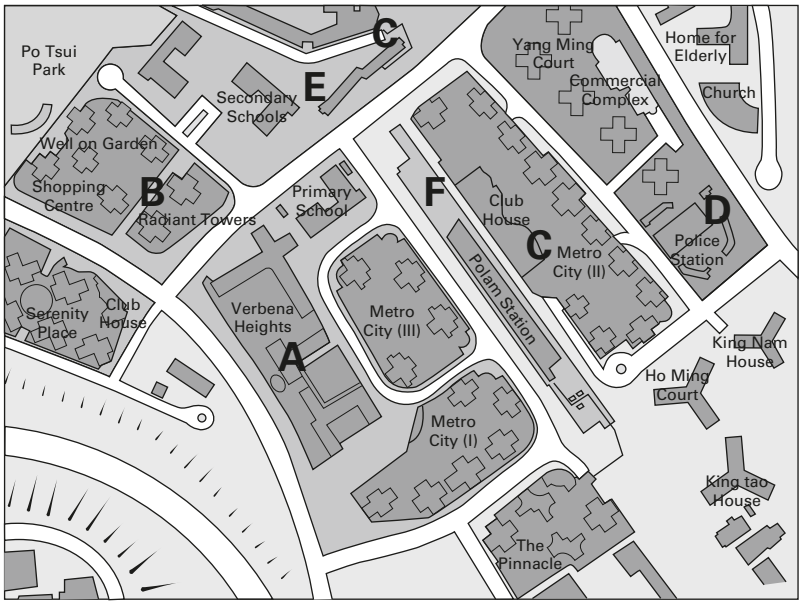

Figure 8.1
To be successful, 'smart' MILU urban development in Hong Kong needs to have more than six uses: A (residential), B (commercial), C (recreational), D (community), E (institutional) and F (transport).

which are: verticality, compactness, convenience and 'sky city' living (Figure 8.1).

Hong Kong: constraints

Problems of land scarcity and increase in population have posed challenges to the urban development of Hong Kong. Only 21% of Hong Kong's land area is build-able, the remaining area is largely mountainous and water bound. Continuous urban migration from Mainland China, which started in the early 1950s, has contributed to a population increase of, on average, 1 million or more people per decade. Of the nearly 7 million people living in Hong Kong, more than 50% live and work in the small inner city centres. As a result, population density reaches 46,000 people per square kilometre, in the densest areas with an average of approximately 6250 plus people per square kilometre overall. The remaining 50% of the population live in new towns shaped by a planned strategy developed since the 1990s, the majority of whom travel to work in the urban centres by means of public transport. These constraints have directly determined Hong Kong's high-rise urban habitat (Hong Kong Government, 2002).

Multiple use of space

Rowley (1998) points out that multiple-use development is to a large extent a relative concept, varying in definition from country to country. He argued that it was important to have mixed-use development not only within a city block or township but also within buildings both vertically and horizontally. However, there are no clear guidelines to differentiate between horizontal and vertical developments, or to indicate the number of uses that are necessary to classify a building or a complex as a multiple-use development. Some planners in the UK argue that any development, over 300 m^2 should be host to a mix of uses. Similarly, planners in Germany have stipulated that commercial development should allocate at least 20% of its gross floor area to residential activities (Coupland, 1997). Most researchers agree that properly conceived multiple use development could bring variety, vitality and viability to a place (Jacobs, 1961; Roberts and Lloyd-Jones, 1997; Rowley, 1996). Indeed, a sophisticated mixing of various uses is a precondition for sustainable urban development.

In Hong Kong, the multiple use of space, be it outside or inside a building, is a standard practice. This arises from market forces rather than from a formal planning mechanism. Mixed-use practice found in Hong Kong exhibits almost all the theoretical and practical attributes of a compact city – an urban system with a large population, high density, high floor-to-area ratio (FAR), shared and accessible mixed land use, short travel distances and an efficient public transit system. All of these are essential contributing factors to the concept of convenience, an underlying theme for a compact city (Burgess, 2000). For instance, the average travel time between home and work in Hong Kong is 30 minutes (Figure 8.2), which compares favourably to other cities such as Tokyo, which has an average 90-minute travel to work journey. Clearly, this is an advantage of the compact city that is widely welcomed by its inhabitants.

Vertical intensification

The skyline of Hong Kong is characterized by thousands of high-rise towers, with the majority reaching 200 m in height, no matter whether they are residential apartments or offices. In the past few years the 200 m mark has been surpassed by the latest