

## RESEARCH SEMINAR

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

### Smart City or Utopian Mirage? Optimizing Urban Public Spaces for Evaluating Community Engagement and Sustainability in Songdo

20 May 2024 (Mon)  
3:00 – 4:30 pm (UTC+8)  
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Seeking relief from the overcrowded capital of Seoul, South Korea, Songdo was envisioned as a beacon of sustainable, high-tech urban living. Constructed on nearly 1,500 acres reclaimed from the Yellow Sea, this planned city, an extension of Incheon, offers seamless access for international and domestic travelers. Conceived in the early 21st century, Songdo promised a utopian blend of cutting-edge technology and Western-style sustainable design. However, by 2024, the lived reality within Songdo's residential complexes starkly contrasts with its visionary ideals. Home to around 200,000 residents, including 5,000 foreigners, Songdo's urban landscape reveals a tapestry of urban heterogeneity, high-end lifestyles, and sprawling mega-housing developments. These elements raise questions among residents and urban experts: Does Songdo truly embody the Smart, Better-Living Utopian Dream it claims, or does its self-designation as a smart city merit scrutiny? I am exploring the functionality of smart urban public spaces in Songdo, assessing their role in fostering community engagement and ensuring long-term healthy living. By examining these aspects, I aim to determine whether Songdo's smart city credentials hold up under closer inspection or if its smartness is merely a façade.

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Dr. Reazul Ahsan is an Associate Professor in the University of Utah's Department of City and Metropolitan Planning. He joined the university in August 2019 as an Assistant Professor and has since managed and coordinated the Urban Ecology Programme at the University of Utah Asia Campus in Songdo, South Korea. Dr. Ahsan's research interests include smart urbanism, climate-adaptive urban design, urban resilience, and environmental sustainability. He received his Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of South Australia in 2013 and worked as a research fellow at MIT for the Malaysian Sustainable City Programme (2015-2016). Dr. Ahsan is a seasoned specialist, having worked in higher education and research in Australia, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States for more than fourteen years.



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