. The Berkana Institute's Two Loops Model is a strategic framework created by Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze that illustrates how dominant, declining systems transition into emerging, living systems over time. It provides changemakers with a visual map to understand systemic transformation, guiding actions to hospicing the dying old system. Credit: The Moment.

note the black dot on the yang side and the white dot on the yin side. As the world seems to be collapsing around us, many of us, however, feel a yearning to be re-circularised. We long for a life that follows the natural rhythm of work and rest, just as seasons change through time. We long for opportunities, time, and space to explore and live into our unique potential, rather than being trapped in mundane, everyday tasks that follow an authority's instructions. We long to be in meaningful, sacred relationships with each other and with the land again. This is a system in which humans are an inseparable part of nature, with mountains, rivers, oceans, and land being our ancestors. How could we destroy our own family?

The system I am alluding to is the very operating system that forms our values and beliefs; it is the "how" that penetrates in and out and in all directions. I'll illustrate why this is the system we want to focus on.

In a city where the local government and residents are all trying to create a healthier, happier, greener future together, reducing demand for private cars is all well and good, and better than simply switching fuels or to electric vehicles. This is until some parent group comes in to complain about higher taxes for car ownership and disappearing on-street parking because they are struggling to transport their young children and elderly parents around town. A group comes in to advocate for modern zero-carbon buildings, only to be met by social welfare groups protesting against gentrification by luxury building complexes and heritage conservationists who want to preserve old architecture in the area. This is why elevating to a "systems" level that remains within a mechanistic category may not be sufficient. It is the classic Whack-a-Mole game; solving one part leads to problems in another.

At this point, I will pause to clarify that I am not criticizing us all for trying to do good. I am merely pointing to a developmental end-state we could align ourselves towards, doing the best we can, consciously, with awareness, within the constraints we experience. In fact, we need people to be rounding off the edges of the square system from within, as well as people who are creating parallel, smaller circular systems and connecting them as "islands of coherence," as Nobel Prize-winning chemist Ilya Prigogine famously said.[5] The Berkana Institute Two-Loop Model illustrates how paradigm shifts occur: First, within the dominant system, pioneers begin doing things differently.[6] Pioneers connect to build networks; networks then connect to form communities of

5 **Ilya Prigogine** was a Nobel Prize–winning physical chemist renowned for pioneering the theory of dissipative structures, which explains how complex, ordered systems self-organize far from thermodynamic equilibrium.

6 **The Berkana Institute's Two Loops Model** is a strategic framework created by Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze that illustrates how dominant, declining systems transition into emerging, living systems over time. It provides changemakers with a visual map to understand systemic transformation, guiding actions to hospicing the dying old system while illuminating, connecting, and nourishing the pioneers of the new.

practice that grow in influence and slowly give rise to the emergent system. The dominant system, having served its time, shall be hospiced and composted, transforming into nutrients for the new system.

This is how I am going to wrap up: practical tips. Systems thinking is not about the "what," it is the "how." You can engage in systems thinking anywhere, anytime. The most important work starts from within ourselves. Cultivate the ability to see and sense wholeness, and not fragment wholes into their parts. A whole is experienced as singular, unified, vital (alive), and developing, according to my mentor and colleague, Bill Reed. A human being is a whole; a community is a whole; a place—perhaps a neighbourhood or a bioregion—is a whole. When we can sense into this wholeness, we are not only understanding the sum of its parts but also the magic born of the interconnections and relationships amongst them all. This work requires constant practice of self-observing, also known as mindfulness, of how we think. Ask "Am I reducing complexities into its parts?" "What is the whole here that is holding the parts together?"

What often happens is that our thinking collapses because the system we are in is too complex for us to make sense of. This is why we need to build our capacity to hold complexity—and yes, it is perfectly doable for anyone. In the regenerative practitioners course I co-facilitate with Regenesis Institute, we learn to think with dynamic living systems frameworks designed to help us sense into and hold complexities, and to align this thinking with others we work or live with. We also engage with reflection questions and Socratic Dialogues designed to help us notice our own thinking process, practice deep listening, hold multiple truths without jumping into advocacy or judgment, and unveil the essence of the whole (be that an individual, a community, or a place).

I hope the intentionally chaotic presentation of my thoughts serves as a little demonstration of a circularised approach. There is an order underneath chaos that can perhaps only be felt and described as "resonance," or the sense of "being called." I am not against AI. In fact, I hope that the arrival of AI will finally liberate us all to be humans again, which, to me, means being creative stewards of Planet Earth.

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Events

APRIL	18	**FS Live Action Role Play Experience** John Poon (FS 2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)	AUG	12	**FS Networking Lunch in Wan Chai** Fung Scholars Community
	19	**FS Indoor Archery Taster Session** Franklin Cheung (FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) Jayden Sam (FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)		21	**FS Movie Night of Love in a Fallen City** Karlie Chen (FS 2011/12, Hong Kong Baptist University)
MAY	15	**FS Networking Lunch in Central** Fung Scholars Community		22	**FS Crossroads: Sociolinguistic and the City: Hong Kong in Her Own Words** Tse Sheung Hei (FS 2023/24, The University of Hong Kong)
	16	**FS Interactive Story Theatre** John Poon (FS 2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)	SEPT	18	**FS Movie Night of Rouge** Karlie Chen (FS 2011/12, Hong Kong Baptist University)
	29	**FS Movie Night of The Flowers of War** Karlie Chen (FS 2011/12, Hong Kong Baptist University)		19	**FS 2026/27 Mainland Welcome Gathering** Fung Scholars Community
JUNE	11	**FS x iD3梦想飞 Volunteer Sharing by Francis Choi (FS 2014/15, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)** iD3 梦想飞 x Victor and William Fung Foundation		20	**FS Caricature Painting Workshop** Sammi Lau (FS 2022/23, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
	27	**FS Cuttlefish Summer Social** Fung Scholars Community		24	**FS Networking Lunch in Sheung Wan** Fung Scholars Community
JULY	4	**FS Crossroads: From Ideas to Actions: AI Agents with Openclaws & Hermes** Franklin Cheung (FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)	OCT	2	**FS Singapore Chapter Welcome Gathering** Gideon Tay (FS 2024/25, National University of Singapore) Kenji Tay (FS 2023/24, Singapore Management University
	18	**FS 2026/27 Welcome Gathering** Fung Scholars Community			
	25	**FS Crossroads: 追尋自我還是放縱自我 Charles Taylor 對本真性的反思** Herman Tsui (FS 2018/19, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)			

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all contributors. Your collective efforts are the best embodiment of Connection across Contrasts. To our newcomers, we truly look forward to the fresh energy and vitality you will bring to our community. You are warmly welcome to join any of our events, meetings, and community-building initiatives!

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