

From consultation to civic engagement

Professor Joseph C. W. Chan
Centre for Civil Society and Governance
Faculty of Social Sciences
The University of Hong Kong

Introduction

- In May 2006, Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre commissioned the CCSG to study different modes of the advisory system and of public consultation to make recommendations to improve civic engagement.
 - The Foundation's study group was led by Mr. W.K. Kam and Peter Lai.
 - The Research Team: CCSG

Introduction

- Why civic engagement?
- What is civic engagement?
- Research results and recommendations

Political ecology before and after 1997

- The traditional mode of public consultation seems to have failed
- Policy setbacks one after another

2003: Article 23 and the 7.1 demonstration

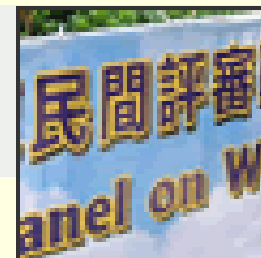


2004: Victoria Harbour reclamation



2005-7: West Kowloon Cultural District

People's Panel on West Kowloon 西九龍民間評審聯席會議



2007: Star Ferry and Queen's Pier



Political ecology before and after 1997

- The CE has only a weak and limited power base
- New political forces are beyond the CE's control
- An active media and civil society targeting government failures

Civic engagement

- Civil society actors want engagement, not consultation.
- What is civic engagement?
 - An organized process where a government has taken the initiative to involve citizens in all stages of policy development, from identification of problems to clarification of values and interests, development of policy alternatives and prioritisation of proposals.

Focus of the study

- Environmental Protection Department – **Advisory Group on Waste Management Facilities** (2002)
- The Council for Sustainable Development – **Support Group on Solid Waste Management Facilities** (2003)
- Harbour-front Enhancement Committee – **Kai Tak redevelopment** (2004)
- Home Affairs Bureau – **Committee on Performance Arts** (2004)
- Commission on Poverty (2005)

Civic engagement

- Two levels of engagement :
 - committee engagement
 - public engagement

Method of study

- Interviewed 70 persons
 - 28 senior civil servants
 - 42 civil society participants
- Documentary review

Basic conclusions

- 1. Two large-scale public engagement cases were successful:
 - The Council for Sustainable Development - **Support Group on Solid Waste Management Facilities (2003)**
 - Harbour-front Enhancement Committee – **Kai Tak Redevelopment (2004)**

Basic conclusions

- Common features of the two cases :
 - an open-ended process, with no hidden agenda;
 - an inclusive and transparent process;
 - learning and deliberation in different stages

Basic conclusions

- 2. Relatively successful committee engagement
 - Home Affairs Bureau – Committee on Performance Arts (2004)
 - Environmental Protection Department – Advisory Group on Waste Management Facilities (2002)

- 3. Relatively unsuccessful committee engagement:
 - CSD (2003)
 - HEC (2004)
 - Commission on Poverty (2005)

Basic conclusions

- Common features of successful cases of committee engagement
 - The two sides developed shared understanding of the issues to be addressed or goals to pursue
 - Officials' sincerity and open-mindedness are critical factors
 - Both sides developed a good degree of trust

Basic conclusions

- But lack of mutual trust is a general phenomenon
- Divergent perceptions of participants on two sides

Basic conclusions

- Two types of people who can build bridges
 - Dedicated civil servants
 - Policy brokers or policy entrepreneurs

The recommendations

- 1. *Develop a framework for civic engagement in policy-making, which includes:*
 - A civic engagement requirement.
 - A civic engagement code
 - An overall annual government report on civic engagement;
 - A secretariat

The recommendations

- *2. Adopt measures to strengthen the government's capacity to conduct civic engagement.*
 - Civil service training in civic engagement;
 - Periodic secondment of civil servants to civil society organisations;
 - More work experience at the district level for AOs;
 - Substantial investment in policy research.

The recommendations

- *3. Adopt measures to strengthen the capacity of civil society to serve as an effective and responsible partner in civic engagement.*
 - Help develop programmes to strengthen capacity in various CSO dimensions
 - Encourage civil society to form roundtables or umbrella bodies
 - Improve the regulatory framework for civil society
 - Secondment of civil society actors to the secretariats of advisory committees.

The recommendations

- *4. Negotiate an agreement between the government and civil society to build an effective relationship similar to the Compact in the UK (1998) and the Accord in Canada (2001).*

Donald Tsang's election platform: A new open government (Feb 2007)

- “The focus of decision making in the future, therefore, will be public participation. The Government must listen to the public at the earliest possible stage of policy formulation. The policymaking process must be fully transparent, fair and well planned.
- “Affected interest groups should be able to express their views at an early stage, and public opinion will form the core foundation for government decision making.

Donald Tsang's election platform: A new open government

- “At different stages of policymaking, there will be enough discussion in the community to test policies in different segments of the public arena, from interest groups to political parties, from District Councils to the Legislative Council.

Donald Tsang's election platform: A new open government

- “I will encourage **government officials** to change their mindset, from that of policy formulator to that of interest coordinator. They should encourage expression of public opinion, provide options, and balance the interests of stakeholders to ensure that decisions are pragmatic and in line with people-based principles.
- “Only then should they introduce policies for passage by the Executive Council and the Legislative Council.”

Policy Address (Oct 2007)

Section 109: Reaching out to the community

- “To strengthen interaction between the Government and the community, I have asked the **politically appointed officials** of the Third Term Government to proactively reach out to the community, listen to public views and work with the stakeholders.

Policy Address (Oct 2007)

Section 109: Reaching out to the community

- “In this connection, we will make better use of the available channels, including various advisory bodies such as the Commission on Strategic Development. Reaching out to the community is a two-way communication process. Members of the community also need to organise themselves, and express their views in a pragmatic and responsible manner, so that a consensus can be reached.”