



Working with Community, Government, Professional and Business Stake-holders: Knowledge Exchange in the Living Preservation of the Blue House Heritage Cluster

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The Blue House Cluster Heritage Revitalization Partnership Scheme (Development Bureau) is the first public-private partnership project of its kind in Hong Kong in which the original grassroots inhabitants are not evicted to give way to heritage preservation and development, but can continue to stay as active participants in the revitalization of their community.



Government's original plan announce on 31 March 2006

- To turn Blue House & Yellow House into Chinese Medicine & Tea Museums plus commercial facilities.
- Demolish Orange House.
- Evict all residents (\$ or public housing compensation.)



Response Political Climate during the Blue House Community Preservation Movement

Persistent preservation movements (e.g. Wedding Card Street, Star Ferry and Queen’s Pier) pushed the government to reconfigure its urban development policies to include heritage preservation.

➤ The government needs to react to new public values in a timely manner.



How can
inter-disciplinary academic research
inter-cultural knowledge
professional know-how
assist
affected community
non-government organizations
the government
generate together better policy development and execution
and do something Hong Kong people actually like?



Knowledge Transfer (one way flow) or Knowledge Exchange (two-way flow)?

Role of the scholars:

as expert adviser for all parties
as organizer of relevant knowledge & people
as facilitator among all parties.
Knowledge Exchange (two-way flow) rather than
Knowledge Transfer (one way flow).
Our research also learns & improves in the process.



Cultural-Social Innovation:

Our introduction of participatory research, policy making, planning and design have helped in creating a new alternative: a **bottom-up**, community-led and sustainable “**living heritage preservation**” model which integrates culture and heritage into the development of an existing community. It can become a beacon for **sustainable communities** to come and a demonstrative research and educational tool. It preserves not only the **architecture and cultural landscape**, but also the Hong Kong Tonglau (唐樓) habitual way of life. Its **innovative social enterprises** and creative financial model are self-sustainable while offering at the same time affordable rental homes and services as well as relevant job opportunities for the community. **promotes community participation and generates local knowledge transfer and cultural production.** How is this possible?



Scholars introduce bottom-up, community participatory planning to the heritage revitalization project

- **underpinned by the will of social-changers to “trickle-up” their alternative policy & plan:** these people are
 - existing residents, neighborhood volunteers, local community
 - advocacy & social service ngos (St. James’ Settlement, Community Cultural Concern, Heritage Hong Kong)
 - progressive scholars, professionals,& local artists

Set up the Blue House Resident Group

Personal commitment of stakeholders ensures identification with & ownership of the project, community responsibility, high consensus & acceptance of democratically generated result (despite disagreements) - essential to effective collaborative management. The local people took ownership & sought to develop how democratisation of community decision-making can work.

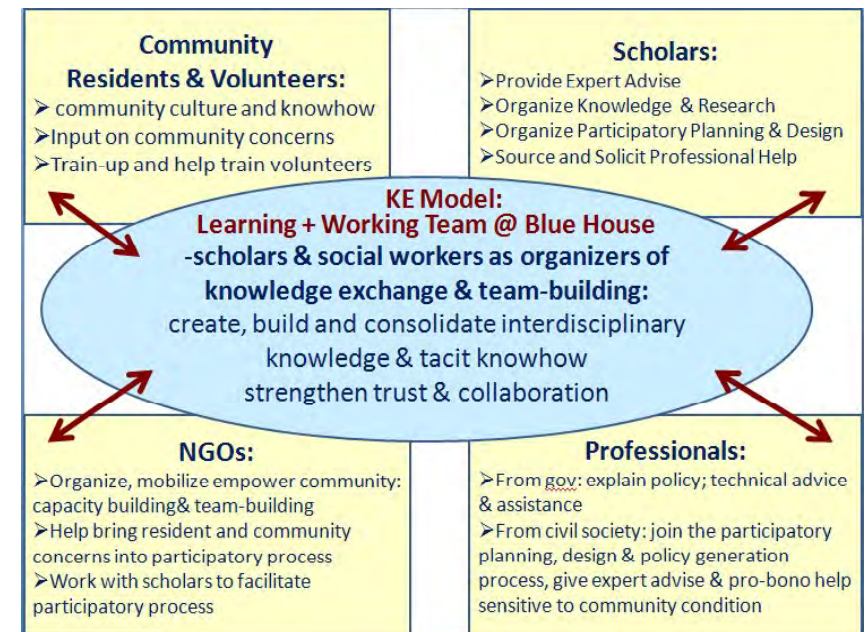
True community participatory planning takes time, but less time, hassle and cost than a militant community fighting the government on all fronts.

Stage 1: Community Participatory Research, Planning & Policy Development on “Living Heritage Revitalization”: demonstrate how PPP should happen

Set up the Blue House Preservation Group: Develop Knowledge & Protocols of Cross-sector Partnership:

Professionals, scholars & artists help in introducing:

- new methods & skills (e.g. community participatory planning and design, architectural expertise)
- knowledge of funding & art of grant applications
- process, technical & bureaucratic knowhow
- socio-economic networks for fund raising
- access to insider knowledge and connections
- relevant credentials, lend credibility, demonstrate, mobilize support of the wider community.



- Heritage preservation trains architects, urban planners, engineers with cultural and social knowhow and sensitivity
- Cultural programs, exhibitions & tours train cultural curators, cultural managers, artists, cultural entrepreneurs with social and business knowhow
- Social Innovation projects train social entrepreneurs and innovative professionals with cultural sensitivity; train social workers with cultural sensitivity and business knowhow
- R&D: build & transfer knowledge on Hong Kong culture & heritage; integrate cultural studies, cultural policy, industrial policy, urban planning for traditional and new creative industries; build theory base and archive; provide research, internship, experimentation opportunities.

Synergy: organizing Knowledge Creation, Building and Exchange



Community shares tacit knowledge; empowered & trained-up by knowledge transfer & exchange.

Outcome 1: New Policy Tool Comprehensive Impact Assessment (CIA)

Academic & NGO collaborative process innovation:

- R&D: evaluate existing impact assessment process→reform
- more comprehensive scope in evaluating impact of project: on residents AND nearby community businesses & residents (wider scope than government's Social Impact Assessment)
- consolidate the opinions and solidarity of residents who want to leave AND who want to stay: mobilize them to petition together for the right to a leaving plan AND a staying plan. Solve the divide and rule loophole.
- Procedures partially adopted by the URS review

New Strategies of Heritage-based Community Building

Outcome 2: Scholar & Community

Collaboration in Cultural Research: deliverables:

- Oral History, Cultural Tours, Program Content Development
- Finding & Building the Heritage Justifications from community pov
- Public Education & Media Campaign: Community stories popularized in the public memory. Innovative new content attract frequent free full -age press coverage: build public understanding & good-will about the alternative plan. Bottom-up research ensures content quality & timeliness.



Outcome 3 : New Strategies of Heritage-based Community Building

Participatory Planning: organize workshops with residents, neighboring stakeholders, supporters, possible future tenants: designing future alternative plan

Collaborative Procedural Negotiations: lobbying the Development Bureau, Town Planning Board, Urban Renewal Authority, Housing Society, District Council.

Planning & Trial-run of future alternatives: collective innovation to ensure financial sustainability of plans.



Outcome 4: Collaborative Research on New Alternatives & Innovative Solutions (scholars & professionals)

Global comparable cases we learn from & improve on

Casa Milà, Barcelona, Spain, 1906-. Both people & the house can stay.



We want to do better in terms of the democratization of participation through cross-sector collaboration & “living preservation.”

Isokon Building, Hampstead, London. Rental community homes. Early famous residents: Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Agatha Christie (1940-46), László Moholy-Nagy, Adrian Stokes, Egon Riss...



We want to do better in terms of the democratization of community participation in its management & development through cross-sector collaboration & “living preservation.”



Outcome 5: Scholar & Community Collaborative Research

The Problems and Opportunities of the Craft-based Industries in Wan Chai District 「技藝行業的危機與轉機：灣仔篇」 for the Wan Chai District Council.

A little trainee of traditional craft-based industries. Source: The Public Records Office (PRO), HKSAR. See also *The Problems and Opportunities of the Craft-based Industries in Wan Chai District* 「技藝行業的危機與轉機：灣仔篇」.



Research Findings:

Existence of vibrant traditional craft-based creative industries in the district (production chain analyzed).
The virtues of the Tong Lau spatial layout for co-existence of new and traditional creative industries.

Spatial needs of new creative industries similar to spatial needs of old Tong Lau communities.

The mixed-use Tong Lau spatial design enables new creative solo proprietors to interact with customers on the ground floor front shop while maintaining easy access to the customized product production or sample/prototype production area at the back or on the upper floors. The mixed-use design also allows them to work & live in close proximity, & thus, allows them maximum flexibility & efficiency.

2 yrs of research + community participation → policy & planning proposal submitted to the Development Bureau on 18 October 2007.



The 'Wan Chai Castle Plan (灣仔古保) Brochure.

The **Secretary of Development, Mrs. Carrie Lam** visited the **Blue House Cluster** in mid Dec 2007 to hear residents present without the help of any professionals.



Presentation to Secretary of Development Carrie Lam, 16 Dec., 2007. Courtesy of Laurence Lam.



Outcome 6: Policy Innovation adopted by the Development Bureau: succeed in getting Government Policy Change in Response

Revitalizing Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme (Development Bureau):

public private partnership = gov + business reinterpreted as

public private partnership = community + business + gov
to rebuild community capacity & build cross-class coalition for sustainable development

2 yrs of effort leading to a First Stage Success

In February, 2008, the Development Bureau invited Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the Blue House Cluster Preservation project based on a more people-oriented approach, which includes tenants who opt to remain within the Cluster becoming an integral part of the social network in the future revitalization plan. The team is proud to have been part of the effort that helped initiate this new policy agenda.



2 more yrs→ Victory during 2nd & 3rd Stage Competition: 2009-2010
We won the bid for The Blue House Cluster Heritage Revitalization Partnership Scheme (Development Bureau).



VIVA BLUE HOUSE We 嘩藍屋

awarded HK\$56.9
million (approx.)

SELECTED ORGANIZATION

St. James' Settlement

and the co-applicants, Community Cultural Concern (CCC), Heritage Hong Kong Foundation (HHKF), Blue House Resident Right Group

Previous heritage preservation models in HK:

Only involved **vacated historical buildings**. The people: the heart and soul of those communities gone. **Three disadvantages that we avoid:**

1. **Over-commoditization:** Focus on finance→ high-end restaurants, shopping malls & boutique hotels. **Accessibility often limited to paying consumers.**
2. **History disjointed & displaced:** Maximum profit results in 'over-alteration' of heritage physical & cultural integrity. **Decontextualization destroys meaningful interpretation by visitors.**
3. **No participation** of residents in the neighborhood. Local **quotidian heritage becomes alienated space operated by an intimidating new culture** out of reach to the local community.

New Cultural Infrastructure Building: Objectives

Viva Blue House is the first project of its kind, a constantly evolving story on local culture, a demonstrative research and educational tool, a beacon for sustainable communities to come.

Better living Conditions– improve the living standard of the staying tenants of the Blue House cluster and to promote community participation.

Share & Exchange - encourage residents and stakeholders to share their time, skills and experience to benefit both themselves and others.

New “Living Heritage Preservation” Model– preserve integrated living tangible and intangible heritage of mixed use Tong Lau, and to share its architecture, living culture and history with the next generation.

Sustainable Development – economic & social network capacity building offer job opportunities to the deprived; self-sustaining in the long run through the operation of the two innovative social enterprises.

Demonstrative Model & KE– proposes a bottom-up, community-led and sustainable regeneration models which integrates culture and heritage into research and development (R&D).

Outcome: Blue House's process-oriented model to overcome the 3 limitations

1. Minimum commoditization, yet sustainable through process-innovation:

- Business and management model innovation: Instead of relying on wealthy paid customers, we will offer affordable rental spaces to existing tenants and market-rate rental spaces to new tenants.
- Financial buffer through two innovative social enterprises, which will generate income & provide jobs for the residents & kaifongs.



2. Historical continuation and compatible usage:

typical ‘mixed-use’ tenement Tong Lau since the 1920s: residential, commercial, cultural & educational institutions (fishmongers’ union, temple, martial arts school, bone-setting clinic, wine shop etc.).

Continue the co-existence of multifunctional spaces - future programs demonstrate historical continuity & usages compatible with existing ecology.



1950s: taken over by Chinese martial artist of Hung Kuen (洪拳, 洪家), Lam Chun Hin (林鎮顯), who operated a martial arts school. **became a traditional Chinese ‘bone-setting’ medical practice,** 1960s: **continued until today** by Lam Chun Hin’s widow (Master Luk 陸師傅).



BH epitomizes the best local Chinese Confucian tradition of social responsibility and philanthropy

- Mid 1920s-WWII, King Ham Free School (鏡涵義學), a **traditional Chinese private school** (私塾; 朴朴齋), **free schooling**. Unit is now occupied by Wah Jie (華姐) & her son.
- Yat Chong College (一中書院): **only English school in Wan Chai.**
- **The continuation of this tradition of community education service is carried by the future Community Classroom in the House of Stories.**



License plaque of Len Hing Chinese Wine & Spirit Shop (聯興酒莊, 1930s-1978) now on the wall of the Wan Chai Liveliness Place in Blue House. G/F, 72, Grocery Store Kwong Wo Store (廣和號) 1930s-1978. **Continuation of the small shop tradition with hand-crafted-goods in the future project.**

Vintage car repair shop on Hing Wan St.



Cradle of local traditional craft-based industries continuing until today.

We will help to preserve & pass on such local skills & traditions.

(Left below) An old printing shop in Wan Chai. Many of its customers come from Central, Wan Chai business districts (Right below) A car repair shop on Hing Wan Street.



3.Strong participation in planning and design:

- Since Mar 2006: involve & mobilize **stakeholders to participate in the planning, design &** future management of the BH heritage cluster.
- **Resident advocacy:** The BH Resident Group set up in Oct 2006 to advocate for their right to make an informed choice whether to stay or to move; adequate consultation, compensation & follow-up services in a transparent & humane manner. After rounds of advocacy, the Dev Bureau finally agreed with the demands of the residents.
- **Participation in the Wan Chai Livelihood Place:** kaifongs provide ideas, set themes, locate & donate artifacts & act as tour guides.
- **Participation in cultural tourism, research & curation:** residents & kaifongs equipped with concrete experience & proper training → success
- **Participation in planning & future operation:** Residents & kaifongs actively participating in the planning & design of all programs & spatial uses.

“Value of Smaller and Mundane Heritage Places” for postcolonial cities

- Age maybe short for world standards but such sites reflect who we are and what we have become on our own terms: “mundane sites often reflect the lives of most people” whose agency are left out of official/dominant/colonial histories.
Grimwade, G. & Carter, B. (2000) “Managing Small Heritage Sites with Interpretation and Community Involvement”
- unique collection of 3 tenement buildings:1920’s & 50’s
- a paradigmatic mixed-use tenement cluster, a well integrated living a Tong Lau (唐樓) community. It radiates the best spirit of Tong Lau neighborhood & way of life. Old Wan Chai urgently needs new ways to stay vibrant amidst the fast urban redevelopment. **Blue House has the vision of this future.**