

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMING ARTS AND TOURISM ADVISORY GROUP's RECOMMENDATIONS ON CACF

4.1 Recommended Performance Venues

4.1.1 Taking into account a host of relevant considerations, including mainly PATAG's vision on WKCD, views collected through public consultation and their sector-specific focus group meetings, relevant data and trends, PATAG has come up with a list of performance venues recommended for WKCD.

4.1.2 PATAG held the view that the arts and cultural facilities in WKCD should seek to promote international artistic excellence, which ties in with the objective of WKCD to become a world-class arts and cultural district. The facilities should also be developed in an organic manner and be constructed by phases. Therefore, the most imminently required PA venues should be provided as soon as practicable under phase I of WKCD development. For the subsequent phases, it should be up to the prevailing market forces to decide when these facilities need to be in place.

4.1.3 The recommendations are summarized as follows -

Phase I Development

- A Xiqu Centre comprising a theatre with a seating capacity of 1 200 to 1 400 seats; a small theatre with a seating capacity of 400 seats; a Xiqu Tea House and other ancillary facilities like well-equipped rehearsal rooms, small exhibition halls etc.;
- A Concert Hall with a maximum seating capacity of 2 000 seats, including a choir stall;

- A Chamber Music Hall with a seating capacity of 600 to 800 seats;
- A Great Theatre with a seating capacity of 2 100 to 2 200 seats;
- Two Medium-sized Theatres, each with a seating capacity of 500-800 seats;
- Four Black Box Theatres, each with a seating capacity of 150-250 seats; and
- A Mega Performance Venue with a maximum seating capacity of 15 000 and a flexible configuration to allow it be converted into a smaller size performance venue.

Phase II Development

- A Great Theatre with a seating capacity of 1 800 to 1 900 seats; and
- Two Medium-sized Theatres, each with a seating capacity of 500 to 800 seats.

4.1.4 It can be seen from the list that the facilities recommended by PATAG are significantly more than those originally proposed in the IFP – they are needed to fill a significant gap in performance venues currently provided in Hong Kong and represent an increase in the total seating capacity of Hong Kong’s performance venues by 37%. PATAG’s recommendations are a considered response to the strong demand for quality facilities from the arts and cultural sector expressed over the years and more vocally during PATAG’s consultations at the early stage of its work.

4.2 Considerations underlying the Recommendations of the Performance Venues and other Facilities

Xiqu Centre (戲曲中心)

4.2.1 Cantonese opera (粵劇) is one of the major categories of regional Chinese opera, which flourished in Southern China's Cantonese culture. Like all other categories of Chinese opera, it is a traditional Chinese art form, involving music, singing, martial arts, acrobatics and acting. This indigenous art form is locally bred and is indigenous to Hong Kong's culture.

4.2.2 All the public views received supported the provision of a dedicated and purpose-built venue for Cantonese Opera which should also cater for all Chinese Opera (Xiqu) in the WKCD. Xiqu covers Cantonese opera, Kunju (崑曲), Peking opera (京劇) and other kinds of Chinese opera. The venue should serve to both preserve and promote these valuable traditional Chinese art forms to the local community as well as tourists.

4.2.3 The Xiqu Centre in the WKCD has been proposed in response to views of the public and those of the Cantonese Opera sector about the need for suitable performance venues and the promotion and development of Cantonese operatic art. Strategically, the Xiqu Centre should help establish WKCD as a place where the Chinese traditional culture are given recognition and social status. Xiqu, a traditional Chinese art form, will create synergy with other art forms to make the WKCD a pivotal part of Hong Kong as an international metropolis. It also signifies the support for preservation and development of traditional Chinese culture.

4.2.4 The proposed big theatre in the Xiqu Centre would be for professional troupes and major performances, while the small theatre would target budding artists and performing groups for both performance and training purposes, so as to enable the new generation of artists to have a chance to polish up their artistic skills to facilitate a healthy succession of the sector. This venue should be

conducive to grooming performing talents and audience building.

4.2.5 A Xiqu Tea House style of venue could accommodate tailor-made traditional Chinese cultural performances such as Xiqu excerpts, where the audience could be served Chinese tea and snacks while enjoying performances in a relaxed atmosphere. This is expected to be particularly attractive to tourists.

Concert Hall and Chamber Music Hall

4.2.6 The need for a Concert Hall in the WKCD stems from the high usage rate of the venues for orchestral music and the strategic aspiration to put the arts and cultural facilities of WKCD on par with, if not better than, those in other integrated cultural districts overseas. At present, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC) concert hall (2 019 seats) and the Hong Kong City Hall (HKCH) concert hall (1 434 seats) are the only centrally located venues that are acoustically equipped for orchestral performances. Although the auditoriums at Sha Tin Town Hall, Tsuen Wan Town Hall and Tuen Mun Town Hall are also suitable for orchestral performances, they are situated in suburban or outer-suburban areas and not purpose-built for orchestral performances. The high usage rates in these three venues also provide little spare capacity for them to cope with the excess demand for the concert hall in HKCC and HKCH.

4.2.7 The arts-related usage rate of the concert hall of HKCC and HKCH in 2005-06 reached 97% and 92% respectively. On top of bookings by the major orchestras in Hong Kong, these venues have to cope with bookings for various arts festivals, cultural and other bookings from art groups/non-profit making organizations. It is quite clear that the current provision of concert hall facilities is unable to cope with the demand at present. Over the next decade or so, the orchestral performing groups in Hong Kong are projecting a significant growth in audience number, thereby creating an even greater demand for orchestral performances and venues.

4.2.8 In addition, an iconic concert hall, like the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, could have the effect of branding the WKCD as a world-class integrated arts and cultural, entertainment and tourism district. Public views received have expressed that a concert hall should not be left out in WKCD as it is an essential facility for a world-class arts and cultural district.

4.2.9 PATAG also recommended, in addition to a concert hall, to have a Chamber Music Hall with a seating capacity of 600 to 800 which could cater for ensemble performances in the WKCD. PATAG noted that Hong Kong had been lacking in a dedicated venue for performances of chamber music. A wide range of musical performances, ranging from solo piano recitals, through song and instrumental recitals to string quartet, large ensemble and chamber orchestra performances are currently staged in different kinds of non-dedicated venues. Existing performance venues such as the HKCC Concert Hall and the HKCH Concert Hall are too large to be suitable for these more intimate performances. More importantly, the high acoustics requirements of chamber music make it impossible to share use with other music art forms like pop music and musicals. The Chamber Music Hall in the WKCD would fill the gap in the current provision of venues for recitals and chamber music performances. This would particularly be conducive to nurturing young musicians in Hong Kong.

4.2.10 PATAG considered that the purpose-built concert hall and the dedicated chamber music hall should have their distinct identity for orchestral music performances. These two performance venues should be co-located in the same complex in the WKCD to create synergy and enhance image-building of this art form.

Theatres and the Concept of TheatreLand

4.2.11 In the original IFP issued in September 2003, the specified CACF have included, inter alia, a Theatre Complex comprising three theatres with seating capacities of at least 2 000, 800 and 400 seats respectively. The Theatre Complex was intended to address the problem of venue

shortage. Under its Terms of Reference, PATAG critically re-examined the need for a Theatre Complex and had the following observations -

- (a) as the performing arts facilities in the WKCD are planned for the future, the provision of only three theatres in the Theatre Complex in the original IFP (see Chapters 2 and 3) would not adequately address the future demand. With the continuous efforts on all fronts in performing arts education and audience building, we are projecting a growth in audience numbers in different art forms. More venues would be needed and suitable space should be reserved to cater for the organic growth of the theatres in the WKCD;
- (b) the performing arts facilities in the WKCD have the mission of nurturing the budding artists and providing opportunities not only for the established performing arts companies but also the budding small and medium-sized companies with good quality work. This is vital to sustaining the vibrancy and diversity of our performing arts scene. We need to construct more theatres with different ranges of seating capacities to meet users' needs; and
- (c) to achieve the integration and clustering effect, the Theatreland concept (like that in the West End) for performance venues instead of a stand-alone theatre complex is considered appropriate.

4.2.12 The Theatreland concept embodies the street theatre concept. It is a place where high art and popular art forms meet to make available a platform for different art forms, as well as small and medium-sized performing arts groups to showcase their performances. The place should consist of theatres of various sizes, the small and medium-sized theatres in particular, and the configurations of the theatres have to be very flexible. They are not solely for drama performances but also various art forms like, opera, dance, pop music, jazz, stand-up comedy, multi-media

performances, experimental drama and tourist shows etc. Furthermore, two or three of these theatres of various sizes can cluster together in one building where catering and commercial facilities are also provided. These theatres will cover two to three streets in the district and the design of the streets should be performance-friendly to cater for street-performances to attract visitors and tourists.

4.2.13 Views received indicated that the three theatres proposed in the IFP were not adequate and they were in favour of the idea of having a number of theatres of various sizes. Besides, the Theatreland concept is generally well received by the arts and cultural sector. The acute shortage of theatre venues and the present booking arrangements of LCSD venues have been deterring long-run international musicals from according high priority to staging touring performances in Hong Kong. For long-run musicals that are operated on a highly commercial basis, they need venues capable of accommodating performances running for at least two to three months in order to be financially viable (see Chapter 3). PATAG considered that there had been an urgent need to provide a theatre for overseas long-run musicals in order not to lose out in our competitiveness to our neighbouring cities.

Great Theatre

4.2.14 PATAG recommended that there should be a performance venue of 2 100 – 2 200 seats for staging international (such as West End and Broadway) as well as home-grown long-run musicals to attract audience not only from the local community and overseas but more conveniently from the PRD where there is great market potential. Both the local arts and cultural sector and the renowned overseas presenter supported the provision of the Great Theatre in the WKCD for long-run musicals and commercial productions which would find a profitable niche. The Great Theatre is not intended to be an exclusively dedicated venue for long-run musicals. Other types of presentation, such as musical performances and operas, can also be staged there.

Medium-sized Theatres

4.2.15 PATAG also recommended that two medium-sized theatres each with a seating capacity of 500 to 800 seats should be provided under Phase I. Having examined the current provision in Hong Kong, PATAG noticed a gap in performance venues with seating capacity from 500 to 800 seats. According to the statistics of the unsuccessful booking applications received for the LCSD's medium-size theatres in 2005-06, the total number of unsuccessful bookings for arts-related activities was 1 127 days. The number of days of unsuccessful bookings for the HKCC Studio Theatre and the HKCH Theatre were 306 days (27%) and 383 days (33%) respectively. The situation of oversubscription should be even more serious if telephone enquiries for bookings have been included in the above figures. The two medium-sized theatres are needed to meet this serious shortfall in medium-sized theatres. They would play an important role in ensuring the development of a vibrant performing arts scene and medium-sized performing groups, contributing usefully to audience building for further growth.

Blackbox Theatres

4.2.16 There are only very few small theatres (blackboxes) with a seating capacity below 250 seats in Hong Kong and they are non-LCSD venues. For example, the Fringe Studio (80 seats) and the Fringe Theatre (100 seats) in the Hong Kong Fringe Club, the Recital Hall (202 seats) and Studio Theatre (240 seats) in the HKAPA. Against this background, the Advisory Group recommended to have four blackbox theatres each with a seating capacity of 150 to 250 seats to cope with the increasing demand. These Blackbox Theatres in the WKCD would help to boost the creativity and vibrancy among the budding performing arts groups. Views gauged at the public consultation pointed to the need for blackbox theatres to provide more opportunities for the development of the local small and medium performing arts groups. There is a proven demand for this size of venues which are suitable for small experimental theatrical productions, contemporary dance performances, film screenings, solo recitals, jazz, puppet shows, children and family shows. These blackbox

theatres can help to build up the atmosphere of encouraging up-and-coming performing arts groups to showcase their work and create the kind of synergy expected of the district. It would also attract young audience to go to the district.

4.2.17 The small and medium-sized performing arts groups will find the two medium-sized theatres and the four blackbox theatres suitable for small-scale and experimental productions, having regard to the size of the audience and financial affordability. These facilities are intended for the nurturing of budding artists and creative talents. PATAG considered that as a world-class arts and cultural district, WKCD venues should house performances that reach a high threshold of standard and quality. Thus budding arts groups and their programmes must reach a certain artistic standard before their performances would be staged in the theatres in WKCD.

Mega Performance Venue

4.2.18 PATAG re-confirmed the need for a mega performance venue as per the IFP with a maximum seating capacity of 15 000. In Hong Kong, there is no single purpose-built performing venue of over 10 000 seats for mega shows and pop concerts. While the Hong Kong Coliseum is currently filling this gap, there had been a lot of complaints about this venue (on acoustics, lighting, flying systems, storage space for stage set and props etc.) as it is a non-purpose-built venue. Performances also crowded out normal sports or community events from the Hong Kong Coliseum, and bad facilities prevented the staging of international pop concerts, mega entertainment events and touring orchestral performances in Hong Kong.

4.2.19 Views received during the open consultative forums also supported the need for a purpose-built mega venue. Taking into account the proven market demand for a mega size performance venue for entertainment events and large scale international congress, and the presenters' views about the limitations of using non-designated venues to stage their productions and the public views, PATAG recommended to have a mega size purpose-built venue of a maximum

seating capacity of 15 000 seats with flexible seating configuration.

Piazza Areas

4.2.20 Public views gauged through the public consultation in the IFP and by PATAG supported having a lot of open space/green space in the WKCD. PATAG unanimously agreed the WKCD would not only present an unprecedented opportunity for cultural development in Hong Kong, but also make available a vast piece of harbourfront open space for the public to enjoy. The open space would serve the following purposes -

- (a) open green space for public recreation and leisure. There should be comfortably landscaped open space spread throughout the district. The piazza-like space can attract people particularly families to stroll leisurely in the district. It would create a relaxing atmosphere for the public to enjoy the scenery and the space. Reference can be drawn from the Millennium Park in Chicago for artistic recreational piazza-like space;
- (b) the open space has rich artistic potential. Not only can it be used for outdoor tented or open ticketed performances like shows presented by Cirque du Soleil, it can also be used to provide free cultural entertainment performances for the public. It should complement the ticketed performances inside the performance venues. It would also facilitate arts and culture to reach out to the public for arts education and audience development. It would provide opportunities for the creative and budding artists to take part in outdoor performances. The piazza areas could also be used for visual arts display; and
- (c) the open space should enhance people flow and provide space for the audience to hang out before and after the performances.

4.2.21 PATAG recommended that Piazza Areas with a total site area of at least 30 000 square meters (3 hectares) should be provided throughout the WKCD as an integral part of a more generous provision of public open space.

4.3 Clustering of Performing Arts Venues and Integration with Commercial Facilities

4.3.1 Upon the request of the Consultative Committee, PATAG subsequently met in late September 2006 to further deliberate on the clustering of PA venues. It recommended that the Concert Hall and Chamber Music Hall should be co-located in a free standing structure with iconic architecture; the Xiqu Centre should be free standing with iconic architecture which demonstrated the characteristics and unique cultural identity of Xiqu; the Great Theatre and the Mega Performance Venue should also be free standing. PATAG also indicated that the remaining facilities should be suitably clustered to achieve synergy and efficiency gains, but was open-minded to the exact clustering pattern. Moreover, PATAG held the view that the Medium-sized Theatres and Black Box Theatres should be suitably integrated with commercial facilities.

4.4 Leisure and Tourism Perspectives

4.4.1 The WKCD will undoubtedly attract overseas visitors, given its arts, cultural, entertainment elements and abundant provision of RDE facilities. In addition, the iconic architecture of buildings in the district, the availability of large open space and the waterfront promenade will make WKCD appealing to tourists.

4.4.2 There is a consensus in PATAG that a well-thought through master plan which would create people flow and attract tourists would be crucial to WKCD's success as an integrated arts, cultural, entertainment and commercial district. In order to achieve this objective, the arts and cultural facilities and other facilities such as catering and

retail facilities need to be clustered together to create synergy and vibrancy in the district.

4.4.3 Based on this premise, the space for retail facilities should be spread over the district to achieve the clustering effect for the local visitors and the tourists. They should avoid replicating the shops commonly found in the shopping malls elsewhere, and the retailing mix should reflect the character of the district as the cultural hub of our city. At the same time, internationally renowned restaurants should be encouraged to set up their branches in WKCD. The catering facilities have to be suitably integrated with the arts and cultural facilities, to allow both performance goers (pre/post performance supper) and non-performance goers to hang out to create the atmosphere. The magnificent backdrop of the waterfront harbour view, a distinctive characteristic of the WKCD, should be maximized to attract tourists.

4.4.4 Iconic buildings like the Xiqu Centre or Concert Hall, could also become attractions to tourists. A suitably designed waterfront promenade, with facilities like PATAG's proposed "Hong Kong Eye" in WKCD, would further attract visitors.

4.4.5 Other than hardware provision, the types of arts, cultural and commercial activities like shopping and dining, provided in WKCD should embrace diversity and strike a fine balance of international and local elements in order to complement Hong Kong as a metropolitan tourist destination offering sophistication, good taste, excitement and fun. These should not confine only to indoor activities, but also outdoor events like street performances. Together the hardware and software contents in WKCD should present a wide range of choices for the visitors and carry a strong international flavour.

4.4.6 The impact of WKCD could be maximized if the tourism and arts and cultural sectors could have further co-operation and linkages. For instance, some of the abridged version of Xiqu could be a selling point for overseas tourists who are interested in traditional Chinese art forms

and the management of future PA venues could take this into account. It would also be useful if an institutional platform could be set up to facilitate ongoing communication and exchange of views between these two sectors. This should help to devise measures to facilitate the tourists to obtain information on the arts and cultural and entertainment events staged in the WKCD. In addition, there could also be a user-friendly ticketing system to facilitate on-line purchasing of tickets from outside Hong Kong for performances in the WKCD.

4.5 Mode of Governance and Management Strategies

4.5.1 At various stages of the WKCD project, there have been calls for establishing an independent statutory body to oversee the planning, construction and governance of the arts and cultural facilities in WKCD.

4.5.2 PATAG has examined, arising from the discussion on CACF according to its Terms of Reference, the desirable mode of governance and management strategy for the CACF in WKCD. Having examined public views and considered relevant overseas experiences, it is agreed that setting up an independent statutory body to take over the responsibility of developing WKCD for the Government at a suitable juncture would be desirable and in line with the principles stated by the CHC. The structure, powers, duties and responsibilities of this proposed statutory body will be further elaborated in Chapter 8.

4.5.3 On the approach of managing PA venues, it has been pointed out that the venue management bodies should seek to build up the artistic character of each venue. Instead of merely managing the venue for hire, they should curate and present their programmes in order to enhance artistic quality, as well as build up the venue characteristics and audience. They should also manage the venues in close partnership with the performing arts groups (particularly the relevant resident companies, i.e. performance groups primarily use the venue as their base), as well as devise proactive and entrepreneurial strategies in arts education,

audience building and community involvement. Under this premise, there should be different modes of operation, mainly self-financed or subsidized modes, and the extent of subsidy may vary between different venues. For instance, the larger theatres predominantly for staging long-run musicals may be able to operate on a self-financing basis but the Concert Hall would need cross-subsidization from other income sources. Some of the venues may also find it feasible to adopt a mixed mode of operation.

4.5.4 The issue of mode of governance should be a subject of further discussion and consultation, particularly with relevant sectors, at the drafting stage of the WKCD Authority Bill.

4.6 Related Arts and Cultural Facilities

4.6.1 The objective of WKCD project is to develop the WKCD into an integrated world-class arts and cultural, entertainment and tourism district. Some peripheral facilities would need to be built in the vicinity to create the clustering effect. Space could be set aside for facilities to develop and promote creative industries in the WKCD such as publishing, advertising, design, visual arts, cinema etc. The suggestions include a Mega Book City, arts galleries, cinema centres etc. While acknowledging that some of these facilities could be operated on a commercial basis, there is a need for an appropriate leasing policy in favour of arts-related commercial facilities with a view to enabling these facilities to sustain their business under Hong Kong's economic climate, thereby cultivating the cultural ambience in WKCD. The future WKCD Authority should take the above suggestion for peripheral facilities into account.

4.6.2 Space should be set aside for facilities of the resident performing art companies and offices for staff and members of the performing art groups. PATAG had a general consensus that there should be residency arrangements for some of the performing arts groups which are frequent users of facilities like the Concert Hall and the Great Theatre I, but facilities of the resident companies need

not be provided inside the performance venues, as they could be provided elsewhere in the district. These facilities should be grouped together in one or two buildings in close proximity to the performance venues for creative talents and the staff of the companies to congregate in and frequent the district, thus creating synergy. A separate leasing policy for the resident performing art groups and performing arts groups would be needed in order that the rental level is affordable to them.

4.6.3 There was also a suggestion to set up a Hong Kong Arts and Cultural Information Centre in the district. This Centre would perform the role as a platform for promoting arts and cultural programmes and more importantly it would help to promote local arts and cultural talents, as people around the world could obtain ready information on the respective arts and culture talents through the Centre, and generate business opportunities for the arts and culture sector.

4.6.4 Space would need to be set aside for suitable arts education institutions e.g. ballet training school and music school etc. to facilitate the promotion of arts education and nurturing of budding artists.

4.6.5 Last but not least, space should be set aside for banquet and conference facilities. These facilities could be suitably integrated with the CACF to create the necessary synergy. There is an increasing demand for these facilities and they can generate income to cross-subsidize other less or non- profit-making facilities in the WKCD.

4.7 Rationalization of Existing Cultural Facilities

4.7.1 There is an increasing demand for performance venues in Hong Kong and an acute shortage of newly designed venues to respond to the needs of the arts and, cultural sector, and community needs. The proposed arts and cultural facilities in WKCD will alleviate the shortage of performance venues, and space could also be reserved in WKCD for organic development of arts and cultural activities

in the district in the long run. When the facilities in WKCD are in place, it is envisaged that the Government would be in a better position to review the existing performing arts facilities under LCSD, having regard to the changing needs of the performing arts market and the evolution of the local arts scene. It is also envisaged the future management authority of WKCD would maintain close liaison with the management of other public venues to achieve good coordination and co-operation.

4.8 Integration with the Neighbouring Local Community

4.8.1 In line with the concept of more integrated planning, efforts should be taken to fully integrate arts and cultural facilities in WKCD with neighbouring areas, cultivating a shared cultural ambience within WKCD and its immediate vicinity. Moreover, the performing arts facilities should also be inclusive of and readily affordable to both the performing arts groups and audience from the local community so as to encourage maximum participation and a sense of ownership and pride from both the arts and public communities.

4.8.2 The full report of PATAG to the Consultative Committee is available on the website http://www.hab.gov.hk/wkcd/eng/cc/doc/20060907CC02_app.pdf.