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Cultivating a Participatory Design Practice in Architecture: A Case Study of Hong Kong Housing Authority

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Abstract: Community participation in urban design and planning is slowly emerging in Hong Kong as the Government increasingly adopts and recognizes the importance of bottom-up community values in the practice of informing, consulting and involving the community. This paper provides a framework that emphasizes the importance of collaboration and community-based initiatives to reconcile different interests and achieve a balanced vision for the design of the city. The fundamental objective is to ensure foster an increased sense of community, responsibility and civic pride in order to improve the overall quality of life. The Lam Tin Estate case study not only demonstrates how the Government is becoming more responsive to the need to consult with the public and relevant stakeholders to build consensus prior to implementation, but also illustrates how community participation empowers key stakeholders to take ownership in designing and planning their built environment.

Keywords: Housing Design, Professional Practice, Participatory Design

Introduction

Hong Kong presents a unique case with regard to its stage of design and architectural development. The city began its urban life as a colony of the British Empire and when the British ceded their possession in 1997, it was returned to China's rule under an interim "One Country, Two Systems" policy. This term implies that Hong Kong is under a unique constitutional principle in which the city can continue to have its own political, legal and economic systems, including external relations with foreign countries while under the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China.

The Chief Executive inherited extensive policy-making powers after the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. As economic development progressed, together with higher education attainment among citizens, concerns over urban planning and development of the built environment were increasingly raised by the public. Several development proposals, such as the calling off of Lord Norman Foster's winning design scheme for the West Kowloon Cultural District in 2005 and the demolition of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier in 2006, have caught extensive media attention, sparking an unprecedented era of societal campaigns for more civic participation. Different societal groups became more vocal and rallied public participation to voice their concerns as the Government's actions were considered not in line with public aspirations.

Participatory design and architecture can be traced back to ideologies from the 1960s, an era when concepts of advocacy, equity, transactive planning, and diverse city planning were most prominent (Davidoff 1965; Krumholz 1982; Friedmann 1973; Jacobs 1961). The notion of participatory design practice in Hong Kong can be seen as a breakthrough from traditional top-down authority to explicitly demand a decentralization of power. The current design culture in Hong Kong is such that public administrators have slowly begun to recognize the need for community engagement in order to ascertain legitimacy of the appointed government officials in implementing project proposals. The Lam Tin case study conceptualizes participation in Hong Kong as an emerging culture and institutional rubric, since even the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA), the statutory body responsible for public housing construction, began to

provide intellectual space for citizens to participate in generating knowledge and contributing to the housing design process.

Hester (1999) argues that not all local grassroots planning practices result in participatory utopia, and current practices are subject to criticisms such as predetermined result, fake consultation, institutionalization and narrowly-defined boundaries (Hou and Rios 2003, 20). This paper examines how a particular form of collaboration between the authorities and district stakeholders of a housing project was used to bridge the design gap between government and residents. The redevelopment case of Lam Tin Estate demonstrates that the practice of participatory design in Hong Kong is moving slowly and is still in its early stages of development. Government agencies are learning to acknowledge, reflect, and reconcile public interest when making design and planning decisions. When designing the urban fabric, architects and city planners are seeing the importance of the city's local knowledge, and realize that participatory planning can offer a platform for open communication that cultivates active reciprocal design practice with a continuous evaluation and feedback mechanism.

Current Challenges in Design Practice

Contemporary urban design issues in Hong Kong are multifaceted, and most urban design initiatives have an immediate impact on the city's 7.2 million citizens. For the past 25 years, comprehensive mass-housing projects have been responsible for major shifts in population distribution, involving different degrees of dislocation. As priorities change and the emphasis shifts to the physical and economic regeneration of the city, particularly in the public realm, it has become obvious that traditional top-down processes can no longer be applied to the design of cities. There is a recognized demand for more inclusive, legitimate forms of sovereignty that are free from top-down power structures, as well as an advocacy for power decentralization (Krivy and Kaminer 2013). Recent literature on participatory culture also expands on new approaches to involve local citizen participation in community design and bottom-up implementation outside traditional territories of institutional politics (Hester 1999; Krivy and Kaminer 2013).

Design practices should thus be carefully constructed through an interactive process comprising elements of community planning to engage the public and respond to community needs and aspirations. This approach should empower those who might be potentially affected by development by enabling them to contribute to the process in some way. It is important to acknowledge that in every community, there exists a wealth of knowledge, energy and creativity from which designers can draw. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance for Hong Kong's future that the community becomes more effectively involved in design decisions as an equal partner. This is central to matters of design management and design professional practices wherever planning is carried out. The first step might be to give more credence to the social workings of the city and put the process of urban design and architecture on a par with the product.

There are several challenges specific to Hong Kong, which have prevented easy realization of the many opportunities inherent in shaping a comprehensive approach to the design practice and management. First, the city's political system has evolved over the last 15 years since the handover ended British colonial rule. Under the current system, the Government has to arm itself with a measure of community support to get proposals through its complex system. In particular, plans are publicly gazetted for two to three weeks for comments, but this consultation process is often criticized as being ill-defined and time-consuming, and can generate an overwhelming amount of unrelated information.

Second, several high-profile cases illustrate that design decisions seem to be predetermined, leading to frustrations among the citizens who had participated and offered feedbacks in the process. For example, the Queen's Pier, a historic pier named after Queen Victoria had to be demolished for the reclamation of the New Central Harbourfront. Despite major outcries from

the public and the historic significance of the pier, then Chief Executive Donald Tsang justified that promoting Hong Kong's economic competitiveness was more important than preserving its colonial heritage. Another case was the winning design proposal by Lord Norman Foster at the West Kowloon Cultural District in 2003. The design was scrapped in 2005 due to intense public criticism.

In recognition of these shortcomings, designers must acknowledge that genuine community involvement does not come about easily. In the end, some would argue that this is not in the cultural DNA of the community of Hong Kong, given its past as a colonial outpost and its indeterminate future as a Special Administrative Region of Mainland China. Atkinson and Eckardt (2004) note that resident participation constitutes a "new orthodoxy" across Western Europe, but this idea is still developing in Hong Kong as mechanisms for genuine public involvement in city's planning and design culture are emerging slowly. Studies in the U.S. and Europe clearly indicate that local communities, regardless of their size, can ably identify opportunities through community-based design planning initiatives. This approach entails networks of bodies—public, private, and voluntary—to share common concerns and work together on common initiatives for the common good of the city.

Research Framework and Literature Review

As Nick Wates (2008) explains in his *Community Planning Event Manual*, community planning is interdisciplinary, collaborative and community-based, enabling all those affected (known as "stakeholders") to participate in the planning process. Wates (2000; 2008) argues that better environments can be created if local communities are involved from an early stage, working directly and closely with a wide range of specialists. Urban design is essentially an interdisciplinary activity. Even within an extremely high-density city with high land values, there is a need to reflect increasing levels of planning concerns through working forums, where the insights of specialists and key stakeholders can be introduced into mainstream planning. In the U.S., the Urban Design Assistance Teams (UDATs) have a significant role to play in teasing out issues, using design devices to simulate vision, and stitching together three-dimensional aspects of the built environment as they emerge from various process planning sessions, interactive exhibitions, and formal consultations. A fundamental objective of this process is to ensure an increase in the sense of community, responsibility, and civic pride, which are directed towards improving the overall quality of life. Whilst the accepted urban design process can yield a wealth of design ideas, the challenge is to transfer the techniques to the mainstream planning process as a result of interdisciplinary and community liaison.

The broad research framework is to achieve a vision for the design of the city and its various parts based on public awareness that cannot be obtained in any other way. This framework would provide a mechanism to identify complex development issues and goals, foster consensus among different interest groups, and act as a catalyst for actions, while innovations would need to be carefully introduced into the design process. There are signs that the Government's own process is becoming more responsive to the need to consult with the public, together with various professional and interest groups and Legislative Council members, in order to build up a consensus before actually submitting firm design plans to the spectrum of bodies in charge of the approval process. At present, what we need are the means to make the process less abstract and less distant in the minds of the community, and to place their concerns firmly on the main agenda. In terms of community design, it is likely that the benefits are commensurate with the inputs.

Hester (1999) argues that there is a necessity for a paradigm shift in contemporary participatory design, the adoption of a more pragmatic and goal-oriented approach to help improve the urban design process itself, and enable better facilitation by authorities and professional representatives, i.e. those who experience change and others who help to bring it

about. This approach should ensure maximum involvement of the key players according to the clearly stated aims. Sufficient resources should be allocated and specialists should assist in facilitating community involvement and training. As Healey (2003) explains, collaborative planning “helps to build up, across the diversity of ways of living and ways of thinking, an institutional capacity to collaborate and co-ordinate [...] The collaborative process may have the potential to be transformative, to change the practices, cultures and outcomes of ‘place governance’, and, in particular, to explore how, through attention to process design, such processes should be made more socially just, and in the context of the multiplicity of urban social world, more socially inclusive” (108).

There are, however, challenges in adopting collaborative design practices. The main constraint is the time-consuming process in gathering comments related to the concerns, needs, and aspirations of different stakeholders. An overwhelming amount of information could be generated from focus group discussions, workshops, etc., and the comments gathered may include conflicting views, which requires experienced facilitators to resolve sensitive issues from heated discussions. There are also multiple fallacies associated with current participatory design models, with scholars arguing that the participatory process is institutionalized and parochialized, which as a result, no longer meets many of its original goals (Hester 1999). Citizens become weary from endless participation exercises, and participation practice is often critiqued to be a tokenistic gesture used to satisfy predetermined mandates that do not intend to fully engage the public (Arnstein 1995). If public participation becomes a highly bureaucratic and standardized process, it could lead to frustration, backroom deals and de facto decision making (Hou and Rios 2003).

Furthermore, there are constant debates and literature reviews on institutional versus community planning theory and practice. Verma (2007) outlines an ongoing dichotomy at work in various institutional planning models. In particular, Teitz (2007) applies the “non-partisan” model to examine how development should be regulated in order to support larger community interests, and how the placement of the planning function within local government structure shapes the design of the city (18). Planning, like other forms of governmental activities in a capitalist society, simply reflects the interests of the dominant class since its institutional structure is inherently oppressive (Teitz 2007, 18). Thus, a critical review of projects is needed, and a clearer direction to reconcile views of different stakeholders can strengthen people-centred design as well as benefit the quality of the built environment for the community at large.

Defining Community and Designing Community

Defining “community” can be a problem in Hong Kong because of its massive density and lack of urban differentiation. How does one define a network of bodies that share common concerns and work together on common initiatives? The U.K. Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR) criteria for community definition is based on a number of characteristics—beliefs, skills, economic positions, personal attributes, relationship of local services and identification with place. Community identity will therefore vary in relation to the composition of key characteristics. In forming a basis for urban design partnership, there needs to be factors within the community that act to bind people together with a combined sense of belonging and supportive relationships. This bond is likely to exist only if local communities are engaged and have participated in action group programs prior to the implementation of design initiatives. While the specific nature and context of Hong Kong are different from that of the UK, the fundamental aims are similar: to bring about environmental improvement, to extend social and economic opportunities, to gain access to better housing, and to avoid discrimination against particular deprived groups.

The definition of “community” in a workable sense must be accepted and recognized by the people who live in the area in question. One can conveniently define a “target area” population

for example, but a community would be unlikely to fit such a concise spatial definition which is only a physical abstraction unrelated to urban life. Furthermore, the term “community” must reflect a number of different factors, not all of which are necessarily related. These factors include relationship to place, provision of local services, economic positions, skills and capabilities, beliefs in terms of political, cultural or religious backgrounds, and personal characteristics. Hence, this paper advocates that community involvement in design and planning can take any of the five specific roles: community members can be (1) beneficiaries and users of the design services, (2) long-term partners in the regeneration process, (3) a source of community activity, (4) representatives of local opinion, or (5) auxiliaries in delivering parts of a design program.

Hong Kong Housing Authority’s Bottom-up Design Practice and Management

Hong Kong has experienced housing shortages for many years as a result of extremely high land values and soaring housing prices. A large number of Hong Kong citizens find it difficult to make a down payment to a mortgage loan. In this context, HKHA plays a critical role in Hong Kong’s society in providing affordable public rental housing. Established as a statutory body in 1973, HKHA is responsible for planning, designing, and building Hong Kong’s new public housing, and also managing and maintaining existing affordable housing complexes for those who cannot afford private houses. Despite HKHA’s powerful position as a procuring entity that makes it seem like a definitional “top-down” player in the development market, it has recently begun to see the value in community planning and has implemented the participatory approach in its housing projects.

HKHA saw the need to change its modus operandi by listening more to the citizens’ voices and by communicating more with the community during the design process of its housing projects. HKHA facilitates community engagement workshops with tenants and local communities in order to secure the understanding and acceptance of design features. The importance of community engagement and effective communication can enable mutual understanding of housing design. In the past decade, attempts have been made to address this “participation deficit” and government rhetoric by promoting bottom-up community values into the practice of informing, consulting, and involving the community (Hall & Hickman 2011, 827). This change in HKHA’s operations has made a huge impact on the process of thinking, designing and implementing public housing projects. By initiating public engagement exercises in both planning and design stages of large-scale housing developments, HKHA introduced the “deciding together” concept that is illustrated in the following case study of Lam Tin Estate.

Engaging the Community in Housing Design: Lam Tin Estate Case Study

Lam Tin can be translated as “blue field,” a Chinese phrase that reflects the site’s long history as a salt field since the Song Dynasty in 1163. Old Lam Tin Estate was built in 1966 and comprised of twenty-three resettlement blocks. HKHA initiated a Comprehensive Redevelopment Programme (CRP) in old Lam Tin Estate in 1988 to improve environmental and social living conditions. The CRP was carried out in multiple phases over twenty years. While the original site area was about 4.2 hectares, 1.5 hectares were assigned for the development of a new school, a multi-purpose municipal services building and road improvements. The remaining 2.7 hectares under the CRP were allocated for the construction of four 40-storey residential buildings, providing 3,036 domestic units along with retail and commercial development concentrating at the ground level—a typical housing typology in Hong Kong that emerged to accommodate its high-density urbanism.

Since the program was an old-to-new estate resettlement scheme, there was a close-knit community with strong aspirations about their neighborhood. Consisting mainly of local shop owners, residents and retirees, this community group had a relatively strong view on the redevelopment direction of their housing estate. HKHA engaged the community in the design process of the redevelopment of the Lam Tin Estate since the beginning of 2004. Over the years, through a series of engagement activities that were organized for universal participation, a stronger sense of belonging and ownership materialized.

This case study from HKHA challenges the traditional relationships between the government body, community stakeholders, and designers. The Lam Tin Estate case study illustrates how traditionally bureaucratic, “top-down” organizations—like architecture firms or government agencies—are recognizing the benefits of grass-roots urbanism, and how others can learn from their methodologies. Notions of self-help, placemaking and the capacity to address local design issues become the impetus to participate. The essence of participatory action, which is tied intrinsically to values of self-determination, place-bound identity and direct democracy, underpins the participatory practice (Love 2013, 9). The case study of Lam Tin Estate exemplifies how top-down bureaucracy can add value on bottom-up initiatives (Figure 1). HKHA conducted a series of consultations, workshops and forums in which members of the public were empowered to participate and share knowledge (Figure 2). The dialogue from these engagement exercises enabled a feedback loop from residents and allowed residents to build partnerships with their space and people. Although it is criticized that residents are not trained architects or planners and do not possess any professional skills to spatial planning, what is important is not necessarily the final design scheme, but rather a method employed in search of knowledge illumination. Public engagement can enlighten the design process by obtaining knowledge about how people and space relate to each other (Wortham 2007, 46). This interface between the Government and community stakeholders can potentially activate a democratic platform for local participants to become key players in design decisions.



Figure 1: A Resident-participatory Approach was Adapted in the Design of Lam Tin Estate
Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority, 2013a



Figure 2: Community Engagement Workshop with Residents of the old Lam Tin Estate
Source Hong Kong Housing Authority, 2013a

In the public engagement exercises in Lam Tin, it has been identified that one definite community desire was to have more public open spaces (Figure 3). In response, HKHA invited the local community to prepare a master layout plan, which comprises a design of an external garden area and a multi-purpose communal space, using an “appreciative planning approach”—an approach in urban planning which is based on “mutual respect, trust, and care-based action” (Bushe and Pitman 1991, 3). By providing practical techniques, collaborative institutional experiences and human resources in conducting community design workshops as a “staging ground for professionals” (Sanoff 2000, 5), HKHA facilitated a platform to share knowledge. Wortham (2007) argues that engagement exercises, though not a formalized coalition of experts, allowed residents to design their own communal living areas (47). The integration of design workshops using low-tech approaches allowed residents to collaborate in generating two physical design outputs in Lam Tin, namely a communal garden and a two-level pedestrian precinct designed to become the “living areas” for all residents (Figure 4). The impact was quantified as the final design scheme achieved a greening ratio of 26%, which includes rooftop greening, vertical greening and a community farm to encourage residents to pursue green living and promote social cohesion (Figure 5).



Figure 3: Common Areas Provided in Lam Tin Estate
Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority 2013a



Figure 4: Community Participatory Design Empowered Stakeholders to Take Ownership in Redesigning Lam Tin Estate
 Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority 2013a



Figure 5: Participatory Design Practice Cultivates Sustainable Architecture
 Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority 2013a

Knowledge generated from the Lam Tin engagement exercises, though non-scientific and by lay people, resulted in an open-ended architectural design which utilized local wisdom. This non-traditional and non-linear design practice can be rather ethnographic, and as such, acts as another advocate that “lived space should not be the outcome of design but should, in fact, inform design decisions” (Wortham 2007, 46). Involvement from Lam Tin residents helped establish a socio-cultural attachment, a kind of psychological ownership with local heritage and space. The ownership, though not a physical possession, evokes a strong sense of community and belonging to their neighborhoods (Miazzo and Kee 2014). Specifically, place ownership is reflected on a resident-designed heritage wall of a communal open space as a repertoire of community life depicting old resettlement blocks, traditional Chinese tea restaurants settings—“cha chaan teng” and local textile activities of the past (Figure 6). Furthermore, the names of the new estates were written in Chinese calligraphy by a renowned local resident of the old estate. These design schemes intended to strengthen the collective memory and to establish a connection between the past and the present with old and new members of the redeveloped community.



Figure 6: Design Elements used to Strengthen Sense of Place and Evoke Collective Memory
 Source: Author 2012



Figure 7: Design Model for Lam Tin Estate Help Stakeholders Visualize the Outcome of Redevelopment
 Source: Hong Kong Housing Authority, 2013a

The people-oriented approach, though insignificant in scale, becomes a design inspiration for the everyday life. For instance, the Lam Tin Estate design elements such as wall murals, outdoor sculptures, and a community display at the estate testified that the interrelationship between materials, social relations and concepts that govern production, exchange and distribution are more relevant in consideration for participatory practices rather than radical political decisions from authorities (Udall and Holder 2013, 65). As de Certeau (1984) suggests, *The Practice of Everyday Life* offered a “way of operating” in order to reduce obscurity and better articulate participants’ input. The discourse of articulating participatory theory, to design practice theory, can be interpreted as an understanding of place that facilitates local wisdom and activates place ownership. This conceptual framework can be beneficial to the design and built environment as a dualism of social behavior and community knowledge. This is similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory in *The Logic of Practice*, where he conceives that “objects of knowledge are constructed through an active engagement and practical relation to the world,” and “[e]lements of human activity are bundled with knowledge in terms of ways of operating, reasons for acting, and particular ‘know-how’ which relate to interacting with people, objects and spaces” (quoted in Udall and Holder 2013, 65). Lam Tin’s community engagement workshops, model-making sessions and alike were used to help educate community stakeholders. Local wisdom from school children and residents of elderly groups constituted the knowledge employed in the design of the

redeveloped Lam Tin Estate. This methodology of participatory design helped stakeholders visualize the redevelopment project, as well as engender a sense of community ownership by working collectively towards a common vision (Figure 7). The Lam Tin Estate post-completion review workshops revealed that the design outcome had become the “pride and joy” for the majority of stakeholders. The mechanism permitted residents to become designers and the evaluation showed a high satisfactory rate with regards to the use of the green areas and open spaces. At Lam Tin, a generic housing project was made dynamic by injecting valuable community input. This example showcases how an actively collaborative approach cultivates a participatory design practice in architecture and urban planning.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned in Institutional Collaborative Approach

The designer’s problem is not to create facades or architectural mass but to create an all-encompassing experience, to engender involvement. The city is a people’s art, a shared experience. –Edmund Bacon (1976, 23)

The outcome of HKHA’s new institutional approach was to generate productive results addressing shared concerns. The residents’ participation in designing their urban living habitats was a mechanism to establish common targets, common interests and common goals for both the institution and the community. The joint design activities became the vehicle through which the institution and community groups addressed and achieved common targets, reducing the potential conflicts that may arise under a typical top-down bureaucratic structure. According to HKHA (2013b), the Lam Tin project achieved high ratings on post-occupation satisfaction—measured at over 96%—effecting a substantial increase from previous housing projects undertaken by HKHA. Although the process of implementing a public housing project is often lengthy and its outcome uncertain, the Lam Tin case study has demonstrated that it is possible to ensure that public engagement sessions are planned well in advance and organized to fit into the construction sequence.

In particular, community briefing sessions are recommended at early design stages, so that stakeholders like District Councillors and residents can react to the overall redevelopment parameters and strategies. For instance, throughout the design and construction stages in Lam Tin, multiple design workshops allowed residents to share knowledge and work out the garden design with architects and designers, including the creation of a sculpture as community art. HKHA also hosted a number of sessions at local schools for residents to design their installation utilizing renewable energy systems in order to encourage more environmental awareness in the estate. The holistic collaborative design approach adopted in the case study reached beyond residents and included other stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, district councilors, government officials, multi-disciplinary professionals and academics. Albeit skeptical views in some participatory design, the benefits of HKHA’s collaborative design demonstrated positive attitudes as an alternative to traditional top-down planning in Hong Kong.

The paper acknowledges current critique on participatory design, and recommends a three-pronged approach in practice theory. Firstly, by fostering stronger community involvement in design and planning practices, the participants could gain a sense of ownership to the place. Plus, the active involvement in participatory design can make citizens feel more related to the decisions made to their built environment and immediate neighborhood. Secondly, an institutional framework should be developed to utilize local wisdom and supply residents with a fair platform where they become the active participants in the design process. By enabling a proactive and responsive mechanism to implement participatory design in the urban context, we gain the capacity to forge stronger communities. Thirdly, government agencies should adopt a holistic placemaking approach to allow genuine concerns about the local environment be brought to the discussion table. Issues related to infrastructural facilities, public amenities, and urban

design can be discussed freely in the local community, to encourage a grassroots articulation of design strategies. The idea of understanding and participating in the urban design process can frame the way tenants establish and develop a stronger sense of ownership, thus giving a more focused direction in collective, grassroots participatory design. Although, as Hester (1999) argues, there is no guarantee that community participation can induce positive change, it is still “one of the best investments of time and energy” to catalyze urban metamorphosis (25). The redevelopment of Lam Tin Estate has gained unprecedented improvements in the design stage of public housing developments in Hong Kong by embracing community knowledge in the process.

Hong Kong, however, is still struggling to adopt a mindset from which community participatory design could result in concrete change. In many cases, proposals often remain at the concept stage without being implemented. The current mechanisms controlling building design and urban development are rather stringent and hierarchical; decision-making rights of past housing projects’ designs remain with government officials. The redevelopment of Lam Tin Estate is a step forward, where HKHA’s experience recognizes the potential of a “pluralist” society in cultivating a participatory design practice in architecture (Brindly, Rydin, and Stoker 1989; Grant 1989; Healey et al. 1988). This practice is significant as architects were placed in design workshops to work closely with residents in formulating a design vision that can be mutually agreed upon. The multi-sided interests generated from professional and local knowledge have empowered local residents to take ownership of the project, evolved its own mentality and institutional approach, and conveyed community needs, preferences and messages to all authorities concerned. This process resulted in a satisfactory and cohesive outcome, which is achieved mostly via self-organized community initiative.

By allowing local residents to take part in the design process, HKHA was able to generate a physical solution that implemented residents’ desires and fulfilled HKHA’s own requirements. This mechanism of participatory design created an organic urban transformation as the design was enriched by public programs co-organized by HKHA and local groups. The redevelopment project of Lam Tin Estate adopted the value of communal placemaking by bringing together diversity and vitality to foster cooperation among stakeholders in the community. The collaboration between key stakeholders helped infuse the importance of community values and sense of place into contemporary design and planning practices. HKHA’s pragmatic design approach has proven a way of realizing how a community-initiated advocacy can be framed into the complex institutional governance, grounded in a thorough empathetic understanding of community needs and aspirations.

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