

**FOSTERING GENUINE PARTNERSHIP FROM WITHIN:
A Mode of ‘Governance Beyond Government’**

Executive Summary

Fostering genuine partnership requires a mode of ‘governance beyond government’

1. A mode of ‘governance beyond government’ is one that fosters genuine tripartite partnership among the government, the private sector and the civil society in governing a city.
2. We argue that Hong Kong needs to explore a mode of ‘governance beyond government’ because the general public is now more educated; have exercised more critical thinking; and have actively voiced out their aspirations and concerns.
3. There are many examples of tripartite partnership elsewhere: World Trade Centre redevelopment in Manhattan, New York; Britain’s Planning Green Paper; and Government budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, etc.
4. We consider that HEC can be viewed as an experiment for a mode of ‘governance beyond government’ because its membership comprises representatives from the government, the private sector, and the civil society; every member (irrespective of background) has equal opportunity to voice out and propose his/her concerns; and partnership building is evident in different projects.

Where are we now?

5. A narrowing cultural gap among the three parties (government, private sector and civil society organizations);
6. A narrowing gap in trusting the ability of the lay public;
7. A narrowing gap between expert-led and partnership approach; and
8. A narrowing gap between black box and transparent practice.

Where do we want to go?

9. HEC practicing a mode of ‘governance beyond government’: partnership among government, private sector and civil society in governing harbourfront planning;

10. HEC playing a role in developing the capability of the citizens in Hong Kong; a tripartite partnership-led approach; and an open, transparent and inclusive process.

How can we achieve our aspirations?

Within HEC

11. Partnership within HEC: more facilitated dialogue--one-day envisioning retreat; social functions such as pre-meeting lunch and post-meeting dinner; etc.
12. Reinforcing tripartite working relationship, i.e., the three parties are working on an equal basis. Each party should genuinely share thinking and seek collaboration. All decisions should be made by consensus. The consultants should be accountable to the HEC, rather than individual government department..
13. Increasing transparency and openness, as such, it is necessary to formulate and implement an effective communication strategy, both internally and externally.
14. Ensuring that the secretariat is answerable to HEC.

Between HEC and the general public

15. HEC should have sufficient funding to organize itself and launch activities in achieving its goals, such as employing assistants to conduct research work or studies and organize capacity building activities in the community, conducting public education/ engagement programmes in explaining to the general public the Harbour Principles, the rationales adopted in organizing various projects; and the need for integrated harbour planning, etc..
16. Capacity and institutional building will lead to conceptual and attitudinal changes which are essential to ensure genuine tripartite partnership in the longer run.

Your comments and aspirations

Members are invited to share our aspirations, deliberate on them and discuss the ways forward in fostering genuine partnership from first within HEC and then eventually reaching out to the community.

Alvin Kwok
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February 2004

FOSTERING GENUINE PARTNERSHIP FROM WITHIN:

A Mode of ‘Governance Beyond Government’

Fostering genuine partnership requires a mode of ‘governance beyond government’

1. In Chinese culture, government officials are very often likened to be paternal figures—they will take care of the people who, however, have little right or few responsibilities in the governing process. In many western countries, because of the strengthening of the civil society and the trends towards stronger democracy etc., many governments have started to recognize the important roles of other stakeholders in the governing process. The trend to move beyond ‘governance by government’ can be seen in many countries: the massive engagement of the general public in imagining the redevelopment of the World Trade Centre site in lower Manhattan, New York; the reiteration of the importance of citizen involvement in the planning process in Britain’s Planning Green Paper; the involvement of citizens in working out government budgets in Porto Alegre in Brazil.... Like parent-child relationship, government-civil society’s modes of interaction have to evolve with time, as the originally powerless or weaker party grows and matures. In other words, the government may play a larger and more dominant roles when society is less complicated and community aspirations more homogenous. However, such a relationship is bound to be challenged if the general public become more educated, exercise more critical thinking and actively voice out their various aspirations. Parents have natural duties to prepare their children for independent lives. So are governments. Governments need to prepare, anticipate and look forward to a time when they are ready to govern the city together with other concerned parties in a convivial way so that social and institutional capital can be accumulated.... Only then will there be hope for genuine tripartite partnerships among the government, the private sector and the civil society.

2. Is Hong Kong ready for ‘governance beyond government’? To a large extent, the answer is no. However, in a way, HEC is a pilot institution for such an experiment. While the government still plays a strong executive role, the civil society organizations including business ones are not just responding to government’s proposals. Very often, unofficial members can put forward schemes and projects for implementation. In HEC, everyone has an equal opportunity to voice out his/her concerns. Although we are still on a learning curve and we are still groping our ways, hitting barriers at times and occasionally enjoying the fruits of success, HEC represents a small experiment for both the government and the civil society to learn how to accumulate trust and work in partnership, thus building up ‘institutional capital’.

3. Such experience is bound to be fragile and yet extremely valuable in Hong Kong because we still are not a democracy. Bureaucrats need extra-courage to undertake such an experiment and civil society organizations need extra-efforts to work with a bureaucratic setting that they probably resist as a natural response. Worse still, not everyone buys into these types of partnership—it could be a result of skepticism towards either party or simply ignorance of a growing global trend in strategic spatial planning... This explains why partnership especially in the context of Hong Kong can easily breakdown. And we want to argue that the only way

to strengthen partnership, to develop genuine partnership is to build up social trust, social and institutional capital from within HEC. Before putting forward our recommendations, let us take stock of the current mode of operation in HEC.

Where are we now?

4. Members are on a learning curve when experimenting with a new mode of ‘governance beyond government’ and the following trends can be observed:

4.1 A narrowing cultural gap

When HEC was first set up, it seemed that the three parties (representatives from government, business, and civil society) were using three different language systems. Examples include consultation and participation; top-down and bottom-up; involvement and engagement; solution and process; clients and stakeholders etc. These are not just differences in usage of language but to a great extent a reflection of cultural and conceptual differences. However, through ongoing dialogues, the gap is narrowing. An obvious example is the adoption of the word “engagement” in the HER project.

4.2 A narrowing gap in trusting the ability of the lay public

While the government officials may rely more on professional ideas and expertise in their governing process, representatives from the civil society appreciate more the beauty and merits of practical knowledge simply because the lay persons are end users of our city spaces. As reflected in the engagement activities promoted by HEC, the lay public have demonstrated interest in delivering interesting and creative ideas to the planning process.

4.3 A narrowing gap between expert-led and partnership approaches

Because of the above gaps, it is not surprising to see that the government had relied on an expert-led approach in reviewing projects such as WDII. Government officials may incline to provide solutions, that is, options for people to choose. However, civil society representatives, having more trust in the capacity and capacity of the citizens, advocate options to be generated by the citizens. A good example of this gap is the emphasis of hard data to justify the need for the trunk road without sufficient considerations of the sentiments and aspirations of the people for an enjoyable harbourfront. For the people, developments should aim at a betterment of the quality of life, not just for the sake of development or economic growth. “People” should be at the centre of a sustainable development, not ‘roads.’ Though this gap is observed to be converging, as reflected in the launching of the HER project, there is still a practice divide in this arena that needs to be reconciled in the future, as reflected in the presentation of the Public Engagement Kit of the HER project.

4.4 A narrowing gap between black-box and transparent practice

Within a bureaucratic setting, government officials often work cautiously behind closed doors. On the contrary, representatives of the civil society demand an open and transparent process

because without transparency, it is impossible to engage the citizens to voice out their creative ideas on enhancing the harbourfront. Logically, it is difficult for the civil society representatives to accept that they are not being involved in making decisions. This gap is obviously decreasing as HEC is one of the very few consultative bodies within the government structure to open up all its meetings to the general public. Public forums inviting interested parties to present their ideas on harbourfront enhancements is a very good example of this trend.

Where do we want to go?

5. As an experimental institution for a new mode of governance that goes beyond ‘governance by government’, we would like to share our vision in the following:

5.1 A ‘governance beyond government’ culture

The vision is for members of HEC to share the responsibility of governing the strategic spatial planning process through actively engaging the general lay public. This, however, requires trust in the capability of the citizens.

5.2 Trusting the capabilities of the Hong Kong citizens

We believe that the citizens of Hong Kong have the ability to comment and suggest constructively on the enhancement of the harbourfront. They may not be well-informed but as argued by Thomas Jefferson (1820), ‘I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of this society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion’. Hence the Sub-Committee needs to provide sufficient opportunities to engage the public, and appreciate their contribution. This trust in the people will not only generate creative ideas about how to enhance the harbourfront, but also help to build up social capital for Hong Kong as a whole. Only then can we really have a citizen-centred approach.

5.3 A people-centred approach

We need an interdisciplinary approach in planning for the enhancement of the harbourfront, taking into account the needs and aspirations of the people throughout all the planning and design processes. The ultimate concern of harbourfront enhancement should be an elevation of the sense of belonging of people through a sustainable improvement of their quality of life. People are the final users of the harbourfront. Only an open, transparent and inclusive process can ensure the realisation of this aspiration.

5.4 An open, transparent and inclusive process

We need a process that allows different voices to be heard and facilitates the generation of creative ideas from the public; etc. For the WDII review, we need an open and transparent conception process so that we can hear all views and appreciate different perspectives.

How can we achieve our aspirations?

6. To move from our current situation to our visions, we need to adopt a two-pronged strategy: practising ‘governance beyond government’ within HEC and advocating our experiment to the community to nurture a culture of governing the city through partnership and sharing the consequent responsibilities collectively.

Within HEC

6.1 Continuous dialogue to narrow the cultural gap:

To minimise the cultural gap among members within HEC, constant and regular but informal dialogues should be encouraged. One possible activity is to hold envisioning retreats for members. Or we can have informal lunch or dinner before or after the HEC meetings.

6.2 Practising ‘governance beyond government’ by allowing unofficial members a more significant role to play in projects:

Although it may not be realistic for unofficial members to micro-manage the HER project or other tasks, unofficial members should be allowed to champion a tripartite partnership approach by taking the lead. Using HER project as an example, this approach can be manifested in several aspects: (a) the consultant to be accountable to the Task Force (which includes both unofficial and official members) but not CEDD; (b) government officials to be executive arms of the Task Group, that is, executing the projects; and (c) HEC is to be responsible for consulting on plans, projects and engagement and making sure that all public activities and reference materials are organised with people-centred principles.

6.3 Increasing transparency and openness:

To ensure the communication of an inclusive and transparent process, perhaps a task force with the lead of unofficial members can be formed to draft an effective communications strategy (both internal and external communication) for HEC and its sub-committees. For example, instead of meeting the press after each formal HEC meeting, there could be regular tea gatherings with the mass media to update the general public work and projects undertaken by HEC.

Between HEC and the general public

7. HEC should have sufficient funding to organize itself and launch activities in achieving its goals, such as employing assistants to conduct research work or studies and organize capacity building activities in the community, conducting public education/ engagement programmes in explaining to the general public the Harbour Principles, the rationales adopted in organizing various projects; and the need for integrated harbour planning, etc.. Reaching

out to the community and share our visions and designed processes in various projects may inspire them to join our activities for better planning of the harbourfront. Such endeavours, however, require additional resources because unofficial HEC members are volunteers and professional support is required to organize various promotional activities. We trust that these bridge-building activities can project HEC's image as an experimental institution for pioneering the world trend culture of 'governance beyond government' when government, private sector and citizens contribute collectively in the designing, planning and running of the city. If we do it well, the resulted social, institutional capital and trust will be an invaluable asset for Hong Kong.

Your comments and aspirations

8. Members are invited to share our aspirations, deliberate on them and discuss the ways forward in fostering genuine partnership first from within HEC and then eventually reaching out to the community.

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