



PECC Internship Programme 2022

Internship Report

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The virtual internship at the PECC International Secretariat rounded off my undergraduate studies. It was a rewarding experience to have acquired extensive exposure to regional affairs and cooperative mechanisms.

Research & Takeaway

With travel constraints remained in place, this internship was conducted virtually. While a physical internship would be more beneficial to inter-personal communication, virtual had become a new normal at work in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, enabling my online participation as a PECC representative in the 2022 Third APEC Senior Officials' Meeting and related meetings held in Thailand and online in August 2022. The functions of regional forums and cooperative architectures have a good number of attributes, namely a steerer of development paths, a coordinator of multilateral agreements, an incubator of policy innovation, and a facilitator of collective prosperity. Before the internship, I had reservations about multilateral cooperation given that I would consider myself more of a realist than a liberalist in regard to international relations. The APEC had on one hand confirmed my previous conjectures. Discussions on some topical areas were indeed open, but consensus on factual actions could not be easily reached. Divergent views among economies on regional conflicts in particular had led to non-cooperative behaviours which constituted impediments to integration. On the other hand, there was a bundle of completed or ongoing projects performed in private-public and multilateral partnerships that had spoken to the mutual and collective benefits cooperation could generate. I appreciate all the efforts invested by the workforce to explore solutions to ever-rising challenges, in particular the climate crisis.

Through participating in this internship, I realised that it is incumbent upon us to promote the digital economy as well as inclusion and sustainability of the region in order to enhance the future economic development. Digital economy has been at the centre of attention in both business and policy spheres in the region this year. Economies are not only striving to revive economic growth via safe passage built on cross-border data access, but also aiming to advance digital application to all dimensions. However, it is worth noticing that about one-third of the region's population lacked equitable access to the internet, and they were mostly underrepresented groups, i.e., the elderly, women, informal workers, and small businesses, who had been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 shocks. Digital transformation therefore also pinpoints the urgent demands on resolutions of the longstanding and emerging social inequalities. It then led to another of my key takeaway from the APEC sessions

— public policy making. My past research activities had focused primarily on the policy implementation and evaluation, yet touched little upon the making of policy. The process of building consensus, while subject to complex administrative procedures, took full account of the multistakeholder discourses. I was involved in observing multiple panel discussions and gained an understanding of agenda-setting and the formation of policy windows.

More importantly, regional developments have also shed light on Hong Kong. I believe that the experiences and current practices of other economies could serve as a good reference point for examining where our economy had landed and would be heading towards. One radical challenge is the retreating openness in terms of border access. Results of data analysis showed that most economies had lifted the entry barriers on the basis of vaccination, and regional mobility had been largely restored. Supply chains have been widely reactivated. Some economies have resumed normal travel, requesting neither vaccination certificates nor COVID-19 nucleic acid testing for travellers. It would be imperative to take actions to cooperate with our regional counterparts and boost the growth via rejuvenation of connectivity.

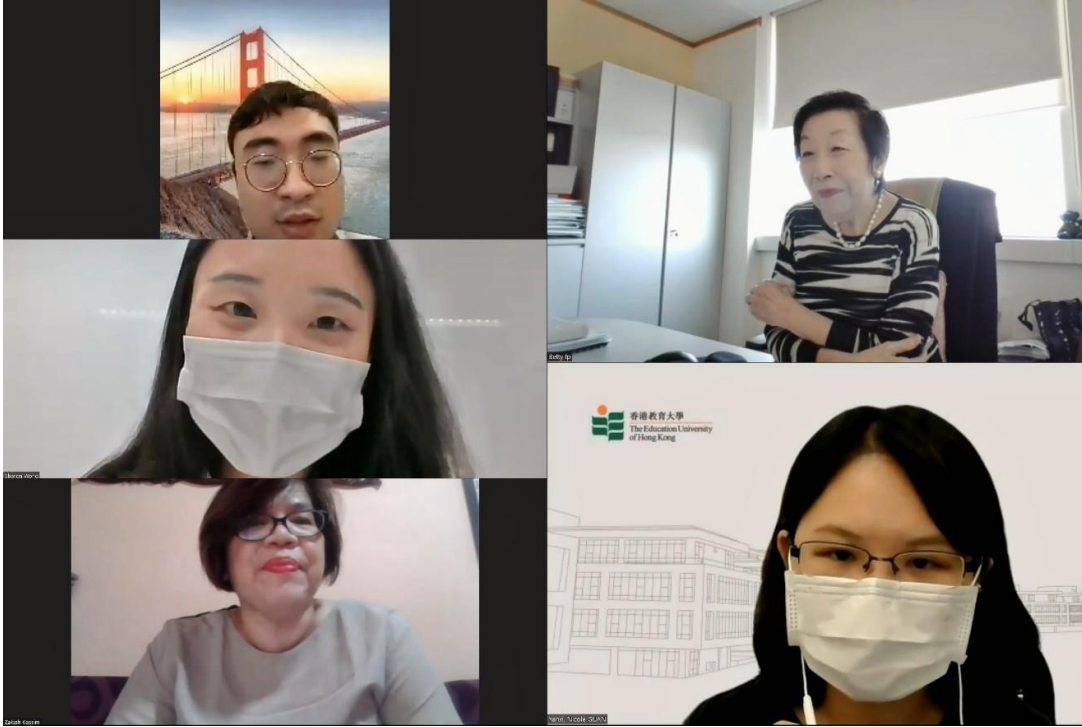
In addition to attending the APEC meetings, tasks assigned by the PECC International Secretariat included providing research support to the 2022 State of the Region Survey, by assisting in data mining and analysis on regional financial vulnerability against rising interest rates. These tasks served as both valuable exercises from which I tested and improved my quantitative skills and an important supplement to assess regional situations from a holistic perspective.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to parties who had facilitated the internship arrangement and coordination — the Education University of Hong Kong and HKCPEC — in face of all the COVID-induced inconvenience, and PECC for the supervisions and supports that contributed to this fruitful experience.

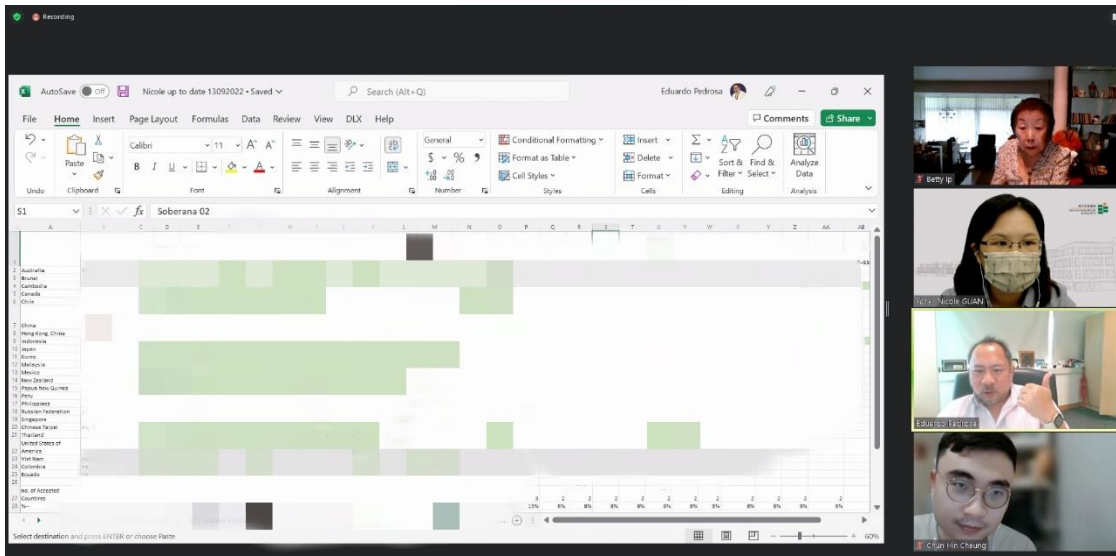
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Photos provided by Nicole Guan and Tommy Cheung

- 1) Nicole (*right on bottom row*) and Tommy (*left on top row*) are having a virtual meeting with PECC and HKCPEC colleagues -



- 2) Nicole is presenting research findings to PECC colleagues -



3) Tommy and Nicole are having an online meeting with PECC colleagues –



4) Nicole is attending the 2022 Third APEC Senior Officials' Meeting and related meetings online –

