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Sustainable Place-Making in Hong Kong: Transforming Urban Crisis to Urban Renewal Opportunities*

Tris Kee
Technological and Higher Education Institution of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

As the discipline of architecture and urban design develop renewed interests in social responsibility associated with participatory design and collaborative place-making, it becomes more critical to review the potential and limitations in current collaboration process. The intrinsic proposition of bottom-up planning implies new approaches on how architecture operates in the context of modernity to manifest itself in the discourse of urban crisis. By examining case studies in the Asian context, we observe an emerging design pedagogy in Hong Kong which involves interdisciplinary coalition of professionals and local stakeholders in community development as an architectural rubric when confronted with social and urban crisis.

Keywords: sustainable development, urban renewal, collaborative place-making, participatory design

Introduction: The Contextualization of Social Crisis

The city is a complicated organism due to the inherent complexity shaped by changing social, economic, and architectural forces. The common assumption that the architect's job is to design for the people is often restricted and undermined with contradictions. People have changing needs and aspirations in regard to the built environment and yet, these values often result in conflicting interests within society. The ultimate pursuit is to ensure a society of justice in which the distribution of common goods and services are beneficial to all. According to Harvey (1973, p. 97), the "principle of social justice therefore applies to the division of benefits and allocation of burdens arising out of the process of undertaking joint labour." The joint venture in projects or other forms of collaboration is risky depending on the socio-economic and political setting. The nexus of power and knowledge among authorities, organisations, and even ordinary citizens may help identify issues and problems specifically related to design. However, solutions to these problems are mainly controlled and regulated by higher powers and decision-making authorities.

This locus of power and decision-making has an undeniable impact on the planning and design of the city. Foucault saw the city as a "milieu or a field of intervention in which individuals, populations, and groups … circulate ideas, forms, and technique" to solve problem-spaces (Foucault, 2007, p. 155). The focus is to evaluate the distribution of benefits in the city and mechanisms applied to accomplish a socially just distribution city depending on individual preferences and values. Harvey (1973, p. 100) assumed that individual justice is on par to achieving territorial justice and he noted that several criteria must be met to achieve socially

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Tris Kee, associate professor, Department of Design, Faculty of Design and Environment, Technological and Higher Education Institution of Hong Kong.

just distribution, which includes features, like inherent equality, valuation of services in terms of supply and demand, need, inherited rights, merit, contribution to common good, actual productive contribution, and efforts and sacrifices. Among the eight criteria, Runciman (1966) identified three (need, contribution to common good, and merit) as the most important to attain the essence of social justice. Harvey (1973, pp. 101-108) sided with him and further dissected the three criteria to elaborate on how the just distribution of the system coheres to the definition of social crisis while considering architecture in the discourse of place-making and urban social culture.

The intrinsic proposition of collaborative architectural practice implies new approaches on how architecture operates, in the context of modernity and crisis, to gradually transform the world. As the discipline of architecture develops renewed interests in social responsibility, associated with the call for participatory design and bottom-up planning in recent years, it becomes more critical to review the process of potential prospects and limitations in the current mode of operations. There are many critiques and fallacies associated with community planning ideologies generated from the 1960s with participatory architecture, which can be traced back to the concept of advocacy planning (Paul Davidoff), equity planning (Norman Krumholz), trans-active planning (John Friedmann), and diverse city planning (Jane Jacobs) (Krivy & Kaminer, 2013, p. 1). Rondolph Hester, a participatory practitioner, argued that participatory process is institutionalised and parochialized (Hester, 1999, p. 12). While confronted with solving social crisis, traditional participatory process may no longer meet its original goals. In contextualising social crisis, we first define "need" simply as the "rights to equal levels of benefit" for all individuals in a society (Harvey, 1973, p. 100). It may be difficult to define needs for all people as they change overtime, but the objective is to understand why such needs arise in the first place. Needs are associated with a number of different categories of activity, such as food, housing, recreational opportunities, neighbourhood amenities, etc. These categories have minimum quantities and qualities that would equate with needs. However, this minimum will change according to the social norms at a given time, which may arise from either market demand, latent demand, or potential demand (Harvey, 1973, pp. 102-103). In short, there are different ways to relate needs in modernity and they vary across categories in the pursuit of defining architecture, modernity, and crisis.

Secondly, a socially just distribution of benefits should have a positive contribution to the common good. This contribution implies that the allocation of resources to one territory affects conditions in another, which the latter should attain equal benefits. This notion of socially just distribution in contemporary urban planning theory is underpinned by the collaborative design practice. Healey (2006, p. 263) defined collaboration as "power-sharing" processes that operate within a multi-cultural social system, where people "acquire frames of reference and systems of meaning," from which individuals construct inter-related identities and social relations. The collaborative process includes consensus building through engagement activities inviting different stakeholders to take ownership of the design. In particular, collaboration in place-making strategy is examined in this paper to understand how our current city is identified as a crisis-space whereby different actors, including capitalists, educators, non-governmental organization (NGOs), foreign experts, and ordinary people, "define what is problematic, uncertain or in need of mediation" (Foucault, 2007, p. 21).

Thirdly, social merit is built as a theoretical framework to mediate between crisis and architecture. Merit means the more fortunate individuals maximise their productive capacity to promote the welfare of the least fortunate. The principle of social justice argues that "society at large should underwrite the higher costs of insurance in areas of higher social risk" (Harvey, 1973, p. 107). This principle aims to promote the

disadvantaged social groups well-being and ensure a welfare system promoting their livelihood. In most circumstances, individuals require adequate security in order to contribute to the common good and allocate their productive capacity to fulfil needs. However, in reality, "programmes which seek to alter distribution without altering the capitalist market structure within which income and wealth are generated and distributed, are doomed to failure" (Harvey, 1973, p. 110). Hence, social crisis is characterised by members of a social system failing to receive expected conditions of life (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977, p. 41). Our social production of space is therefore derived from these three main criteria: need, contribution to common good, and merit, in order to reframe the roles of architects and architecture in engaging urban issues for contemporary practice and pedagogy (Anderson, 2014, p. 16).

Urban Crisis in Hong Kong

Urban problems in Hong Kong do not merely focus on the simple attainment of justice for the people, but also the fear that institutional conditions limit people's possibilities to participate in decision-making and express their feelings, experiences, and perspectives (Albrechts & Denayer, 2001, p. 380). This fear has resulted in the growing desire for community involvement in different fields of practices and yet, the stringent executive-led political system of Hong Kong, an inheritance from the city's colonial past, offers no immediate solutions. The city was a British colony before returning to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The political system in the colonial era operated under strong executive-led influence dominated by elitism. This system resulted in powers vested in the hands of the Executive Council, with ruling classes dominated by business professionals as well as influential policy secretariats (Cheung, 2011). This mode of decision-making practice had spanned across different domains of government bureaucratic practices. Moreover, Hong Kong society was particularly apathetic in terms of civic participation during this period, when people were more concerned about making economic livelihood and sceptical about handover issues. With the introduction of the District Council elections of 1996, community participation only began to formulate loosely among certain interest groups or political parties.

After the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, the chief executive inherited extensive policy making powers from the colonial government. As economic development progressed and stabilised, together with higher education attainment among the public, concerns over the built environment transformation were raised accordingly. Several development proposals, such as the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier demolition in 2006, the latest urban development proposal of the Northeast New Territories, and the "Occupy Central" campaign in 2014 have caught mass media attention, sparking an era of societal campaigns and social unrests (see Figure 1). Given the growing effectiveness of social media in rallying protesters, Hong Kong is witnessing an increase in malicious and even destructive civil protests in recent years, especially as more societal groups rally massive public involvement to voice out their disagreements whenever government actions are considered not in line with public aspirations. Fragmented views on how the city should be designed between the public and the government have catalysed fierce protests and violent break-ins to the Legislative Council, creating an unprecedented scale of social crisis.

To raise legitimacy of the appointed government officials in implementing project proposals and to appease public's desire for greater involvement in development projects, the government began to collaborate with different stakeholders in bridging the gaps among the itself with both the private and public sectors. The changes in the political system and the increasing collaboration undertaken to please the public have set

unprecedented improvements in involving key stakeholders, specifically the public audiences, in voicing their concerns, needs, and aspirations in planning and design processes. However, a critical analysis of the current collaboration system is required to assess whether embracing community design can truly mediate between the stakeholders and alleviate the current crises.

Figure 1. Urban crisis in Hong Kong is characterised by recent public protests. (Source: Courtesy of Arts News)

Collaborative Design Process

It is important to study the problems of the city rather than problems in the city itself. Hong Kong's top-down sovereignty has nowadays become less stringent with actively involving the community in collaboration processes. However, the need to collaborate with key stakeholders and acknowledge their viewpoints in the design outcome remains a challenge for the government bureaucracy. The collaboration during the place-making process can help define common concerns over shared space among key community stakeholders and can "build up social, intellectual, and political capital that transformed into a new institutional asset" (Healey, 2006, p. 311). This joint effort of public participation could ease future discussions by effectively providing new channels to recognise impacts and capturing the "pluralism of values and knowledge in a society where preferences have not been properly captured by the technocratic bureaucracy" (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013, p. 151). The inclusive dialogue embraced in engagement exercises could potentially shape social space by promoting "new synergetic partnerships between stakeholders with new mode of governance that acknowledges the need to involve multiple stakeholders" (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 283). This partnership further produced negotiated knowledge that is co-constructed by social actors with diversified views and priorities. Here, diversity is recognized as a form of social asset to celebrate differences and encourage a discursive mode of governance.

Hitherto, the collaborative approach simply assumes a unified, coherent voice but few scholars (Albrechts & Denayer, 2001; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Healey, 2006) had noted that this is seldom realised in practice. The main difficulties come from the stringent institutional conditions where power remains with the executive politicians. The power relationships create tensions in operating collaborative practice that paradoxically "embeds values of cohesion, solidarity, and inclusivity within a world that is socially fragmented" (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 283). The collaboration between the government, the private and public sector, and other professionals in architecture and urban place-making is now considered as a standardised practice. Public participation is highly questioned in its implications in practice as the dialogues generated are considered purely a form of govern-mentality (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013, p. 151). The central debate raises many questions about the effectiveness of public participation in undertaking a collaborative effort and whether there should be more of engagement exercises. Indeed, collaboration during the place-making process would only be effective where genuine and inclusive dialogues among all stakeholders are enabled in the institutional framework.

Knowledge Collaboration in Hong Kong

Through a mix of literature reviews, structured interviews, and case studies, the author will illustrate how engagement is conducted as a mediation of architecture and urban crisis in Hong Kong (see Figure 2). The primary method of data collection for the case studies involved interviews with key personnel involved in the planning and delivery, while structured interviews constituted part of a wider research project that examines the notion of spatial governance. Secondary data collection mainly involves reviewing academic literatures and planning studies regarding crisis contextualisation in defining the analytical framework. An examination of public engagement publications related to the case studies reveals responses from the community sector. Two case studies are selected for comparative analysis, identifying their commonalities in collaborative design and the effect of their outcomes. The overall analysis aims to identify some of the shortfalls associated with top-down planning and how, through collaborative design, it redefines social cohesion. The author also examines theories that underlie how trans-disciplinary knowledge initiates change and becomes the praxis that draws on social production and inclusive process (Anderson, 2014, p. 16).

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) once defined three broad types of knowledge: the theoretical, the poetical, and the practical. There is no reason for knowledge to be confined to narrow scholarly or scientific definitions, which would limit the province of knowing to "the facts, information, and skills acquired by a person" or to "what is known in a particular field" (Wortham, 2007, p. 46). Various modes of knowledge are all necessary constituents to the truth, to connect human activities that are "the means to the ends of truth," thus, knowledge should include "the open-ended, the unprovable, and the speculative," while embracing both ontological and local wisdom (Wortham, 2007, p. 46). Postmodern scholar Haraway (1988) called for embodied knowledge that recognises "the partial vision of everyone's seeing and knowing," and that "all people speak from a place—from local knowledge, from past experience, from education, from professional positions" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 2000, p. 135). Knowledge can be further delineated into enlightenment and an experience of civic conscience, which presents the architect's new challenges and a deeper responsibility to conscientiously perform social awareness. Community-driven place-making has been emerging as an alternative in recent design pedagogy in Hong Kong, to bridge the design knowledge and communication gaps between citizens and government officials. An examination of the following two Asian case studies offers a critical review of the role of collaborative design, as the praxis of architecture meets the context of urban crisis (Kee, 2017).

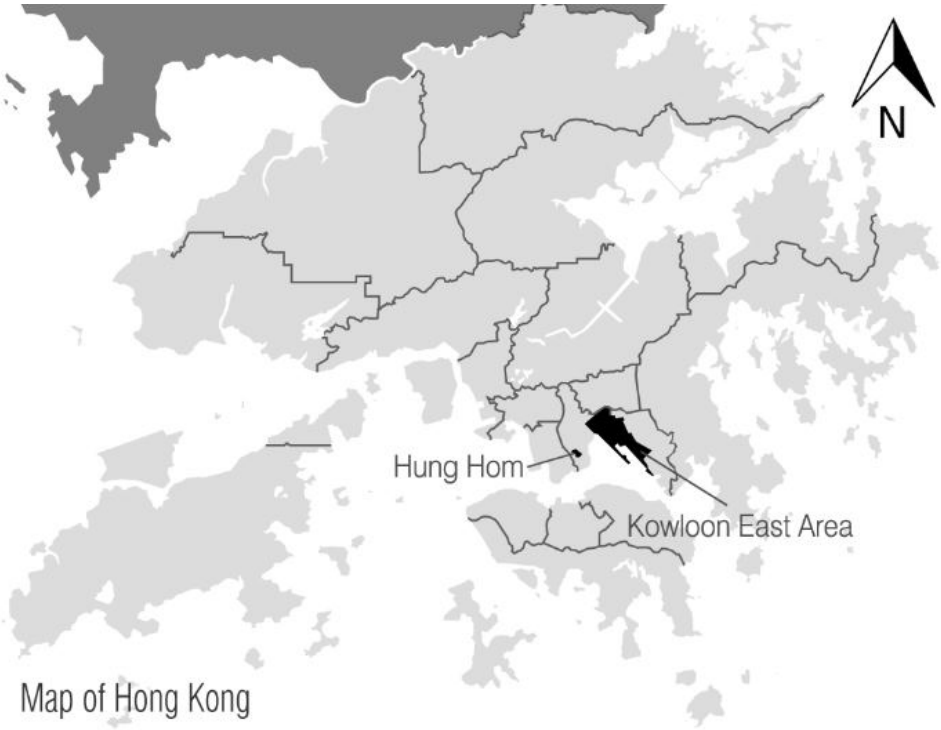

Figure 2. Map of Hong Kong and location of case studies. (Source: Kee, 2017)

Case Study 1: District Urban Renewal Forum—Local Experience of Civic Conscience

Knowledge under the auspices of community participation can offer great local wisdom as well as converge urban propositions. Architecture can actually be regarded as a reconstruction of informal settlements, which is often the case, since what we call "do-good" architecture tends to focus its efforts on vulnerable communities (Clouse & Lamb, 2013, p. 186). Most politically and environmentally vulnerable communities are in desperate need of the kind of strategic thinking that designers bring to the table, thinking that includes both professional and local knowledge. In Hong Kong, a prominent example of where the collaborative place-making process has taken a revolutionary turn-away from traditional top-down planning—is the pilot District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) that was launched in 2011. The first pilot DURF selected Kowloon City, one of the oldest districts in Hong Kong. This piece of urban fabric presents aging housing stocks, high unemployment rates, lack of green open spaces, and ailing infrastructure, all of which are calls for immediate attention to urban revitalisation (see Figure 3).

Contrary to traditional top-down planning, DURF provides a platform for active dialogues with the community and operators to identify and implement measures in addressing people's needs and aspirations. The communication within the collaborative effort aimed to build up trust and collaboration and shift the locus of power to the people. However, designing for the people and by the people is not easy to achieve. The knowledge derived from collaboration explores the potential for mixed efforts to support differences in project design. In particular, public participation was only recently adopted in Hong Kong in the place-making process and the mechanism is far from holistic. This form of collaboration is relatively new, which corresponds to the political changes after the 1997 handover. The city attempts to carry out community engagement activities proactively so that citizens can be educated to voice their views regarding city planning. The goal is to establish

and foster open discussions between the government, private, and public sectors to facilitate place-making. Although the incorporation of public participation is important as a tool to involve locals in influencing decision-making, it still lacks a sound operational mechanism for genuine empowerment.

Figure 3. Dilapidated buildings in the urban context of Kowloon City require urban revitalisation. (Source: Courtesy of Kowloon City DURF)

If one accepts the premise that all participants have legitimate claims to knowledge construction, both objective and subjective languages "generated from the professional discourse can be displaced from their hierarchical position to be placed beside local knowledge" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 2000, p. 135). DURF was established for a term of three years to fuse professional theories and local knowledge in the process of place-making. Since everyone is assumed equal, the notion of community-driven urban renewal is strengthened, endorsing a new vision to "balance the interests and needs of all sectors of the community without sacrificing the lawful rights of any particular group" (Development Bureau, 2011, p. 4). As a by-product of the Development Bureau's (2011) *Urban Renewal Strategy Review*, the first pilot DURF adopts a "people first, district-based, public participatory" approach to better address community's needs and aspirations. This approach adopts broad-based public engagement exercises, which is designed to mitigate the increasing social demands for equal contribution in the urban renewal process (see Figure 4).

While grounded in Western design practices and ideologies in collaborative place-making, architectural schemes were proposed in DURF with district stakeholders' and government officials' participation, attempting to strike a balance between top-down and bottom-up powers. As Kendig and Keast (2010, p. 69) suggested in *Community Character: Principles for Design and Planning*, designing with the community has positive effects on the social, economic environmental, cultural, and other physical attributes that create neighbourhood characters. The overall community approach can promote quality urban design and innovative architecture, create vibrant public space, and invite arts and culture to city life.

DURF participants acknowledged their aspirations for green spaces enhancement, traffic improvement, pedestrian linkage, and street vibrancy enhancement, while recognising the significance of pedestrian-friendly

environment with attractive streetscape and urban greening. DURF architects' primary methodology was to gather first-hand stakeholder's opinion to develop a collaborative design applicable to the city's context. The possibilities offered to DURF architects were tremendous but challenges were also prominent, which included effective mechanisms, legitimacy, clear directions, and role of design professionals in engaging grassroots effort.

Figure 4. Collaborative design workshop in DURF programme. (Source: Courtesy of Kowloon City DURF)

DURF in Sub-District

To understand where urban crisis lies in Hong Kong and how collaborative practice mediates citizen's needs, contribution to common good and merit, we begin with the problem of incompatible land uses in a sub-district south of Kowloon City District called Hung Hom. In the past, Hung Hom was a hinterland for heavy industries. The phenomenon of deindustrialisation gradually transformed Hung Hom into a residential neighbourhood, with some minor industrial uses in the north. Despite the changes, the operation of traditional Chinese funeral and related businesses, such as funeral parlours, coffin shops, nunneries, etc., clustered near residential developments, has been a heated problem for the past decades. The nuisances generated remained as a contending problem for locals, which not only affects the cleanliness of the physical built environment, but also disrupts the psychological well-being of residents.

The problem of incompatible land uses was resulted from the lack of buffer between residential and funerary uses. Within the affected boundary, there are three funeral parlours, a mortuary, and more than 40 ground-level shops dedicated to specialised funeral consultation services. These shops offer a selection of funeral products, which can be obnoxious practices in contemporary urbanism. For instance, traditional Chinese-style wooden coffins and urns for funeral purposes are displayed in a significant number of ground-level shops, which are highly visible to residents and bystanders (see Figure 5).

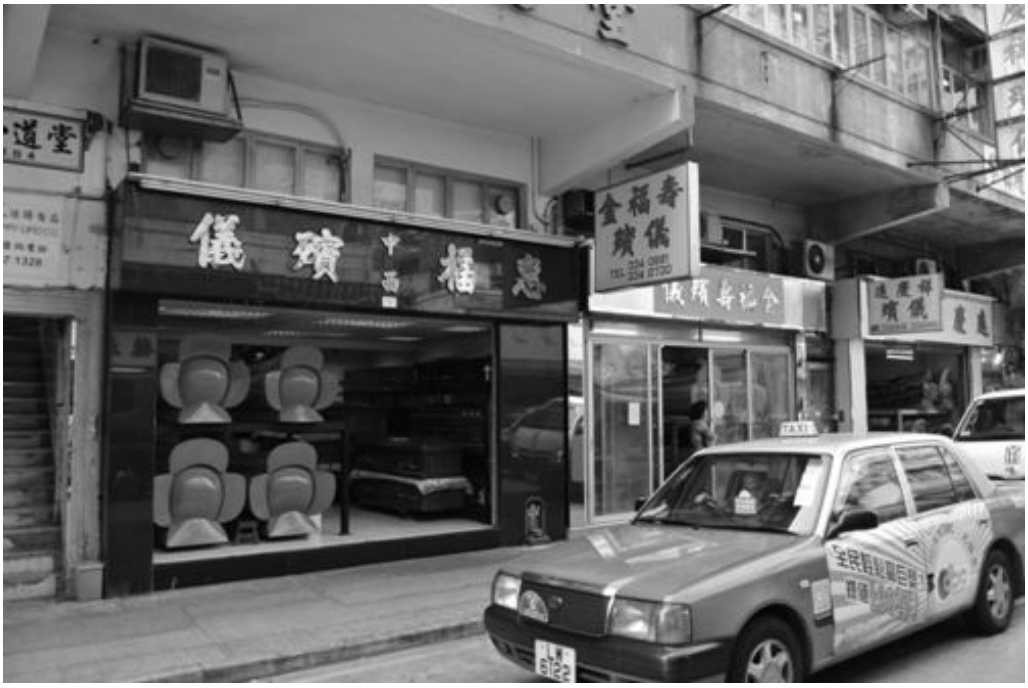

Figure 5. Traditional Chinese coffin shops on street level become a visual nuisance in the urban context. (Source: Kee, 2017)

There are no strict regulations controlling the locations of funeral and coffin shops, however, this interface problem displays a typical resentment of the "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome conveyed by affected residents. Although funeral parlours are tangibly disjointed with the intrinsic urban fabric, the buffer between the conflicting land uses is less than 300 meters apart. There are no mitigation initiatives or measures in the current institutional framework to reduce this clustering effect, which leaves many affected stakeholders helpless in confronting this problem that affects their quality of living.

Knowledge Input From Public Engagement

In De Certeau's (1984, p. xi) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he underlined the "everyday practices," "ways of operating," and "doing things" such that they "no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity," and are instead more pronounced. The public engagement exercises include focus group discussions, workshops, and public forums to raise important dialogues that focus on the urban design of the built environment. Citizens' aspirations of the district, the impact of funeral business and the economic, social, and political considerations were presented to formulate a social impact assessment (SIA).

To realize participation as the practices, public debates helped generate architectural schema and mitigation measures to solve the incompatible crisis (see Figure 6). Findings from focus group research and public engagement are quite in line with aspirations and needs as discussed in public consultations. The public engagement exercise provides countless opportunities to explore sensitive issues both at the micro- and macro-level. Different from typical procedures in planning, the open-ended questions provide participants with a sense of ownership in the place-making process. This helps them understand in detail how district-based and place-specific problems affect the lives of ordinary citizens. The importance of a community-based approach shows the vast urban issues that require imminent solutions.

Figure 6. Fierce debates during participatory planning in a Hong Kong community hall. (Source: Courtesy of Kowloon City DURF)

But when it comes to participation, there is a strong trend to highlight everyday practices in order to move away from "a discussion of levels of participating and legitimacy" and move toward "an understanding of the organising, productive and reproductive work that is done when participating in the production of the built environment as part of an ongoing process of social change" (Udall & Holder, 2013, p. 65). Moving from the obscure background of participation, there is a paradigm shift in motivation, skills and access to resources that make up participatory practices. In this case, the comments derived from public engagement dialogues concentrate on the nuisances generated by funeral businesses towards the locals. The knowledge inputs, however, also include non-residents of Hung Hom. The architects and planners have taken into account of all comments from the public consultation and have been incorporated in the final Urban Renewal Plan (URP) (see Figure 7). The Hung Hom area is identified as a "Mixed Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Area" to address impacts generated by funeral and related businesses. For instance, urban design elements are proposed to enhance the streetscape for a better pedestrian experience. Despite the mitigation measures, there is still a wide gap between the design proposals and public views. The power structures of the DURF continue to show the dominance of the executive-led governance throughout the place-making process. As one of the urban planners who participated as an interviewee in the research pointed out:

> To achieve better public participation experience, we have to start small. It is critical to prioritise issues related to local community and urban renewal to consolidate professional views, so the government's blueprint for urban renewal can encompass local characteristics and reflects local aspirations and community interests at large. (Community Project Workshop [CPW], 2013, p. 68)

Thus, the authorities of DURF should realise public aspirations, and their proposals should be realistic in mitigating social problems authentically to genuinely improve the quality of life and the built environment.

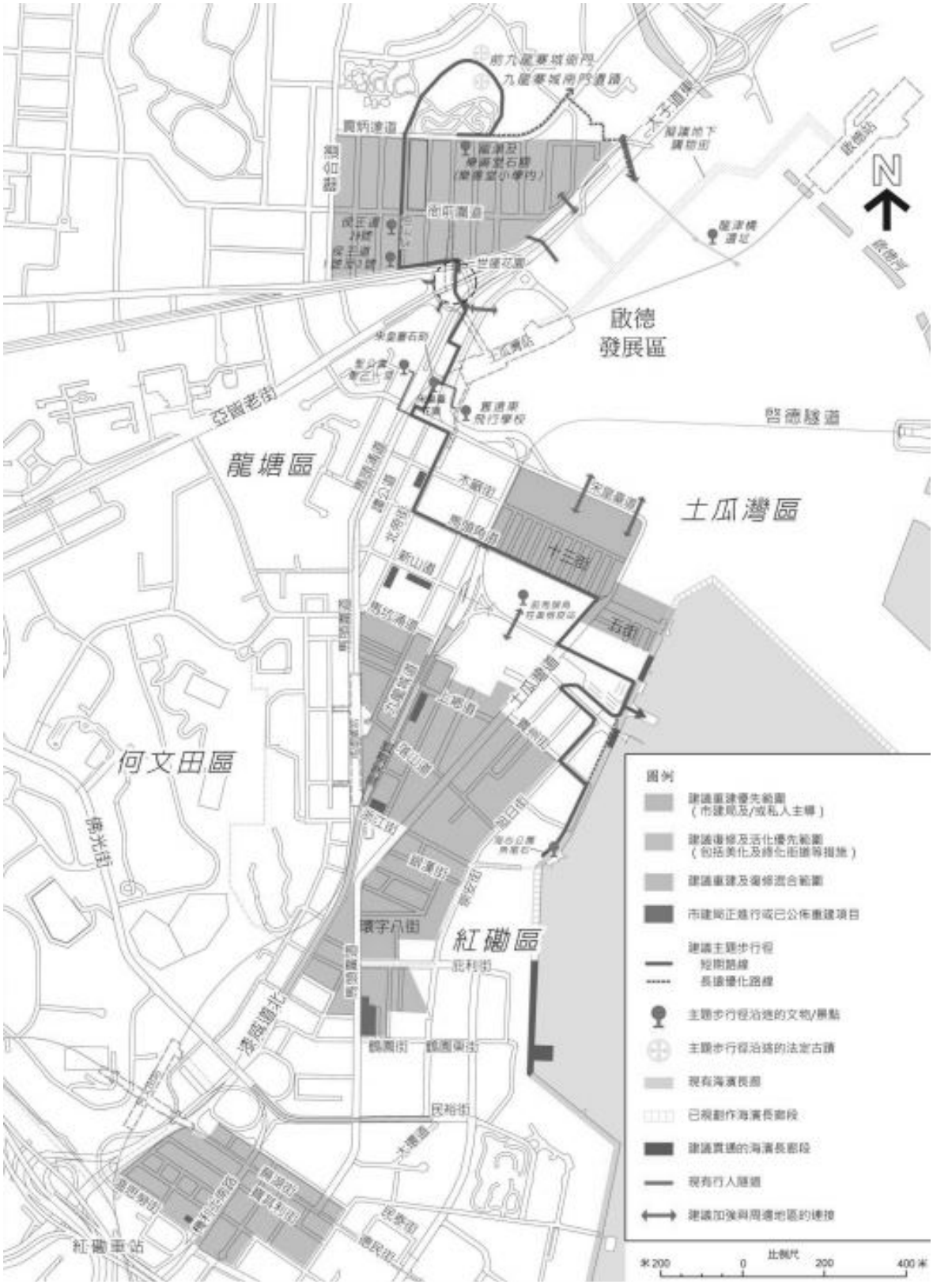

Figure 7. URP as a result of DURF consultation. (Source: Courtesy of Kowloon City DURF)

Case Study 2: Kowloon East—Merit in Urban Branding

To demonstrate how collaborative design can be cultivated in the city's planning process, Kowloon East was chosen as another case study in exemplifying the possibilities and constraints of collaborative place-making and design process in Hong Kong. The Kowloon East area is identified as a strategic growth area in transforming into the second central business district (CBD) in Hong Kong. The area served an important manufacturing function in Hong Kong during 1960s-1980s industrialisation (see Figure 8). With gradual relocation of factories to Mainland China, these factories became obsolete and have gradually transformed into non-industrial uses by local artists. Within the developed neighbourhood, there is insufficient green space, poor walk ability, and street connectivity with frequent competition of road usage among pedestrians and road traffic. The waterfront is also not enjoyable for public usage with its previous use as loading and unloading area. To promote better land utilization within the neighbourhood, the Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO) was set up in 2012 to steer, supervise, and monitor the transformation of Kowloon East into a strategic district that supports commercial need via urban planning and design strategies (see Figure 9).

Figure 8. Manufacturing industries were the economic pillar in Hong Kong during the 1960s-1980s. Most factories were located in Kowloon East. (Source: Courtesy of EKEO)

Taking the advantages and past economic glory of rich industrial elements from past development, this provides an important legacy and design direction to continue past successful story and respect unique local

urban identity in the process of Kowloon East transformation. The whole project aims at promoting urban branding to the entire area into a CBD2 by putting emphasis on four themes of urban regeneration, namely, connectivity, diversity, design, and branding. Urban connectivity focused on green transportation and pedestrian network provisions to enhance circulation between inland and waterfront areas. On the other hand, diversity brings multiple purposes in urban area through diversifying functional uses to cater day time and night time activity needs among urban dwellers for business, tourism, leisure, and cultural purposes. Therefore, the architectural and urban design will include landscaping, greening, and streets furniture provision to enhance urban life. More importantly, urban branding is crucial as a place-making element; incorporating it would impart an overall identity to this premier CBD with a local uniqueness on the international stage.

Figure 9. EKEO was set up to activate urban transformation in Kowloon East. (Source: Courtesy of EKEO)

As the mission to embrace urban branding as the merit that tackles urban crisis, EKEO engages stakeholders across different sectors to express their views and organises events to raise public's involvement in promoting CBD2 identity (see Figure 10). When confronted with complicated land use problems, innovative ideas, and recognition of the urban merit can facilitate district transformation, and make the best rational use of public spaces to maximise public and private sector needs. This strategy fosters a sense of partnership and develops a platform for all community actors to steer the project and move onwards through collective effort.

Through a series of public participation activities and attempts to encourage broad involvement of local community sectors, invaluable inputs offered feedback on the design direction, branding, and urban development proposals. Collaborative synergy is gathered through public forums, workshops, seminars, and exhibitions. Participants included residents, business parties, architects, surveyors, engineers, and planners, who had all identified district branding as the key to establishing urban identity. Some specific implementations included a conceptual master plan for the districts and have already received multiple revisions since launched (see Figure 11). Other place-making methodologies branded open space into a pioneer Industrial Heritage Park, showcasing Hong Kong's history through landscaping, encouraging public arts, artefacts having industrial characteristics, or displaying physical products related to industrial businesses (see Figure 12). The collaborative planning vision even transformed an unattractive urban space underneath the flyover flanking the promenade into an active cultural performance venue (see Figure 13). The notion of urban branding becomes an asset and merit in urban regeneration: prompting a transformation from obsolete industrial precinct into

attractive community leisure hub. As participants from the urban branding events also expressed their reaction to the approach.

Figure 10. Collaborative community workshop for urban branding and place-making. (Source: Courtesy of EKEO)

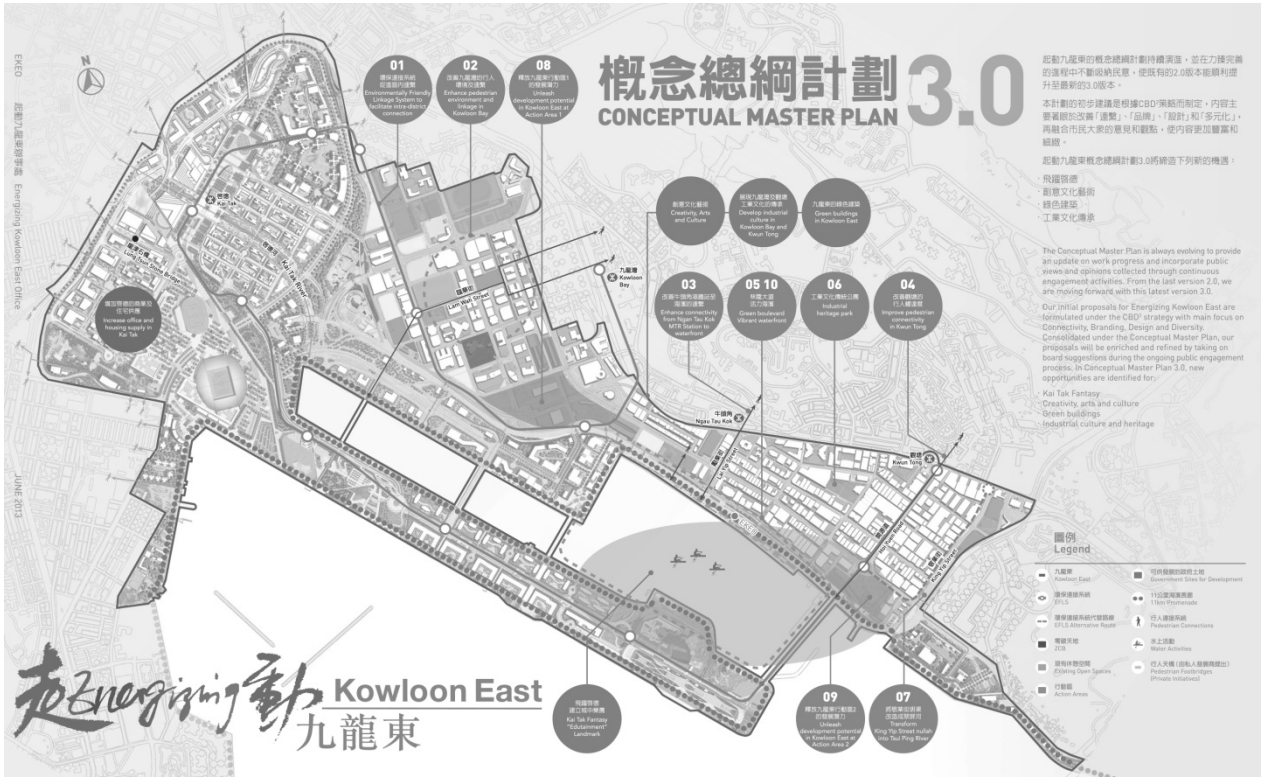

Figure 11. Conceptual master plan: A branding vision for Energizing Kowloon East. (Source: Courtesy of EKEO)

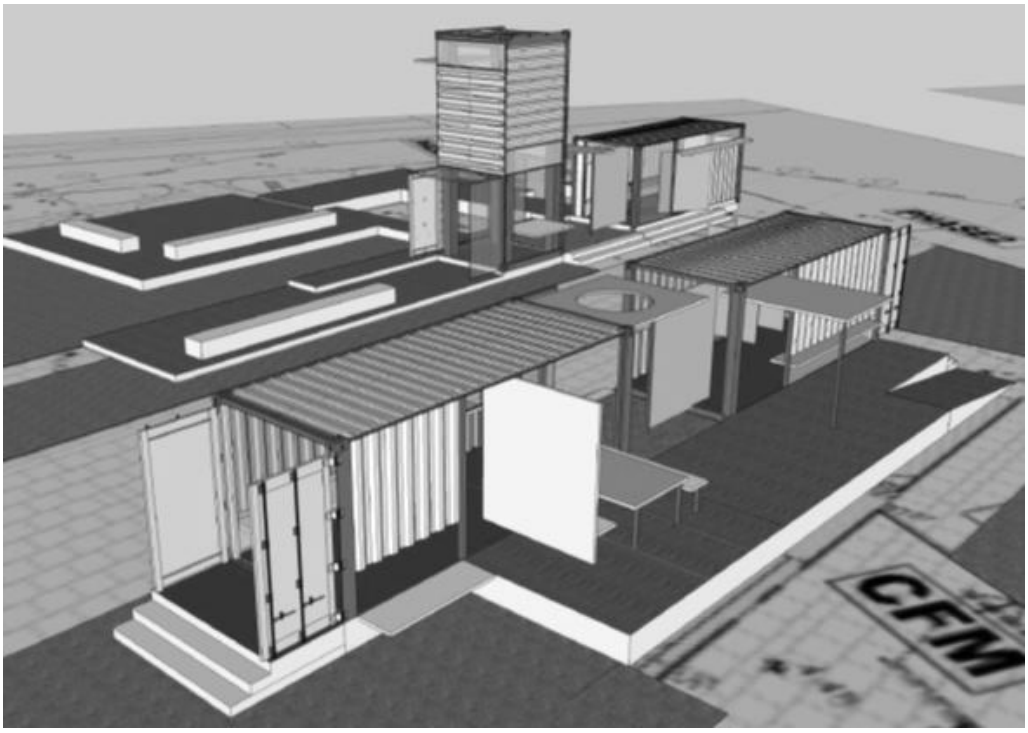

Figure 12. Proposed Industrial Heritage Park featuring artefacts related to urban industries. (Source: Courtesy of CPW)

Figure 13. Collaborative planning was able to transform idle urban spaces underneath flyover structures into a community venue. (Source: Courtesy of EKEO)

Being a resident of Kwun Tong, the author is very pleased to see that EKEO seems to be taking a progressive approach to the district's revitalisation. The author is passionate about public space and has cofounded a group, the Pocket Park Collective, to engage the community through fun events which make creative use of space and social furniture (CPW, 2013, p. 69).

As a concerned citizen, born and raised in Kowloon East—the zone with highest population density in Hong Kong, the author sees stories and endless culture that lie within people's day-to-day lives. The author sincerely hopes EKEO is willing to find, to listen, and to be really open to the emotional content, not anger, from the people we met today. The panel discussion today shall be a start of this long winding road (CPW, 2013, p. 69).

Comparative Analysis and Critique: How Collaborative Design Alleviates Crisis

While critically evaluating the case studies, questions emerged on the effectiveness of collaborative planning. While some existing urban problems can be addressed through collaborative design, new concerns associated with the collaboration process arise. In DURF, the proposals provide broad, indicative mitigations measures that do not provide feasible relations of funeral parlours in the long run. The proposals remain vague and neglect the need, desired by the residential population, to remove funeral and related businesses from a predominantly residential neighbourhood in improving the quality of life at the community level.

Meanwhile, the cases disclose three main common threats in public engagement in Hong Kong. Firstly, in reference to Arnstein's (1995) ladder of citizen participation, despite government effort, it is easy to realise that Hong Kong's public participation continues to remain at the tokenistic stage. Successful engagement is attributable to both local expertise, commitment, and intact management. The pilot DURF program was criticised because of its lengthy outreach exercises and a projection of an overwhelming amount of information that were not all necessarily considered in the place-making process. The lag produced from the excessive time spent to consult the public placed an enormous time-cost on the design process. The *DURF Master Plan*, guided by appointed officials in every place-making stage, is submitted to the government only for consideration. This lack of implementation power easily characterises the program as ill-defined and time-consuming, when actual implementation still relies on the private sector. Even though the dialogues generated from the public engagement exercise have helped officials better understand people's needs, oftentimes, the local knowledge inputs are still neglected in the final decision-making processes. Thus, the lesson drawn from the study highlighted the concept of balancing public participation and governance. The paper illustrates the value of an institutional framework. Such a framework or governance can be backed by more effective bottom-up approaches to achieve social cohesion. While the genuine empowerment of local knowledge is challenged in the place-making process, professional knowledge continued to override the subjective knowledge of the layman. As a result, power remains with government officials, with professional knowledge helping legitimise the hegemony of the executive-led government.

Secondly, the wealth of knowledge generated from dialogues of public engagement exercises is not amplified to unleash the potential of the pilot DURF framework. Community participation in outreach activities often fails to meet initial aspirations and the local community is often a subordinate partner in the process (Colquhoun, 1995, p. 3). Indeed, satisfying all stakeholders and reaching a consensus in the place-making process is difficult. The case of DURF demonstrates that key citizen needs and aspirations were ignored in the master plan. The study illustrates that although DURF's government planning blueprint provides a broad indicative proposal, they expend little effort to truly foster a people-centric model to integrate with urban renewal projects in the city.

To realize the adopted holistic perspective in social renewal and urban regeneration, a comprehensive plan would be required. The mitigation measures should focus on physical redevelopment, while balancing the

existing social conditions of the community. Another critique of DURF was the paradox between the top-down place-making process and the adoption of Development Bureau's (2011) "people first, district-based, public participatory" renewal strategy. Public engagement provides an important platform for stakeholders to voice their viewpoints; however, the process of engaging is more "productive in defending exclusionary groups than in promoting the public good" (Hou & Rios, 2003, p. 20). Unfortunately, citizen participation "is often used to satisfy mandated requirements and is not intended to fully engage the public" (Hou & Rios, 2003, p. 20). Hence, DURF's public participation exercises display the bureaucratic nature of the Government, which is arguably a form of governmental tokenism that exists to retain power.

In the second case study, the urban branding as social merit approach employs managerial-based place marketing for image building, communication, and identity construction. It is common to use visual aids and public events to create competitive advantage of a city. Though the case paid much effort in enhancing the spatial components of branding through providing landscaping and infrastructural support, non-spatial components on civic enrichment of social structure are still clearly lacking. Zenker and Braun (2010) offered "one of the most encompassing definitions" of place brand: It is a network of associations in the consumer mind, based on "the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the places' stakeholders and the overall place design" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 70). Yet, regrettably, the CBD2 brand, instead of being built up through a collaborative process, is being defined and confined to the initial stage. Kavaratzis (2012, p. 10) characterised branding as a nonlinear process that consists of "a complex web of intertwined, simultaneous processes" through coordination, but clearly, EKEO engagement activities were passive acts in participatory place branding, which were held after planning directions were established. Place branding ought to be a collective exercise that "defines the meaning of the place for the various stakeholders," not a managerial one (Kavaratzis, 2012, p. 10). Without genuine adaptation of local knowledge in the initial stage, and through superficially branding existing neighbourhood characteristics, EKEO unilaterally defines which interest groups are prone to be benefited while displacing existing social practices. Despite the plan is said to be subject to modification, ideas are only selectively endorsed by officials without face-to-face negotiation with residents.

Although EKEO stressed that the CBD2 development is different from the London Canary Wharf development, where a single authority had complete control over the development process, it admits that the process is wholly market-driven, through timely input and facilitation by government infrastructure provision and policy support. EKEO also claims that its community engagement events were comprehensive enough to enable a sufficient mix of knowledge and experience to develop Kowloon East holistically and competently. However, in reality, when brainstorming visions and ideas on a predetermined concept plan, there were only a handful of place-making workshops for residents. Other forums or sharing sessions concentrated mostly on professionals like architects, planners, designers, and less on local wisdom or interested parties. This elitist attitude may be detrimental to future place-making strategies, as it hinders the opportunity to learn from the local culture, and will only generate a branding direction that would be lopsided. Admittedly, local knowledge should be integrated at the initial stage when developing broad planning principles in this context as good practice.

While participatory efforts gather public momentum with the hope to influence change and serve as a counterforce in reacting to the urban crisis, current fragmented views in the society reveal social discontent and distrust towards the government. Therefore, this paper reacts to the fundamental challenge of achieving public

participation in planning. The dichotomy in achieving need, contribution to common good, and merit often does not result in the emergence of a fluid planning process. In the case of EKEO, it is undeniable that, to a certain extent, streetscape improvement, accessibility enhancement, and the beautification of promenade and playground have enhanced environmental and social benefits for the general public, but there are still concerns over the highly-regulated environment on the usage of public open space. For example, although the space underneath the flyover at EKEO is allocated for performances, cultural groups have complained about complicated administrative procedures, incomprehensive supportive structures, and how stringent performance restrictions have undermined the freedom of space usage. The Kowloon East transformation mostly benefits the business sector, as job opportunities created by upper class commercial offices might not be suitable for the surrounding residents, given the education level or skills that are sometimes required. On the other hand, its industrial heritage identity is being preserved symbolically by putting historical machinery artefacts along the waterfront, loosely creating a connection with the area's collective memory. Together, what role could the central government agencies and the planning profession play in establishing effective frameworks for supporting participatory urbanism?

Conclusions

For Hong Kong, urban crisis does not merely focus on the simple attainment of justice for the people, but also justice by the people. While the decision-making process continues to be dominated by a centralised government bureaucracy, the practice of participation in place-making encourages different stakeholders to voice their concerns, needs, and aspirations in the final design. However, such a strategy tends to neglect the latent problems within a place and/or space, which further contributes to the contextualisation of crisis in a social space. The city lacks an authentic system of local governance that truly responds to the needs of the society. The participation in place-making practices in Hong Kong will not work until an effective institutional mechanism at the local level is introduced to allow room for genuine collaboration between stakeholders and decision-makers.

Degree of planning collaboration in Hong Kong remains at consultative level. It is designed not to facilitate real dialogue exchange but to play a significant role in legitimising policy process especially when governance is dominated from a top-down perspective. The consultative process is usually featured with publicity campaigns that involve in-print or electronic announcement, leaflet dissemination, or publication as well as talks, roving exhibitions, and public forums organisation. Nonetheless, the collaboration process is carefully staged by relevant officials who have set out all agendas and policy plans while incorporating community's feedback selectively. Notwithstanding how the public sees the effectiveness of the actions, the collaboration process is undeniably becoming the norm of practice with the policy environment indicating that it will be a risky political act to continue exercising decision making from a top-down perspective.

This paper attends to the mechanisms and practices that could help society's stakeholders coordinate more effectively on the ground and to develop a more sustainable urban environment. Regardless of the fluidity of planning reforms and the oscillation between different political agendas, the ultimate goal is to implement a more flexible, people-oriented structure under the current dominant political paradigm. The two cases above both illustrate community involvement in Hong Kong's place-making, which is emerging as a pattern in architectural praxis and pedagogy. Meanwhile, the government has begun to provide multiple platforms for the public to get involved in expressing their concerns, understanding ongoing developments, and identifying

development directions. Collaborative planning and design is a dialectic social learning process which takes time to mature. Not only the quantity, but also the quality of the committed collaborative efforts is meaningful in realising genuine productive results. This learning, therefore, not only applies to the government in initiating changes to move away from elitism at the starting point of the planning process, but also applies to awaken the community's role in voicing their concerns logically and systematically. The government should also learn from other countries in urban branding, but first and foremost, learn from others about the way to conduct bottom-up collaborative planning. On the side of the public, rather than taking a hostile attitude to confront or boycott against the government, more productive results could be achieved when locals contribute their knowledge input into the design process. Professionals are facilitators to build up arguments and ideas by identifying commonalities and differences from both sides. While trying to expand design innovativeness on agreeable issues, more efforts should be played in breaching the planning and design gap among conflicting ideas. New solutions formed under mutual negotiation and idea exchange would undeniably be a product of common learning process to address most peoples' concerns. Although there still might be imperfections and it would be a time-consuming process in early stages, this would be a fundamental action toward rebuilding the community's confidence in the local government regarding its legitimacy to rule, as well as to ensure that collaborative methodologies become the architectural rubric at times when conflicts and crisis are prevalent.

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