

June 8, 2008. South China Morning Post

Concern is about direction, not speed, of arts hub development

I refer to the report ("Artists form alternative to arts hub authority", May 29), which requires clarification.

The alternative West Kowloon Cultural District forum held at the Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity at the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture on May 28 was neither artist-led nor did it focus on the "sluggish" progress by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority as suggested.

The co-organisers span a wide spectrum of constituencies, from the Legislative Council to non-governmental organisations, universities, think-tanks, artists and arts organisations.

The poster clearly described the event as a civil society forum and alternative platform looking into the fundamental issues around the cultural district seemingly neglected by the authority to date. These include human capital, cultural leadership, audience development, and the need for world-class green public spaces, to name a few.

The point here is not about speed of execution. Referring to it as being sluggish implies we want

authority is doing the right thing or asking the right questions. This has little to do with choosing one of the three shortlisted master plans.

Fundamentally, it is about the role of the cultural district in shaping the cultural identity and strategic positioning of Hong Kong in the 21st century.

Rather than having public engagement exercises carried out as a procedure we desperately need leadership in the public policy, cultural and civic realms that create a clear, consistent and bold vision. This vision is unlikely to be the aggregate of questionnaire responses. No respectable artist creates work through focus groups.

We ought to be clear on what is uniquely Hong Kong and world-class artistic excellence that could be curated for and world-premiered in West Kowloon. The "what" precedes the "how".

The greatest challenge, and hence opportunity, lies in realising the potential and synergy of the cultural cluster, so that the total is more than the sum of its parts.

William Wong, visiting Clore research fellow, London