

model of the user for which the design will be conceived.

These intermediaries play an important role in enabling the design process. The vast majority of environments are designed for a class of users rather than for a particular set of people. It would be inappropriate for the individual whims of those who happen to be the first or current users to be used to justify a space that will be inimical to the long-term viability of the structure. At the same time, though, it is clear that the data on which assumptions regarding the user are based is often incomplete and fallible, based on broad ideological preconceptions or market data to which the client has access. The facilitator in a participatory design process supplements this information with a class of information that is largely inaccessible to the self-appointed intermediaries.

Participatory design need not involve an usurpation of power from any of the stakeholders. Rather, it should be seen as a way of facilitating the gathering and dissemination of information throughout the design process that is associated with appreciable gains for all stakeholders. Whilst the users are typically depicted as the main beneficiaries of participatory design, the developer, corporation or housing authority reduces the risk of uninformed speculation leading to un-rentable properties, ineffective working environments or costly and disruptive alteration work. The architect gains a valuable and reliable source of design data and directives.

Worldwide examples of modern standardised mass housing are generally recognised as having a common ancestor in Le Corbusier's built and unbuilt housing projects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not just the organisational typologies of the buildings, but also the way in which the stakeholders collaborate in realising these projects, is firmly grounded in socialist ideals. The realisation of these projects imply a strong central authority with the ability to commandeer large plots of land and dictate a way of living to large groups of people, as well as an architect (or architects collective) of sufficient size and regimentation to oversee projects of such a scale. Thus, this mode of housing was most widespread in 20<sup>th</sup> century communist societies and in low-income government housing projects in America and Europe: contexts in which governments had both the wherewithal to carry out such large-scale social experiments and the responsibility to house masses of people who were in no position to determine their own living conditions. Jacobs (1961) has attributed the famous and spectacular failure of this strategy of housing in the West to the faulty premises upon which it was conceived, grounded not in scientific evidence or observation but in dogma and expedience. After their demolition, a good number of failed mass-housing projects in Europe and America were, or are being, replaced with a low-rise urban fabric similar to that which was cleared to make way for these projects in the first place.

Without resorting to trite generalisations about the respective value given to individuality and communality in Eastern and Western cultures, one should be very careful in generalising this experience in Western countries to indict the continued proliferation of mass housing in Hong Kong. In the United States and British context, there is a high level of correlation between dense living quarters and poverty, and thus with crime. This is not the case in Hong Kong, where most of the middle class lives in conditions that would be considered extremely crowded in other parts of the world. The huge differential of individuality and variety of living spaces between middle-class (often detached or semi-detached) and low-income

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(standardised) housing in the West does not find its counterpart in Hong Kong, where standardised floor plans and layouts apply to housing across the city at all income levels. Hyper-density and mass-standardisation are responses to the fundamental economic and sociological facts of Hong Kong, which apply throughout the city to a wide range of income groups, rather than wilfully imposed measures, as in the West. The real challenge of Hong Kong participatory design for public housing is not to vilify a housing typology out of hand and revert to the typology that had preceded it, but rather to achieve a way of ensuring an informed evolution of the type through a more effective dissemination of information and action throughout the design process. This could lead to a greater differentiation of mass housing types, based on greater understanding of varying needs based of demographic groups, or at least to a better-informed breed of standardisation.

### **5. Conclusion - From citizen participation process to sustainable housing - a sociologist's perspective**

The case of Ngau Tai Kok has demonstrated a successful model of participatory community development (PCD) in Hong Kong's context. It also signifies a process from citizen participation to sustainable housing development.

Based on the sociological understanding of PCD, the fundamental beliefs of participatory community development are that -- all people have the right to share in the world's resources equally, and to be masters of their own development; and the rejection of such rights is at the heart of marginalization, poverty and suffering. Strengthening people's capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to act on these, is the basis of community development. Therefore, its primary goal is to lead to a more just society through transformative social change (Small, 1995; Park, 1993). The most central feature of participatory community development is that citizens are full partners with community workers in the community development and they ultimately control of the entire development process. Professionals like social workers, designers, and architects are at the service of their citizen collaborators, rather than the reverse arrangement (Small, 1995; Ku & Luk, 2002). In short, the goal of any project in the end is that citizen participants will become the owners of the projects.

Another distinctive feature of participatory community development is its emphasis on empowerment of the local participants. Through active involvement in the development process, citizen participants become more aware of their own abilities and resources and learn how to gather and use professional knowledge. The opportunity to be actively involved in the development project often leads to increased ownership of projects, including the knowledge generated from the projects. In other words, once citizens begin to see themselves as owner of the community, they are prepared to address future problems when they arise (Gaventa, 1998; Park, 1993; Small, 1995). Because of the aim of citizen ownership, in participatory community development, the citizen participants are primarily responsible for the design of the projects, including deciding what and how the data will be collected, analyzed, and eventually disseminated. The different collaborators, as partner and facilitator, only play a role in the selection of methods by presenting the various options along with their strengths and weaknesses, and may also help participants consider the human and financial resources available (Park, 1993; Ku & Luk, 2002). The collaborators like the designer only contribute by sharing his or her research expertise and educating participants about how to

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implement particular methods.

The empowering and collaborative nature of participatory community project can also contribute to the process of social change through the creation of organized social and political groups. Because the participatory process brings together individuals in a collective sharing, learning, and analysis, it can generate bonds of solidarity and an awareness of a common cause. Then the citizens can come together to fight for their own interest. Such citizen organizations may eventually become powerful social and political forces for social transformation (Tandon, 1981; Freire, 1970).

The project of Ngau Tau Kok is one of the pioneers in Hong Kong's housing development, which have opened the channel for the local groups to voice their view on the urban planning and renewal process of the living environment, as well as their housing preference. The findings of these projects also have enriched our greater understanding on the need of the underclass citizens and uncovered the problem of government's planning and housing policy.

Based on the views above, therefore, my conclusion is that the projects happened in Ngau Tau Kok can be counted as participatory community development because the degree of citizen participation is high in terms of following criteria:

- The citizens have participated in the whole process of Ngau Tau Kok renewal process.
- The project has enhanced the awareness and capacity of the local participants.
- The project to certain extent has empowered the participants and enhanced citizens' competency in the community development process.
- The participants have become the owners of the projects.
- The project has brought some important transformation and social change in the community.
- In the project, local people's aims are served, rather than the academics or their collaborators.

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