

An Accessible and Inclusive Community Below the Lion Rock

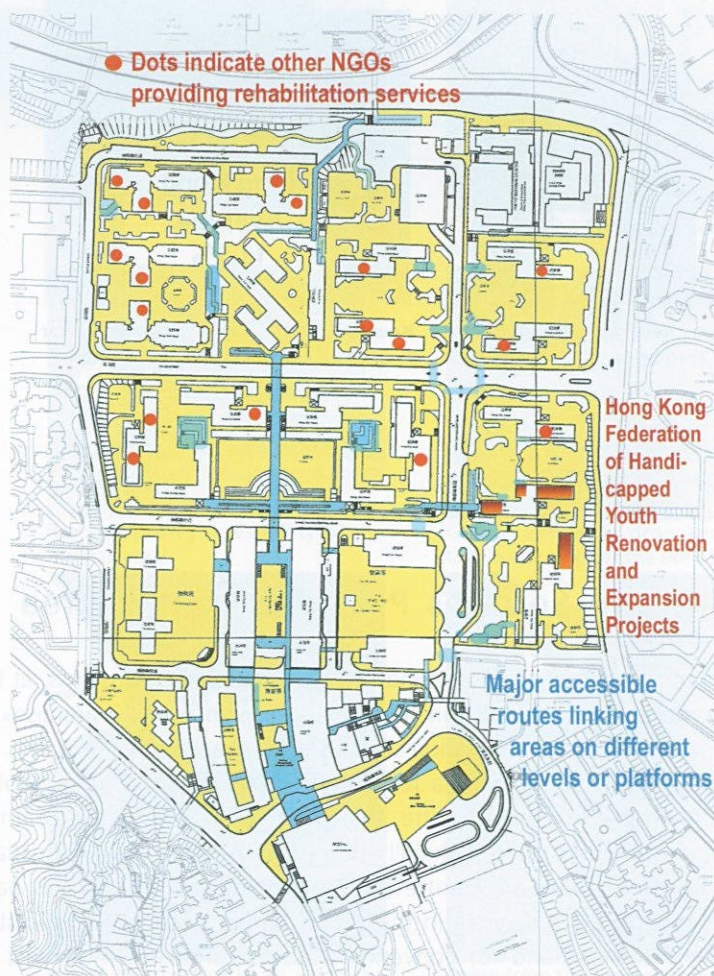
The Lok Fu - Wang Tau Hom Area

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I had an opportunity participating in the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth (HKFHY) renovation and expansion project from 2003 to 2004. In an evening meeting on 3 December, 2004 near the completion of the project, Mr Benny Cheung, the Chairperson, asked, "Organizations from outside Hong Kong always want to visit our premises. Now we can show them our premises and our standards. I used to tell them that there is nothing to see in our old and worn premises, but they still wanted to come anyway. I really don't understand why they want to visit our premises and what they want to see." Benny's question kept me thinking. Couple weeks later, I decided to take a walk in the area as if I were a visitor from outside Hong Kong.

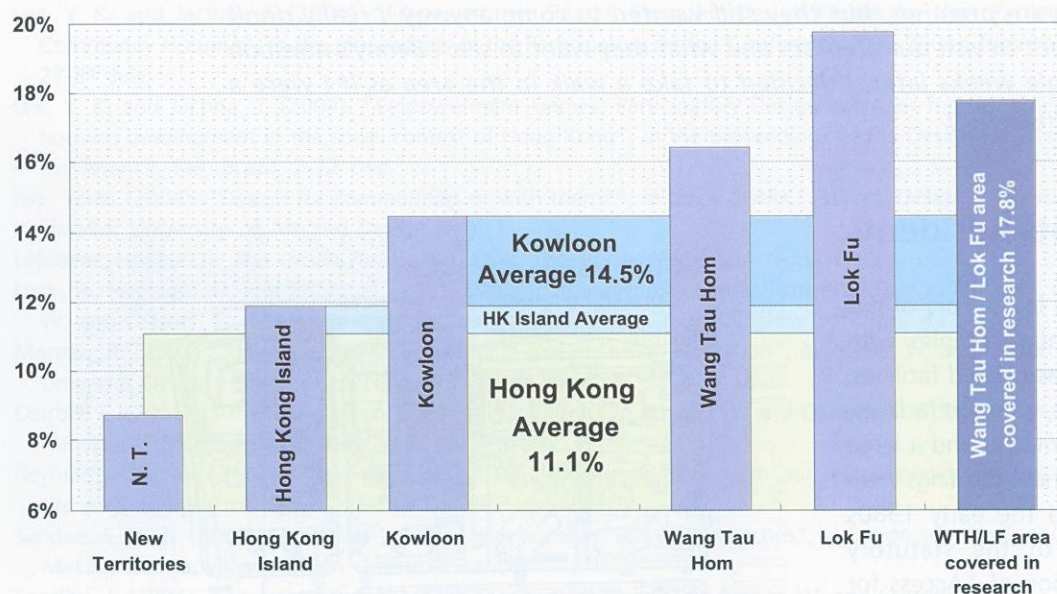
Community and its Residents

The buildings and facilities in the core of this area form a large residential complex with housing estates and their associated facilities, including lots of open space, transport facilities, two secondary schools, a market and a large shopping centre. Most of these buildings were designed or built around the early 1980s before the enactment of the statutory regulations for the provision of "Access for the Disabled" in 1984. The "linear block L1" used primarily in the Wang Tau Hom Estate, just reaching their middle-age of over 20 years, cannot be expected to meet the ideal modern standards of living since the design of public housing has already gone through another generation, however these areas have been transformed into an oasis and a model community among stretches of similar urban fabric in terms of accessibility and user-friendliness environment. Recently, this community has gained some exposure because of the popularity of the Lok Fu Shopping Centre, the top ranking place among all shopping centres owned by the Housing Authority. The success of this Shopping Centre is indeed also greatly attributed by its accessibility.



From the age group distribution ² of people living in this area, this area qualifies as one of the elderly community despite its middle-age built environment. There are about 4,800 people aged 65 or above out of 27,000 people residing in the core area. That is about 18 elderly persons in every 100 people in this community, which is about 60% more elderly persons than the average figure of 11 in every 100 in Hong Kong. This corresponds approximately to the figure of about 60% of households are "un-extended nuclear family" ³. This also relates to the figures of about one quarter of the households having five or more persons occupancy ² while another quarter having four persons in this area. The median monthly household income ² of \$16,700 is 50% higher than that of all public housing. It might, however, be fairer to compare this with the median 4-person household income of \$13,700 in public housing or the median domestic household income of \$18,705 in Hong Kong ⁴. Knowing that over 95% residents in this community speak Cantonese ² and with these population and demographic analyses, I would describe this community as a grown and matured local "grass root" community below the Lion Rock.

Percentage of population aged 65 or above



Works and Services Provided in this Area

Other than the shopping centre and the market providing business, at least 14 non-government organizations (NGO) are also in this core area with over 20 premises. At least 10 NGOs with 16 premises provide rehabilitation services for a clientele of thousands from the local and other districts. These NGOs provide a full range of services from pre-school to elderly care, such as Lok Fu Rhenish Child Care Centre, the Jockey Club Conductive Learning Centre, The Spastics Association of Hong Kong, Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong, Christian Family Service Centre, Wang Tau Hom Day Care Centre for the Elderly, etc. This area is part of the social services hub for rehabilitation services in the Wong Tai Sin District. Accessibility is clearly an important issue since the demand for convenient access comes from at least 30% of the pedestrian movement, not yet including the needs for push trolley, baby on stroller and small children.

Inspection of the Travel Chain

This area is just below the Lion Rock hillside. The core area has over 10 metres level difference from one side to another. Ramps were provided to connect housing blocks and external areas in the original layout. There are also lots of areas with adaptive design improvements, such as the addition of ramps and double rails. At present all the external areas are well-connected with ramps as the main or one of the major accesses.

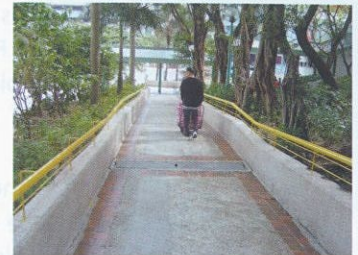
This area is within easy reach via different modes of transportation. This is essential to the NGOs because they serve not only the local residents. Although the Lok Fu MTR station is quite small, a lift has been squeezed in with a standalone wide entrance gate. Ramps were added to connect the main entrance to the street through the stepped forecourt in front of the station. The side exit leads to the street through a ramp, which then connects to a grand staircase on one side and to a ramp on the other, both of which lead to the grand entrance of the award-winning Lok Fu Shopping Centre Phase II⁵. This is just one of the many accessible entrances to the Shopping Centre. The entrance through the central courtyard garden is through a series of ramps next to the market. Each landing between the ramps has linkage to a level of the stepped courtyard garden.

Getting out of the Shopping Centre, the shops along the Wang Tau Hom South Road welcome customers using ramps to overcome the level difference between the shop floor and the pavement. The taxi station near the garden, the bus terminal around the corner and the mini-bus stop have all undergone adaptive design improvements to upgrade their accessibility with wide and gentle drop kerbs, ramps and tactile warning strips.

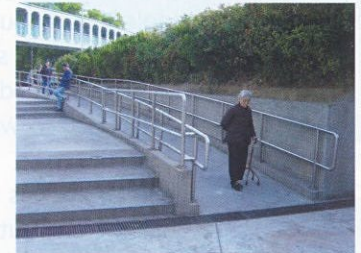
There is a long footbridge extending from the north end of the Shopping Centre to the area north of Fu Mei Street and also serving the areas in between. This footbridge provides a traffic-free, weather-proof and accessible route between the housing blocks and the Shopping Centre. It also forms a spine in the core area leading to the landmark Shopping Centre, creating a vista for orientation in the otherwise easily lost jungle of housing blocks. Not only does this footbridge provide ramped access at multiple points in multiple



Ramps incorporated in landscaping



Long Ramp with landing



Ramps from forecourt of the MTR station to the pavement

Standalone lift in MTR with accessible gate



MTR station side exit to the Shopping Centre



Ramps to the Shopping Centre via the courtyard garden



Ramp improves accessibility of the bus terminal.



Gentle and wide drop kerb with tactile warning for the mini-bus stop



Sitting benches scattered along the long footbridge



Ramp from the footbridge links with ramps in open space.

directions leading to many areas, it also links up with the footbridge crossing Wang Tau Hom East Road. Another rare amenity found along this footbridge are the plenty of sitting benches throughout its 140-metre length.

Approaching the location of the renovation project, I noticed two interesting things. The first one was a temporary ramp built on top of half-a-side of a 10-step staircase. There were plenty of people walking pass this point. During the 10 minutes, I was wandering around, not a single person out of two dozens walking past this point used the fixed, solid and sound staircase. Every person chose to walk up the temporary wood board ramp. Residents in this area seem to have gotten used to walking on ramps rather than steps.

Another interesting thing was the channel covers. The grill-type channel covers used throughout the whole area had been replaced with the grid-type covers at, I believe, all major pedestrian routes. However, after passing by many of the channels, especially in larger areas with planters, I noticed that some major pedestrian routes had the grill-type covers while the channels around the planters had the grid-type covers. Obviously, these interchangeable covers were misplaced by the workers cleaning the channels.

Setting New Standards of Accessibility

Recently, the HKFHY renovation project and the Rehabilitation Alliance's Resource Centre project have been completed. The renovated premises set new standards of accessibility in the area and they will become the standards for other projects to follow. The HKFHY renovation project was carried out by A & N Architect & Interior Designer Ltd⁶. The premises are used as the Jockey Club Activity Centre, the Flower Workshop, the First Sense Design (a design and printing workshop) and the Head Office. There are many accessible features provided. These include:

- tactile guidepath from loading/unloading point to the activities centre;
- power-operated sliding entrance door that can also be used as swing door in case of fire;
- sliding door control with hand and foot buttons with colour contrast;
- tactile map with beeping sound, braille and handrail guide and entrance sensor bell;
- rails with colour contrast along wide corridor;
- induction loop for counter and activities centre;
- crutch/umbrella holders at all the counters;
- knee-space for counters, basins, tables and other fittings wherever possible;
- highly accessible toilet features including power-operated door for the toilets in the activities centre, tactile markers for locating wash basin and urinal, handrails for urinal, tilted mirror, etc;
- well-placed big push-button switches with colour contrast;
- easy to operate lever door handles and taps;
- accessible fittings, fixtures and furniture;



Mis-placed channel covers are often found unless the covers are of different sizes.



A temporary ramp was seen to be used more often than the permanent staircase during the author's visit.



Counter with high/low counter-top, knee space and umbrella/crutch holder.



Toilet with power sliding door and other accessible features.

- passing and turning space wherever possible;
- colour feature panels and simple graphics at entrances for identifying difference premises;
- sliding glass doors that open the activities centre to the pavement outside without any level difference;
- appropriate lighting level for internal and external areas; and
- clear and concise signage and instructions.

Impression and Reflection

A walk through this community reveals that an accessible environment can be achieved throughout a large area if there is a determination to make it happen. None of the points mentioned above can be considered a grand design element, but many small points have contributed in making this community very different from other similar communities in Hong Kong, making it a rare example of an accessible and inclusive community.

- Considerate provisions take care of people with different abilities.
- Holistic approach and thorough implementation give continuity and connection.
- Multiple access points and routes allow for tolerance and provide convenience.
- Level access and ramps as main or major access treat people with equality.
- Review and improvement provide sustainability to the built environment.

The level of accessibility achieved in this middle-aged community is rare even comparing with younger communities in Hong Kong. It is a joint effort and contribution by many parties, among those mentioned above are the works by the Housing Authority, Rocco Design Ltd., MTRC, A & N Architect & Interior Designer Ltd., Environmental Advisory Service, various Government Bureaux and Departments and others who have contributed one way or another. The driving force behind, the NGOs in the area and the residents, who have dedicated to the continual improvement of their working and living environment, should be congratulated. We should also salute to the people of this community who are living in harmony and in support with the NGOs and the groups served by the NGOs, whether their support is perceivable or in silence.

Thinking again on Benny's question on why visitors wanted to visit their premises. I have an answer for him now. It is not only their premises these visitors want to visit, may be the visitors want to meet the people and to see the community where the NGOs have been working in harmony for such a long time and may be they want to find out the secret of the success of this accessible and inclusive local community below the Lion Rock.

Notes

- ¹ 《建設及建築物—公屋樓宇類型·公屋類型(一)相連長型·公屋類型(七)和諧一型》 by Benny and Leung Fun, *Hong Kong Place*, internet web site: <http://www.hk-place.com>
- ² Statistics extracted from Centamap, *Population Census Statistics*, <http://www.centamap.com>, Building Group, is jointly developed by Census & Statistics Department, Government of HKSAR and Centamap Company Limited.
- ³ Census & Statistics Department, Government of HKSAR, "Definition of Terms: 8. Household Composition: One un-extended nuclear family (未擴展的單核心家庭住戶): A household comprising one family nucleus without other related persons".
- ⁴ Census & Statistics Department, Government of HKSAR, *Key Statistics of the 2001 Population Census*.
- ⁵ Hong Kong Institute of Architects Annual Award 1991, Certificate of Merit, by Rocco Design Ltd.
- ⁶ Photos of the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth renovation project were taken by A & N Architect & Interior Designer Ltd., and used with permission.



Power sliding door with high/low control button and tactile guide path.



Power sliding door may be opened as swing exit door in case of fire.



Some of the accessible toilet features such as tactile markers and handrails for urinal.

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