

The Development of Lantau: The need for a Democratic process

Submission of the Living Islands Movement to Legco.

"To me, a strong government does not work behind closed doors. Rather, it heeds public opinion, adopting the public interest as the guiding principle and accepting wide public participation in policy formulation. A government that operates this way is often characterised as having a clear direction, consistency in policy making, forceful and decisive leadership that is efficient and effective." The Hon. Donald Tsang Yam-Kuen, Chief Executive, HKSAR.

1. The Aims of Living islands Movement. (LIM)

The prime aim of the Living Islands Movement is:

To encourage the enrichment and animation of the islands of Hong Kong by sensitive and sustainable development for the benefit of the entire population of Hong Kong.

The rich ecology of Lantau is as a vital and essential part of the enrichment of the whole - notably for the life of the local population.

2. This paper

We do not intend, today, to present further ideas or plans. Rather, we wish to focus on the processes that are essential to reach our vision.

We regret to say that the processes adopted, to date by the government, cannot possibly achieve this.

3. The process to date

The first consultation document that the government produced was the "Lantau Development Concept Plan". This appeared to sweep up a number of ideas from over the years and present them as plans in specific locations without any analysis whatever. Many high-impact proposals, known to be under way, were excluded such as the LNG storage at the Soko islands and CT10. It was prepared 'behind closed doors' which is contrary to the present CE's belief of strong government.

The subsequent public consultation took the form of 'town hall meetings'. At these, a number of the government officials first informed those present about the plan. This was followed by a 'Question & Answer' session in which the public tried to contribute their ideas by making them sound like questions. The 'answers' were invariable: defence, denial or obfuscation. No dialogue took place and no new ideas were created - essential parts of any true consultation.

Furthermore, there was only time for about 20 members of the public to participate. Any government statistics about how many people were 'consulted' at such meetings is, therefore, wholly meaningless.

4. The process we would like to use in future

In several submissions and letters we have earnestly requested that the future process includes two features:

1. The second document is presented in the format of *concepts only* that presents the idea, who might benefit and the facts and factors surrounding it. It should not include details of layout, siting etc. There should then be a list of questions that have to be answered to determine whether or not the concept is desirable, feasible and viable.
2. Subsequent meetings would be designed to help answer these questions and encourage dialogue and generate further creative ideas. It would not only tap that the wealth of knowledge in the community take it forward as the plans were developed.

5. The process used by the Council for Sustainable Development

A process like this has already been used, successfully, by the Council for Sustainable Development.

Notably:

- the consultation document gave information and posed questions;
- the public meetings were led by an independent facilitator;
- small groups were formed which created an unthreatening situation which encouraged everyone to have their say;
- the whole process was highly cost-effective .

In other words, it was the government who asked the questions and sought answers from the community: bottom-up approach rather than top-down.

We understand that this process has had the blessing of the highest level of government. If it is disdained by those leading this present consultation, we feel that it is incumbent upon them to explain why.

6. An example

In our submissions, we gave outline examples for some sample specific projects. Here is one.

Concept : a water-sports centre

A concept statement would include, inter-alia:

- What is meant by 'water sports'? A brief description of each possible kind.
- What is the extent of the population of HK who would be interested in which kind of sports?
- What are the physical conditions required for these sports. (eg water characteristics, land infrastructure, access, transport etc))?
- Who, other than the participants, would benefit from that the development (e.g. businesses local to Lantau)?
- Who would suffer disadvantages in the presence of such a development (e.g. from noise and other pollution)?
- What is the scale of costs and likely incomes from such a project?
- Would it be self-supporting or would it qualify for public funding?
- A reference, with degrees of success or failure, of similar projects in the past.
- etc. etc.

Concepts related in this way could then form the 'Agendas' for community feedback and ideas to feed into decisions to go ahead with specific outline designs.

Among the advantages of doing this are:

1. there resides considerable 'wisdom' in any community. Experience worldwide has proved that its inclusion only improves the final outcome.
2. The community involved in this way feels that they are part of the decision-making process rather than being told 'what is good for them' or, worse, that it is being driven by a hidden agenda - as is the present case.

These factors maximize the quality of the decisions, minimize conflict and speed up the process.

7. A Final word.

There is a lot of discussion about introducing democracy into Hong Kong. We feel strongly that grasping the will to use processes such as these goes a very long way towards 'governance for the people, by the people and of the people', We will be extremely disappointed if this does not happen and, furthermore, we feel that attending any meetings of the type used to date will be counterproductive.