

# The study of public participation in City Planning process in Hong Kong

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In order to shape a quality living and working environment in Hong Kong, Hong Kong government had investigated various possible development plans in recent years.

Taking into account of the public views to the Outline Development Plans, public consultations were conducted. However, some of the plans had been strongly opposed by local citizens as well as scholars.

In this research, by studying the relative government organizations that are responsible to city planning in Hong Kong, and examining the town planning system, it investigates the effectiveness of current public consultation approaches to enhance public participation in Hong Kong.

**Keywords:** City Planning, Public Participation, Town Planning Ordinance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Involvement in Urban Design and Planning was considered the preserve of the expert. Only trained and knowledgeable professionalisms could be able to negotiate in planning theory and practice. Even in discussing the minor modification in the ward, citizens of the ward believed the ward officers or government will provide the most suitable plan for them. In any case, the public was assumed to be uninterested in participating in discussion, design and implementation of Urban Planning in the past decades. The issue of public participation in planning has gained new

awareness in 21st century in Hong Kong, not only applied to urban planning division, but extended to education reformation, political reformation etc. After handover to China in 1997, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government had implemented several of city planning proposals in order to catch with the market demand and further development requirement. However, some of the plans had been strongly opposed, even they had been undergone several public consultation stages. In this research, a case study of one of the opposing proposals, "North-East New Territories Development Plan" will be introduced in detail.

Without doubt, public participation practice is a growing part of decision-making in various aspects of Hong Kong's policy planning.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

This research study looks at its genesis of the raising awareness of public involvement in urban planning at 21st century in Hong Kong. It investigates the background of Hong Kong planning development and influence of political concern after handover to China in 1997. Also, this study will evaluate if the current public consultation approaches are effective means to enhance public participation. And examine techniques and possible methods to promote and improve the effectiveness of public participation in a developed cities.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Previous Research**

This research concerns about the development of public participate in recent 50 years. Especially, when Hong Kong had undergone a Transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, which was from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China. In this research, it examines the modification of Town Planning Ordinance, and studies the citizens' satisfaction toward the government planning.

#### **2.1.1 Town planning Ordinance in Hong Kong, British colony years (1939-1997)**

The Town Planning Ordinance (the Ordinance) was first enacted in 1939. Apart

from some major amendments made in 1974 relating to the planning permission system and those made in 1991 relating to planning enforcement and the setting up of planning committees and the Town Planning Appeal Board, the Ordinance has remained largely in its original form.

#### **2.1.2 Town planning Ordinance in Hong Kong, after handed-over to China (1997~)**

In 1996, the Government, still under British colony, published a proposal on Town Planning to seek public views on the proposal to overhaul the planning system. Having considered the public comments received, the Government introduced this proposal into the Legislative Council in 2000. Due to complexity of the issues involved, however, the then Legislative Council was unable to complete the scrutiny of the proposal before the expiry of its term.

Later on, the Government considered it more appropriate to adopt a phased approach to amend the Ordinance to first put forward those proposals with general consensus and which would produce immediate benefit to the community at large. The Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance 2004 was introduced into Legislative Council and passed on 7 July 2004.

The main objectives of the Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance 2004 are,

- (i) to enhance the transparency of the planning system
- (ii) to streamline the town planning process
- (iii) to strengthen enforcement control

against unauthorized developments in the rural New Territories.

### 2.1.3 What Public Participation is?

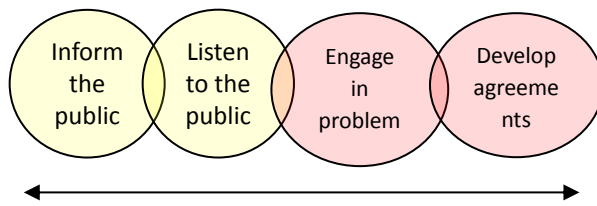


Fig. 1 Continuum of Participation

Participation is best understood as a continuum. Public information programs are essential component of an effective public participation program. People cannot participate unless they receive complete and objective information on which to base their judgments.

After a well circulation of information programs, government agencies have had considerably greater success working collaboratively with the public to find a solution that will enjoy broad support. This approach does not always result in agreements. Sometimes all that occurs is that the positions are clarified through interaction and everybody understands the reasoning behind the decision. Sometimes out the essential elements of an effective public participation in a city planning project. By studying to a case of recent city planning, it discusses the reasons of failure

sufficient agreement is built that the agency is able to proceed with sufficient legitimacy that there is tacit acceptance even by those who do not support the action.

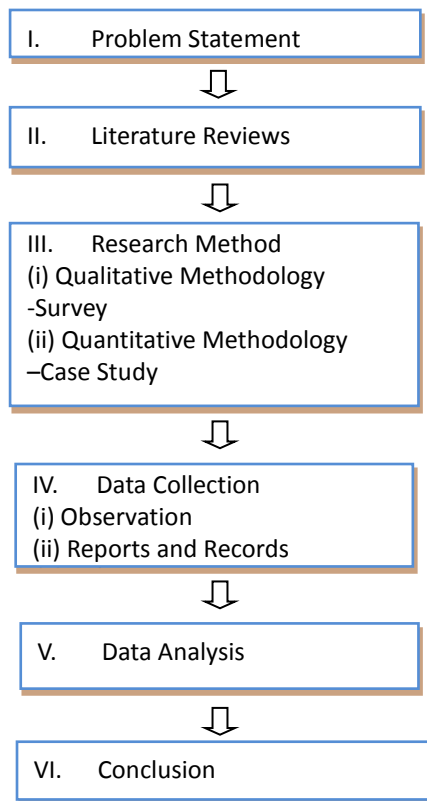
## 2.2 Research Position

Taking in account of the raising awareness of the public opinion in City Planning, the government had put plenty of resources on public consultation in order to collect comments and advices from public. According to the Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance 2004, major projects in Hong Kong had been undergone plan-making process and procedures for public participation, where public information had been presented for public judgment and comment.

However, the result of public consultation did not bring an expected effect to raise the citizens' satisfaction towards the planning. On the contrary, some of the plans had been strongly opposed by local citizens and scholars. In this research, it aims to find

about public consultation held in Hong Kong.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



### 4. BENEFITS, COSTS, AND PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

The desire of expressing opinions and participating in public affairs are getting increasingly important in Hong Kong. There is always a question that is it worth the effort for citizen involving in policy decision making.

In this chapter, it will focus on describing the forces driving in increased use of participatory practice, the benefits accruing, the respective costs and the potential problems behind.

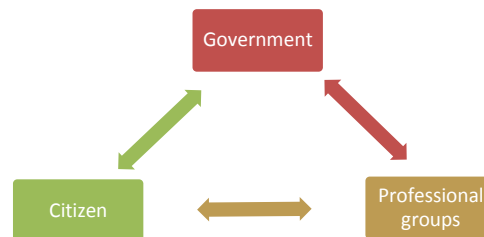
#### 4.1 Benefit of Public Participation

##### 4.1.1 To enhance Better-designed plan

*“Argument for enhanced citizen*

*participation often rest on the merits of the process and the belief that an engaged citizen is better than a passive citizen.”*  
(King, Feltey, and Susel 1998)

To implement a new or revised town planning, it will enhance the development concerned with the use of land and design of the urban environment, including air, water, and the infrastructure passing into and out of urban areas such as transportation and distribution networks for decades. Therefore, participatory planning aims to harmonize views among all of its participants as well as prevent conflict between opposing parties. In addition, marginalized groups have an opportunity to participate in the beginning of planning process.



**Fig. 2** Connection of Major stakeholders

Without citizen involvement, government will strongly relies on the analysis and strategic proposals from professional parties, such as architects, urban planners, environmental engineers etc. As a long term end user, citizen can only enjoy the plan in the finalize stage.

With citizens participate in the decision making process, formulated policies might be more realistically grounded in citizen preferences. By circulating the related document and information among government and

professional groups, citizens can be more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, and the increasing support from the public shall create a less divisive, combative against towards the plan.

#### **4.1.2 To develop civic sense and trust towards government**

*“Engaging citizen in policy-making is an investment in good governance, helping to build public trust in government and to strengthen civic capacity” (OECD Newsletter 2001)*

To encourage a citizen to participation in urban planning decision, it can often be the first experience of taking an active part in the democratic process.

With its special historical background, Hong Kong was a British colony over 100 years before 1997. During the colonial period, Hong Kong citizens never participated in any policy making process and entirely relied on the colonial government.

After handing over to China, Hong Kong established its own Special Administrative Region (SAR) government, promoting “Hong Kong people running Hong Kong”. People started concerning about civic issues, and public participation processes benefit from the direct and immediate knowledge held by citizens and concerning city planning conditions in their communities.

A successful public participation enhances the sense of belonging towards the

communities, encouraging the public and other stakeholders to share their knowledge, with the regulatory authorities, fosters better-informed decisions and decreases the likelihood of unsatisfied planning.

#### **4.1.3 Generate diversity concerns**

*“Wisdom is not limited to scientific specialists and public officials, which suggests that participation by diverse groups and individuals will interject new information and practical insights into the decision-making process” (Harvey V. Fineberg, 1996)*

Started from the setting of Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance in 2004, Hong Kong government allowed “unprofessional” citizens to give voice on public policy making. Public participation gives broader perspectives on a particular process, and it is no doubt that early involvement gives sufficient time to study and evaluate issues. In civic perspective, public participation encourages early identification of the diverse perspectives on the issues of concern. In economic perspective, better-designed projects, which avoid costly delays in appraisal and implementation, can also result from early and planned consultations and public participation.

#### **4.1.4 Conflict analysis**

*“Researchers assumed that stakeholder group members shared a common set of values and these value differences were the principal source of stakeholder conflict” (Cordano et al. 2004)*

It is undoubtable that in every city planning decision makings, the plan will raise series of issues that shall be shared by all stakeholders, such as natural resources, ecological balance, well-being of live style etc.

However, the interests of stakeholders often vary significantly and can be highly conflicting. Several of conflicts have been reported in literature (Tam et al. 2009).Public engagement is one of the techniques of conflict analysis. It allows investigating the possible conflicts and alliance between interest groups in order to avoid opinion domination by those groups that generate the loudest noise in the process of urban planning.

The case study shows that public engagement helps collecting public opinions more accurately that can represent the public interest in the selection of the best development and design scheme for the territory, which would not be corrupted by the “dominating opinions.

Benefit of Public Participation		
	To citizen	To government
Decision process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Persuade and enlighten government</li> <li>- Gain skills for activist citizenship</li> <li>- Strengthen the sense of civic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Persuade citizen</li> <li>- Build trust with citizen</li> <li>- Build strategic alliance</li> <li>- Gain legitimacy of decisions</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Break gridlock</li> <li>- Achieve outcome</li> <li>- Better policy and decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Break gridlock</li> <li>- Avoid litigation costs</li> <li>- Better policy and decisions</li> </ul>

**Table 1** Summary of Benefits of Public Participation

## 4.2 Problem encountered in Public

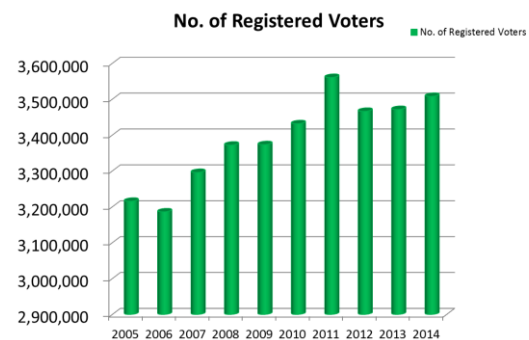
### Participation Practice

The major difficulty affecting public participation are attitudinal, lack of capacity to deliver programs, lack of clarity about what outcomes are possible and the lack of a legislative framework. Some aspects of these issues are addressed below.

#### 4.2.1 Attitude

In Hong Kong, citizens over 18 years old are eligible to register as voter, which is the prerequisite for participating in legislative council and district election. The chart below is a statistic showed the No. of registered voter in recent decade.

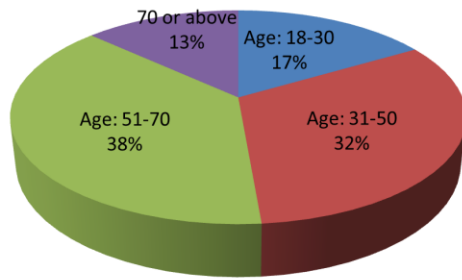
In 2014, 73% eligible electors (18 years old or above) had been registered as voter.



**Fig. 3** Statistic of registered voter

However, by considering the distribution of registered voter, more than half are over 51 years-old. Checking the proportion of registered voter, only 59.7% eligible citizen aged 18-30 had been registered; while 74.3% eligible citizen aged 31-50 had been registered as voter. It showed that young generation in Hong Kong is lack of proactive attitude toward political issue.

**Age distribution of registered voter**



**Fig. 4** Age distribution of registered voter in 2014

A survey which aimed at investigating the teenager satisfaction toward the community had been conducted in 2013, and the result showed that 70% of the teenage satisfied with the current living environment.

At the same time, 60% of the interviewees believed they can only have small influence toward government planning.

Since the teenager will be the major core end-users of the plan, if they have the motivation to express their opinion about the community, it can bring an effective plan which can satisfy the public.

#### **4.2.2 Lack of capacity of delivering program**

There is a general lack of experience of participatory processes in Hong Kong, and very few stakeholders have experience in participating of a planning decision-making. Even government officers or planners do not have sufficient experience to lead a participatory process. Citizens are frustrated when they are treated as adversaries, and they always feel like they have been invited too late in the process. Public ‘hearings’ often do not include ‘listening’.

According to the statutory plan-making process as amended by the Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance in 2004, if adverse opinion was received toward the draft plan, it is the Board’s right to decide whether to amend the draft plan by the proposed amendments. Citizen’s efforts and ideas are not included in proposals and no reason given. The resources available to proponents and government are overwhelming.

The lack of a clearly defined purpose can also means that the role of the public is sometimes unclear not only to the public but to those delivering the process, with the consequence that the participation process chosen is often unsuitable for the particular city planning.

Moreover, it is not clear delivered about the possible outcome of the plan. Somehow the government aimed at focusing on the possible contribution of the plan, but avoiding delivers the possible drawbacks, such as damage of natural environment, over-budget etc. It will be further elaborated by using a case study in “North East New Territories New Development Areas (NDAs)”.

#### **4.2.3 Lack of Legislative framework**

Public participation can avoid hearing from only the activist or the powerful elite, and in order to get the widest sweep of opinion and information, therefore the government must reach out into the community. However, lack of technical support for the public, and difficulties in getting access to information will diminish

the ability of the public to play a meaningful part in the planning process.

The best timing to hold public hearing or forum shall be the early stage of public consultation, so that the citizen can receive first-hand information and give a feedback in the early stage. However, in most of the case studies in Hong Kong, only local committee or benefit related parties were being invited in the first stage of public discussion. And there is no legal compulsion shows that how submissions may influent the final plan. Where legislation does not specify early public involvement, then it is at the discretion of the relevant authority, and dependent on the opinion of the relevant public servants.

#### 4.3 Cost of Public Participation Practice

To collect the opinion and gain the heart from citizens, meeting with them regularly and ultimately, getting their trust and friendship may be one of the direct methods. Ostrom (1990) suggested collaborative decision making works best when the group is small and homogenous, which is most likely found in rural communities.

##### 4.3.1 Human resource for holding hearing and forum

In order to receive majority comments, a 10%-20% citizen representative is recommended. However, in a busy and speedy city like Hong Kong, it is nearly impossible to expect such big proportion of citizen can be gathered to have a meeting regularly. If the citizen participants

comprise a tiny portion of the population, there are no guarantees that each citizen participants is influential in their community. Hence, it is better to divide the public form and hearing into small groups of community, and it causes heavy burden and workload for the organizers, such as government officers, planners and professional parties.

##### 4.3.2 Time consumption

Because citizen participants are not paid for attending the plan decision making, committees may be dominated by participant whose livelihood or time is surplus. Some participants, especially those representing business and government agency interests, are paid for their time devoted into the initiative. On the other hand, local citizens spent their time in voluntary.

#### 4.4 Principles of Successful Public Participation

No.	Principles	Cata.
1.	Willing to share power with stakeholders	Overall
2.	Presence of community organizations	Pre-Con
3.	Support for and by community organizations	Pre-Con
4.	Educated and empowered citizens	Pre-Con
5.	Having listening and facilitation skills	Practical
6.	Being-inclusive	Practical
7.	Involving stakeholders as early as possible	Practical
8.	Meeting face-to-face	Practical
9.	Educating and empowering citizens	Practical
10.	Tailoring the process & build good relationships	Practical
11.	Avoiding control by a particular group or individual	Practical
12.	Involving the media	Practical

Fig. 5 - Principles of Successful Public Participation



According to the study of Makiko Tanaka (2005), she summarized twelve key principles of successful Public Participation. They are divided into 3 different categories, which are “Overall Condition”, “Preconditions” and “Practical Conditions”.

(a) Overall Condition

For “Principle 1”, it required the government is willing to share power to planners, administrators or the public, and engage in collaborative efforts.

(b) Preconditions

For “Principle 2-4”, it provided some pre-conditions to enhance an effective public consultation. For instance, by ensuring the community organizations can be created and maintained over time. And the governments and community organizations can cooperate mutually. Moreover, given that the local citizens are sufficiently educated, with basic knowledge of planning.

(c) Practical Conditions

Among principle 5-10, it mentioned about the essential requirements for the public participation being feasible.

- Principle 5: Planners and administrator have good skills to understand public perception
- Principle 6: All stakeholders are being involved
- Principle 7: Stakeholders are able to join in the early planning stage
- Principle 8: A meaningful process, strategies for direct meeting

- Principle 9: Citizens are sufficiently educated and able to empower and work in collaboration
- Principle 10: Build a cooperative relationships, with trust and respect between planner and citizens
- Principle 11: Avoid being dominate by a particular group or individual
- Principle 12: Involve the media in the planning

Taking into account of the above 12 elements, it can be applied to evaluate the degree of reflection by analyzing a recent case study in Hong Kong.

## **5. CASE STUDY IN NORTH-EAST NEW TERRITORIES NEW DEVELOPMENT AREAS (NDAs)**

### **5.1 Background of Public Participation development**

Before Town Planning (amendment) Ordinance 2004 had been amended, the authorization of city planning and decision making was appointed to the Planning Department and the Town Planning Board (the Board).

In 2005, major amendments were made to the Town Planning Ordinance by which the plan-making process and the vetting procedures of the applications for planning permission were streamlined to enhance the openness and transparency of the statutory planning system. Under the Town Planning Ordinance, members of the public could submit written representations on draft statutory plans (could be supportive or adverse) to the Board during the

exhibition period of the draft plans (2 months). All representations are open for public inspection and any people could make comments on the representations for consideration by the Board.

Pursuant to the Town Planning Ordinance, members of the public could also make comments on the planning applications received by the Board for its consideration during the vetting process. To inform the public of the details of the planning applications, the Board is required to put up notices on newspapers and at/near the relevant sites to notify the public the application details, and to make arrangements for public inspection of such details. Apart from the statutory measures, the Board would take additional administrative measures to notify the public, including posting notices at the Board's website, office of the Board's Secretariat, Planning Enquiry Counters of the Planning Department, the relevant District Planning Office, local community center, District Office, Rural Committee office etc., and to inform the relevant owners' corporations and residents' committees.

In addition, the Board's meetings are open for public's observing at the Public Viewing Room of the Board's Secretariat. The minutes of meetings are also available at the Board's website. These procedures have enhanced the openness of the statutory planning system of Hong Kong and its legitimacy to the public.

## **5.2 Decision Maker**

### **5.2.1 Who are the ultimate decision makers?**

The Town Planning (amend.) Ordinance allows the public to give representation to the plan. If an adverse further representation was received, the Board will hold further hearing and decide whether to amend the draft plan by the proposed amendments. And those amendment made by the Board shall form part of the draft plan. Then, the submission of the draft plan, together with a schedule of the amendments made by the Board (if any), a schedule of the representations, comments and further comments will present to the Chief Executive in Council for approval.

Therefore, the final decision maker of the plan shall be authorized to the Town Planning Board (the Board), members of Legislative Council and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong.

### **5.3 Case Study – Public Participation in North East New Territories New Development Areas (NDAs)**

North-East New Territories New Development Areas (NDAs) is one of the argumentative development plans in Hong Kong, this development plan aims to provide new land to meet long-term housing, social, economic and environmental needs, and the development is situated in the North-eastern part of New Territories, which is a village of indigenous people, and the rarely seen farmland in Hong Kong.

This development plan was first announced in the Chief Executive 2007-08 Policy Address, and underwent technical analysis and public consultation in

different stages before the plan had being

### 5.3.1 Stage One Public Engagement

Stage one public engagement had been started from December 2008 for 3 months consultation, which aimed to engage members of the public in discussions on key issues relating to the development of the NDAs.

A one-day community workshop was organized and some of the professional bodies, like Hong Kong Institute of Planners, The Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong etc. were invited to be an advisor. Since there are lots of indigenous people live in the planned area, the Town Planning Board (the Board) had invited the four rural committees in North District to participate in the meetings.

About 90 individual written comments were received in the Stage one Public engagement.



Fig. 6- Location map of NDAs

### 5.3.2 Stage Two Public Engagement

Stage two public engagement had been started from November 2009 for 2 months consultation.

It focused on discussing the Preliminary Outline Development Plans, based on the public comments received

announced.

during the Stage One Public Engagement.

Briefing sessions and public forum were held in this stage to outreach to different sectors of the community. Press briefings as well as press and radio interviews were also held to distribute information through the media. The Study Team also consulted relevant statutory committees, local organizations, professional bodies and stakeholders by briefing sessions.

Up to March 2010, the Board received 257 written comments, including those from individuals (mainly local residents) and various organizations.

### 5.3.3 Stage Three Public Engagement

The Stage Three Public Engagement exercise was carried out between mid-June and end September 2012. A Stage Three Public Engagement Digest was prepared outlining the Preliminary Outline Development Plans and the key topics of the NDAs proposals including implementation arrangements and the results of the traffic and technical assessments. Thirty-five briefings or meetings (including 1 public meeting and 1 public forum) were held during Stage 3 with over 10,000 written comments received.

### 5.3.4 Consequence and Feedback

Under the 3 stage public engagements, it raised the awareness from the public and media. Some people welcome to the NDAs as it brings with new supply of public housing. On the contrary, still many citizens

and scholars opposed to the plan since it rural land, and have to demolish the local villages. From the written comments received in Stage 3, it can reflect the adverse comments from the individuals, committee groups, NGOs etc.

The NDAs had been approved by the Legislative Council in 2014. Therefore, it gave rise to the dissatisfaction from the public, and consequently, the distrust to the government policy making. A large scale of parade has been held to against the plan permission

### 5.3.5 Degree of Reflection to NDAs

To analysis the result of NDAs, we can make use of the “12 Principles of Successful Public Participation” which had been introduced in section 4.4.

No	Principles	NDA s
1	Willing to share power with stakeholders	Fair
2	Presence of community organizations	Full
3	Support for and by community organizations	Weak
4	Educated and empowered citizens	Weak
5	Having listening and facilitation skills	Weak
6	Being-inclusive	Fair
7	Involving stakeholders as early as possible	Weak
8	Meeting face-to-face	Full
9	Educating and empowering citizens	Weak

endangers the nature environment of the

10	Tailoring the process & build good relationships	Fair
11	Avoiding control by a particular group or individual	Fair
12	Involving the media	Full

Fig. 7 – Summary of the degree of reflection in NDAs

Although the Town Planning (amend.) Ordinance increased the transparency of the plan by presenting all information to the public; the public are still weak to collaborate in engagement.

**Principle 3:** Government administration and the Board failed to obtain public support

**Principle 4:** Lack of education about the concept and knowledge of public participation in the early stage. Instead of empowering participants; government tends to “educate” and “cure” citizens believe on the plan.

**Principle 5:** The board, members of Legislative Council and the Chief Executive, as the final decision makers of the plan, they do not have adequate listening and facilitation skill in order understand public perception.

**Principle 7:** With reference to the schedule of public meeting held in Stage one, most of the hearing were being held with professional bodies, rural and village committees in North District and relative government during November 2008 – March 2009. They are possible benefit-holders in the plan but they are responsible in the preliminary planning process.

However, local citizens were lack of information about the plan until Stage Two public engagement or later.

Stage One Public Engagement

Date	Major Events
7 March 2009	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for Villagers in Fanling North</a>
9 January 2009	Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Advisory Council on the Environment
20 December 2008	<a href="#">The NENT NDAs Study - Stage 1 Public Engagement - Community Workshop</a> (Luen Wo Hui Community Hall)
17 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Kwu Tung Village Meeting upon their invitation</a>
16 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Heung Yee Kuk N.T.</a>
15 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Sha Tau Kok District Rural Committee</a>
15 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Ta Kwu Ling District Rural Committee</a>
11 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the North District Council</a>
10 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Fanling District Rural Committee</a>
9 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong</a>
9 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Sheung Shui District Rural Committee</a>
3 December 2008	<a href="#">Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Hong Kong Institute of Planners</a>
27 November 2008	Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Planning Sub-Committee of the Land and Building Advisory Committee
26 November 2008	Presentation on the NENT NDAs Study at the 12th Beijing – Hong Kong Economic Co-operation Symposium
25 November 2008	Presentation on the NENT NDAs Study at the Joint Co-operation Meeting between Planning Department and Shenzhen Municipal Planning Bureau
25 November 2008	Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Legislative Council Panel on Development
14 November 2008	Briefing on the NENT NDAs Study for the Town Planning Board

**Fig. 8** – Schedule of public forum in Stage One

**Principle 9:** Citizens were not fully educated and empowered in the plan to expand their ability to work in collaboration with the Board and planners.

## 6 TECHNIQUE OF PROMOTING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### 6.1 Involve interests as early as possible

The earlier a consensual process can be started, it provides more time and resource for better decision making. But not all planning are suitable to involve public engagement in the very beginning stage. Some plans, such as environmental pollution issues, transportation network planning, which required adequate research and investigation before open for public discussion, it is better to put public engagement after government had studied

with relevant professional parties.

On the other hands, for the plan which is foreseeable to affect the daily life of citizen, like urban renewal or redevelopment plan, it is also the best for citizens to attend before some decision had been fixed by government.

Problems	Possible solutions	Degree
Insufficient housing demand	Increase residential land	MEDIUM
Lack of community facilities	Urban Renewal	HIGH
Pollution	Pollution control and awareness	LOW
Aging population	Set up Retirement protection scheme	HIGH
Traffic congestion	Improvement of transportation network	MEDIUM
Insufficient urban land use	Development of Suburb area	MEDIUM

**Fig. 9** – Degree of importance for early participation

### 6.2 Selection of citizen representative

By studying the case study of North-East New Territories New Development Areas (NDAs), it shows that there is not strong support between the government and public. Therefore, to select a leader (or a community) who represents local citizens; it enables to act as a bridge between government and public, to smooth the conversation and opinion reflection during consultation period.

### **6.3 Public Petition**

According to the Town Planning (amend.) Ordinance, public allows to give comment to a proposed plan. However, the plan may not be an adequate proposal to fit the public need. In order to consider the actual need from the society, the government can allow the citizens creating on a new idea. If a petition meets a required quantity of public signature, it will be reviewed by the government and the Board.

### **6.4 Education to the public**

Since the practice of public participation is a new concept to Hong Kong, we do not have a well-developed educational channel to provide sufficient knowledge and technique to the citizens in schools. Therefore, the government can learn from of experience of Mini-munchen, a program in Germany, where “Mini-munchen” is a kids’ town in which things work partly like in a real town. The town is managed and administrated by kids and teens supported by adults. It allows the children to pretend acting as an adult, to learn the sense of civilization and adequate skill to present their ideas.

### **6.5 Involve the media**

Getting good coverage by the newspapers, radio and broadcast television channel is so obvious principle but sometimes being overlooked. We cannot assume every citizen will catch up the up-to-dated news of the plan by themselves, therefore, to involve media which has central stand point towards the plan, allows

the most updated information can be circulated in the community.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

During the British colony age, city planning was solely designed by the government administrations. In order to enhance the transparency of the planning system and to streamline the town planning process, the Town Planning (amendment) Ordinance was introduced to cover the old ordinance in 2004. And the Board and government administrations had involved public to participate in the new city planning discussion.

Although the hardware (concept of Public Participation and amended Town Planning Ordinance) of the public engagement is ready, the software (public education to responsibility of civilization, supportive relationship between government and citizens) to implement Public Participation is not ready. It is no doubted that there is no plan can fulfill everyone’s requirement; people shall have different expectations towards the plan. The principle of public participation holds that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. Public participation implies that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

Taking into account of the North-East New Territories New Development Areas (NDAs), the Board and the administrations failed to provide a platform to understand and discuss public expectation. On the other hand, local communities and citizens are lack of skill to expand their ability and idea

in the planning process. They concerned the environmental preservation, city sustainability and supply of public housing estates etc. However, the voice was not able to converge and deliver to the final outline plan. This is the critical problem which leads the public participation insufficient to reflect its anticipated outcome.



**Fig. 10: Ladder of citizen participation; Arnstein (1969)**

By considering the ladder of participation, Hong Kong's public participation is still between the level of "informing" and "consultation". Citizens lack of power to insure that their views will be considered with power. It is sad but true that when participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, hence no assurance of changing the status can be guaranteed.

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