

Tuesday English News Report: Broadcast Date: Nov 21st, 2017**Hong Kong needs more public open space, for people's physical and mental well-being**

Layla McCay and Paul Yip say a wealth of research points to the positive effects of public space, but it needs to be a natural environment for us to enjoy the full benefits

Space is one of Hong Kong's **scarcest** resources: a luxury commodity, available to those who can afford to pay. Sometimes, private space expands at the expense of public space. Even in public housing, private amenities like kitchens and bathrooms have driven the **demise** of communal facilities and seen us **retreat** further into our own small spaces, with our neighbours becoming strangers. With half of the city's households living in spaces smaller than 500 square feet, we need public space to **compensate**; to relax and interact with our communities. It is no surprise to see so much unhappiness arising from a shortage of space.

When we spend every day within a **dense** urban environment, it affects our mental health: it can make us stressed, anxious and depressed, but it doesn't have to. Densely built environments can strengthen any urban population's ability to enjoy life, cope with stress, work productively and contribute to our communities. Public open space is at the heart of this effect, but Hong Kong has a public space deficit.

We could learn from the groups of older people who punctuate Hong Kong's morning and evening landscape with their postures. In this dense city, they find places to conduct a synchrony of exercise such as tai chi in public areas such as parks. By appropriating public space every day, they pick up three ingredients we all need to build our mental health resilience: physical activity, positive social interaction and exposure to nature.

Physical activity does not only improve physical health; it improves mood, self-esteem and overall mental well-being. It can be as effective as medication for mild and moderate depression. However, long working hours make it hard for some people to fit in exercise. Using convenient local spaces rather than having to travel to designated exercise venues can help. That's why walkability is so valued in cities.

Ideally, we would all be walking daily in country parks, but many people lack time, energy or motivation. Urban walking integrates exercise into our daily routines without special effort. The MTR is particularly good at making us stride **briskly** through underground and overground walkways every day towards our destinations.

Increasing the city's bikeability would further help integrate daily activity for more people, but safety concerns **inhibit** cycling as a practical mode of transport in Hong Kong. Perhaps a future Hong Kong will start to transfer some of the city's infrastructure away from cars and towards protected cycling and walking routes to promote health for all.

Importantly, group exercisers do not just **reap** the benefits of regular physical activity; by meeting in public spaces they create community and belonging. This is **enviable** because, in a city of more than 7 million people, it is easy to feel isolated.

Research finds positive, natural social interaction protects our mental well-being. Having nearby friends and family to **confide in** and spend time with increases happiness and our mental resilience. We develop social capital that helps us cope. By participating in and contributing to a community, we feel we belong somewhere beyond our place of work or study. This reduces loneliness and anxiety, and improves memory and intellectual performance for students, workers and older people alike.

Questions to think about:

- What is your opinion on the issue or issues raised in this article?
- How do you try to relax and enjoy life? After reading this article, would you choose other ways to do so?
- Are there any other pros and cons to living in a city such as Hong Kong?
- If there is one thing you could change about Hong Kong, what would it be and why?



I: Vocabulary and understanding meaning: Match the meaning and/or synonym (words with a similar or the same meaning) to the words which have been highlighted in bold in the article.

Column A: Word from text	Letter	Column B: Meaning or synonym
1. scarce (adj)	B	A. to be in a lucky situation, to be in situation where others may be jealous of
2. demise (v)	H	B. not many of, insufficient
3. retreat (v)	I	C. trust someone enough to tell them about something private
4. compensate (v)	G	D. quick (and not wasting time)
5. dense (adj)	F	E. receive (something, especially something beneficial) as a consequence of one's own or another's actions.
6. brisk(ly) (adj/adv)	D	F. close together
7. inhibit (v)	J	G. to make up for, give (someone) something, typically money, in recognition of loss, suffering, or injury incurred; recompense.
8. reap (v)	E	H. the end or failure of something or someone
9. enviable (adj)	A	I. move back, withdraw
10. confide in (phrasal verb)	C	J. hinder, restrain or hold back

II: Usage of vocabulary: Choose the most appropriate word from the table above to fill in the missing words of the sentences below making sure your answers are grammatically correct.

1. The victims of the incident sought **compensation** for the injuries they suffered as a result of the carelessness of the driver.
2. I was very angry when I **confided in** a friend who then told others. I thought I could rely on him not to blab. He had promised not to tell anyone my secret.
3. The scandal led to his **demise**. He is no longer the CEO of the company.
4. Water is a **scarce** resource, we should not waste it.
5. Many peoples form of exercise is a **brisk** walk every day.
6. The problem with many cities is that they are (a) **densely** populated, so there is almost nowhere to (b) **retreat** and get away from the crowds.
7. People often **envy** others for what they have, but actually do not realise how lucky they themselves are.
8. Some people are very shy and **inhibited** they find it difficult to meet new people and socialise.
9. People in developed nations should realise how lucky they are and **reap** the benefits of all the opportunities they are given.

Challenge of the week: Hong Kong riddles

ENGLISH CORNER CAFÉ IS ALWAYS OPEN ON A TUESDAY FOR DRINKS, SNACKS, CONVERSATION & GAMES

See Ms Roberts for prizes if you know the answers!