



Personal dev



Art

feature

Hong Kong is a fast-paced city – maybe too fast. In Central district, high rents and popular real estate means the area changes fast – and not always for the better. That's where Agnes To Cheuk-hei and Uva Fung Yu-yun come in. The two 16-year-old students from St Stephen's Girls' College want to help control and improve the development of the district.

The pair entered the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS) Map Making Competition, which asked secondary school students from around Hong Kong to create 3D models of how they would improve Central.

The girls' plan, which they named **AWSome** (Art Worth Spreading), won them the first prize.

The students had help from HKIS, which held seminars and workshops to teach participants about surveying the city. By better understanding how planning works, the students were then able to come up with ideas to help improve the areas in Central.

From practical to fantasy

It wasn't as simple as listing wild ideas. "This competition didn't only require us to be creative, but also to be realistic," explains Agnes. "When we thought about the designs and what we wanted to add to them, we needed to think if it would really work in real life. Like, if we wanted to remove some buildings, was it possible? Or was it reasonable to do it?"

Ideas ranged from practical – like establishing a large-scale food court for office workers in Central to avoid over-crowding during lunch hour – to the more fantastic – like turning Victoria Prison into a zoo, or building a long slide next to the Central escalator to help pedestrians going down from Mid-Levels.

Agnes and Uva focused on revitalising their zone by promoting small businesses and cultural growth.

"The first thing we noticed in our zone was PMQ," Agnes said. "But we think PMQ is not really enough, because people might go there once and then when they leave they'll think 'Ok, I've gone there', and never go again. We

don't really feel that artistic atmosphere around there, so we want to enhance it."

Uva agrees, saying: "In Hong Kong, there aren't enough places for art development. It's important for the art atmosphere to spread around the entire Central area, and not just be restricted to PMQ."

The girls' plan helps artistic development, and promotes traditional culture as well.

"We have two iconic buildings," explains Uva, pointing to two new areas on their 3D map of the area. "The first one is called **Spiral**, and it has a modern approach."

It's important for the art atmosphere to spread to the entire Central area

Spiral would be designated as a rent-controlled space where young local artists could set up new businesses. The girls believe that offering young artists an affordable space gives them a better chance of success.

Uva gestures to the other new building on their map, which she says was inspired by an old Chinese saying: The sky is round and the ground is flat. "The building is more for traditional artists who are working on Chinese culture and arts," she says.

The girls would renovate existing buildings to preserve traditional culture. "We will keep the ground floor for local businesses," says Uva. "And we decided to change the upper floors to a museum that focuses on the life of Hong Kong people during wartime."

The competition was fun, but it wasn't all just a simple exercise to win a prize. The HKIS

will be presenting the girls' plan to the Hong Kong government, along with other recommendations for changes in Central.

The girls realise that not everyone will love their ideas. "Even if our plan might look good, many residents may oppose it," says Uva. "After all, they have been living in Central for a long time, and some residents might not want too much activity. They are living there and they might want a more peaceful environment instead of a very busy one."

But the girls hope that their plan will have an impact, even if it just means that more young people take an interest in how Hong Kong develops and changes.

"Students should care because they are sort of the future of Hong Kong," says Uva, as Agnes nods in agreement. "They're also living in the city so it's part of their responsibility."



Aspiring city planners Agnes To and Uva Fung tell **Ariel Conant** about what they would do to improve the high-speed development of Central district

A model plan for the future



Agnes To (far left) and Uva Fung believe that business and art can go together in Hong Kong.
Photo: Bruce Yan