

An Evaluation of the Hong Kong Geopark:

To what extent does it promote sustainable human development?

A Case study of Sam Mun Tsai Village

Shu Kwan Yeung

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Abstract

This thesis evaluates the objective of the Hong Kong Geopark as promoting sustainable socio-economic development with a case study of Sum Mun Tsai Village, a village adjacent to the Geopark. The research focuses on the human development aspect of sustainable development, since the Geopark is not only concerned with promoting economic development, but also with the social dimension of sustainability. The study analyses the case with insights from Sen's Capability Approach. Two aspects of freedom were analyzed, *process freedom and opportunity freedom*. Process freedom refers to the avenues for democratic decision-making and opportunity freedom to the ability of local people to actualize their own socio-economic development, according to their own values. Empirical data were collected through literature reviews, participant observations and semi-structured interviews with the local residents and the Tai Po Environmental Association, a local environmental NGO engaged in the development of the Hong Kong Geopark. Relevant legislative and policy documents were also collected and examined. The low level of community engagement in the decision-making process indicates that the local residents enjoy very limited process freedom in the governance of the Geopark. On the other hand, the increase in income, the acquisition of new skills and the discovery of capabilities that they already had, all indicate that the opportunity freedom has been increased. The Geopark has not been successful in supporting process freedom, but it has made important contributions to human development as it supports opportunity freedom even though this is not a specific policy goal. It is therefore suggested that the government ought to actively engage the community in the decision-making process, in order to fully support human capability and achieve a truly sustainable human development.

Keywords

Geopark, Geotourism, Community participation, Process freedom, Opportunity freedom, Capability Approach, Hong Kong

The picture on the title page shows Sam Mun Tsai Village, the study area of this study

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFCD	Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGN	Global Geopark Network
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
TPEA	Tai Po Environmental Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. Introduction

Having been a British colony for more than a century, Hong Kong returned to China's rule in 1997. This change of sovereignty has rendered Hong Kong unique in regard to its political status. Although citizens have long yearned for universal suffrage, to this day Hong Kong remains semi-democratic (Lam, 2012). Without universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council elections, the government sees no needs to garner public support for putting forward development projects. One example is the construction of the High Speed Rail which connects Hong Kong and Mainland China. Even though tens of thousands of people gathered outside the Legislative Council showing their discontent with the project (Nip & Chiu, 2010), the proposal was nevertheless approved by the Legislative Council. The low level of citizen's engagement in the decision-making process of planning and development has recently drawn strong criticism from the public. Public consultation is often conducted for the mere sake of satisfying statutory requirements rather than truly listening to citizens' voices (Kwong, 2005; Tsang, Burnett, Hills, & Welford, 2009). Residents are invited to express their opinions, which however do not necessarily contribute to the outcomes of the policies (Cheung, 2011).

On the other hand, democracy is widely recognized as integral to sustainable development. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) (2002) has affirmed democracy as a fundamental human right. It helps promote political stability and ensure transparency and accountability (Ibid.). Citizens are also empowered to give pressure to strive for better policies to increase their economic and social opportunities (Ibid.). Gerring, Thacker, and Alfaro (2012) back this argument by using infant mortality as an example and conclude that democracy helps advance human development as it significantly lowers the infant mortality rate. A study conducted by Lake and Baum (2001) also indicates people living in democratic countries have better well-being because they receive better public services such as health care and education.

In Hong Kong, the government has been promoting sustainable development in various initiatives such as the implementation of pollution charges and stricter controls on air and water pollution (Wong & Wan, 2011). Implemented in 2009, the Hong Kong Geopark is a large-scale development programme in the rural area (Figure 1) which aims at protecting the natural environment, educating the public on earth sciences and promoting sustainable socio-economic development through geo-tourism (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). A problematique has therefore come up: to what extent the goal of sustainable human development can be achieved without full democracy. As the Hong Kong Geopark is a recent

development, no evaluations have been conducted so far. This thesis, therefore, aims to evaluate the objective of the Geopark as promoting sustainable socio-economic development. Among different approaches to evaluate a development programme, Sen's Capability Approach is considered particularly suitable in the political setting of Hong Kong. In his book *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999, p.146-159) suggests that democracy has its *intrinsic, instrumental and constructive* roles in promoting development. Citizens' participation in decision making is an important way to bringing about democracy. Sen (1999) adopts a freedom-oriented view of development and defines the aim of development as to realize human potential. As such, development programmes should focus on increasing the capabilities of *participants* of choosing a life that they 'value or have reason to value' (Sen 1999, p.18). The freedom to choose a lifestyle that one values, on one hand, is important for that person's overall freedom (Ibid.). On the other hand, it is significant in providing the person with the opportunity to achieve outcomes that he/she values (Ibid.). Borrowing the insights from Sen's Capability Approach, the evaluation of the Geopark helps observe how democracy affects local communities' freedom as well as the human development in Hong Kong. It is hoped that this research can contribute to this field and encourage more discussions about the city's future development.



Figure 1: Photo of the Hong Kong Geopark (High Island Geo-Area) shows the rich geological resources for Hong Kong to develop a Geopark

1.1 Research questions

The research questions of the thesis are:

- What is the depth of democratic participation in the decision making of the Hong Kong Geopark?
- To what extent does the Geopark provide opportunities for local people to actualize their values?
- Following an analysis employing insights from the Capability Approach, what could be suggested as policy implications to address sustainable development of local community?

1.2 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Following this introductory remarks, Chapter 2 is a brief introduction of the political situation in Hong Kong. Chapter 3 introduces the relevant concepts and ideas of Capability Approach. Chapter 4 presents the research strategy used in the study. Results will be summarized in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, analysis and discussions will be presented to further investigate the case and make connections to the Capability Approach. I will conclude this thesis in Chapter 7 to make policy implications and recommendations for further research.

2. Political situation in Hong Kong

1997 is an important year in Hong Kong's history: it marks the end of the British colonization as well as the beginning of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The Basic Law, the constitution of Hong Kong, clearly states that under the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong has a 'high degree of autonomy' (Article 2). It also ensures that 'the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years' (Article 5). Being the pioneer in the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework¹, the new political order of Hong Kong has been developing with difficulties and worries (Lau, 2007). Concerns over the autonomy of Hong Kong have increasingly been raised by various scholars such as Holliday, Ngok, and Yep (2002). Since the handover in 1997, there has been a mounting influence from the Beijing government on the Hong Kong's local affairs (Cheng, 2011).

Even though the Basic Law prescribes that Hong Kong would *ultimately* enjoy universal suffrage by selecting the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council members (Article 45 and 68), the pace of democratization has been slow (Cheng, 2011). Hong Kong has returned to China's rule for 16 years, yet it remains semi-democratic (Lam, 2012). In the most recent election which took place in 2012, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong was chosen by merely 1,200 selected members comprised mostly from business and professional groups (Ibid.). In the Legislative Council, only half of the seats were elected by universal suffrage, the other half by functional constituencies where business and professional elites were heavily represented (Ma, 2011). These undemocratic elections have sparked off debates over the demand for universal suffrage. Nevertheless, it still remains unlikely that Hong Kong will achieve genuine democracy in the near future (Lam, 2012; Ma, 2011). One reason given for the slow democratization comes from the Beijing government's reluctance to implement genuine democracy in Hong Kong (Cheng, 2011).

¹ Macau is the second place to implement the "One Country, Two Systems" Framework. It returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999.

In the midst of the undemocratic governance, it is a general belief that the only way to break through the political deadlock is to gather citizen's support through participating in political activities (Lam, 2004; Ma, 2011). The protest on July 1, 2003 in which half a million people marched on the streets to protest against the administration and the introduction of the national security legislation is an important milestone in the local political progress. It has empowered many participants and raised their attention to political affairs (Lee & Chan, 2008). This rally was also an outbreak in the civil society, as for most participants, this was their first time to join a demonstration (Ibid.). Since then, tens of thousands of citizens would go to streets on July 1 every year (Ma, 2005). Political parties take this opportunity to voice out their demands, among which is the universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and Legislative Councillors. It is clear that Hong Kong citizens have nowadays become more active in political activities (Ma, 2005).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Capability Approach

The idea of the research originated from my profound interests in Hong Kong politics and the development of the Geopark. It was my intent to find an approach that can connect the current political situation in Hong Kong and the governance of the Geopark. Sen's idea of *Development as Freedom* can fit into the political setting of Hong Kong. He highlights the importance of democracy in development by examining the three different aspects of political freedom. First, democracy can make *direct* contribution to basic capabilities to enrich people's life. Second, democracy plays an *instrumental* role of freedom in development. People have freedom of speech to voice out their concerns over different social issues. Democratic governments are scrutinized by the public, so that policies are made for the benefits of the society. Third, political freedom is *constructive* in formulating values and priorities, and identifying the needs. Sen (1999) further mentions that open discussions can help address social problems such as reducing the high fertility rates in India. Sen's interpretations of democracy have indeed provided a solid foundation to understand the importance of democracy in development. As such, I draw a few insights from Sen for the discussions of the thesis.

Sen sees development 'as a process of expansion of freedom that people enjoy' (Sen 1999, p.36) which expansion of freedom is viewed as both the *ends* and the *means* of development. The measurement of GDP should not be the sole indicator of development as he believes economic growth is only a means to well-being (Haq, 1995). Sen pays more attention to a person's *freedom* than the end-state of the person.

In relation to sustainable development, Sen opposes to Solow's definition as 'to achieve a standard of living at least as good as our own and to look after their next generation similarly' (Solow, 1997, p.15) and argues that not only should the standard of living be preserved for future generations, but also their available choices. Sen (2013) further argues that sustainable development ought to preserve the ends of development (such as needs) as well as the means of development (i.e. freedom). In the article *Why We Should Preserve the Spotted Owl*, Sen (2004) relates environmental issues to the concept of sustainability and discusses destruction of the natural environment may restrict our freedom and stresses that available choices of future generations have to be preserved (Ibid.). It is clear that his notion of sustainability attaches much significance to sustain *freedom* even when standard of living is preserved for future generations.

In order to achieve sustainable development, individuals play an important role as an agent to change. For Sen, good policies have to be agent-oriented to help people develop their capabilities. The concept of agency is highlighted as he believes an individual has his/her ability to 'pursue and realize goals that he or she values and has reason to value' (Sen, 1999, p. 19). A good development programme should treat participants as agents so that they are *free* to choose their values and act according to their values. In fact, democracy has a fundamental impact on agency as open debates and discussions help formulate values and priorities. Under undemocratic governance, authorities often treat participants as *patients* by only considering their needs, but not their freedom to value. For example, local residents are seldom invited to participate in decision making in urban renewal projects in Hong Kong. Affected citizens are forced to move out of areas where they had strong affiliations despite the government plans for a better living environment. Sen (2004, p. 10) criticizes those policy makers without considering people's values as 'a rather meagre view of humanity'.

This thesis takes up Sen's perspective on development as an *expansion of freedom*. Two aspects of freedom will be analyzed in the evaluation of the Geopark, *process freedom and opportunity freedom*. Process freedom refers to avenues for democratic decision-making (Fukuda-Parr, 2003) and opportunity freedom to the ability of local people to actualize their own socio-economic development, according to their own values (Alkire, 2005). Either inadequate processes or opportunities can result in different forms of unfreedom such as poverty, illiteracy, undernourishment, limited access to water and medical facilities (Sen, 1999)

3.1.1 Process Freedom

The *processes* in which people make decisions are a vital aspect of accessing freedom (Sen, 2002). Sen points out that unfreedom can be caused by inadequate processes such as the violation of voting rights or other political or civil rights. He uses the example of famine to show that countries under democratic regime have never experienced famine (Ibid.). Indeed, process freedom can relate to the three roles of democracy suggested by Sen. For direct role, people who have limited process freedom would have fewer choices in life. For instrumental role, with high level of process freedom, people can voice out their demands and satisfactions to the government as well as monitor the government. As a result, the government proposes and implements policies to promote progress of the society. Last, from the constructive aspect, process freedom promotes decisions and debates among the community members. This can help find out values and needs to advance development, which in turns promotes both collective agency and individual agency (UNDP, 2002). Collective agency is particularly important because public decisions such as investment in education and health or demand in equitable economic growth can rarely be made on an individual basis (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). People are empowered when members of society are involved in the decision-making processes; they can claim their rights and accordingly strive for economic and social policies that fit with their values (UNDP, 2002).

3.1.2 Opportunity Freedom

Inadequate opportunity freedom is the other aspect that can lead to unfreedom. Opportunity freedom is more concerned with *consequences* (Sen, 1999) or attainable end-states of a person (Gasper, 2007), rather than with the process that gives rise to opportunities that people enjoy (Sen, 1999). In assessing opportunity freedom, it is necessary first to find out people's values because the main goal of development is make people lead their lives that they value or have reasons to value (Sen, 2002). There could be a wide range of opportunities as individual have different values. Sen (1999) identifies some basic capabilities such as access to food, water, provision of education and medical service. Apart from these opportunities, income is also considered as an important means for people to expand their freedom, but not an end for development (Sen, 1999). Thus, countries such as China can have lower GDP per capita but higher life expectancy than other countries such as Brazil and South Africa (Ibid.).

3.2 Research gap

Although the Capability Approach can be applied to diverse disciplines (Robeyns, 2003), the number of empirical studies are still limited (Robeyns, 2000). The Capability Approach has mainly been used in evaluating poverty alleviation programmes (e.g. Schischka, Dalziel, and Saunders (2008), Schmidt

(2009)), gender inequity (e.g. Robeyns (2003), UNDP (1995)), and gender analysis (e.g. Fukuda-Parr (2003)). However, the application of Capability Approach should not be confined to these uses. From my literature research, I have not found any application of Capability Approach to evaluate a programme on rural development that does not primarily aim at poverty alleviation. No applications of the Capability Approach that focus on the context of Hong Kong have been found. This thesis aims to fill in the research gap by employing insights from the Capability Approach to evaluate the objective of the Hong Kong Geopark.

4. Research Strategy

4.1 Qualitative Research

As the Capability Approach focuses on agency aspect that goals and pursuits are judged by individual's values, this research adopts the epistemology of interpretivism which aims to understand social behaviour (Bryman, 2012). People are different from the objects of analysis of the natural sciences, in a sense that people attach emotions and attribute meanings to their environment (Ibid.). It would be helpful to interpret community participation from the perspective of the people being studied. In this research, local people's lives in this traditional fishing village are very different from those in urban areas. Qualitative research is therefore useful in understanding social relations because of the diversifications of ways of living in a society (Flick, 2009).

4.2 Case study

4.2.1 *Global Geopark Network*

In 1999, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced a Geopark programme and since then the term has been used (HKSAR Government, 2009b). A Geopark is defined as a natural area with unique geological landscapes and important ecological, cultural and historical resources (Agriculture, Fishery and Conservation Department (AFCD), 2010). The intent is that not only should a Geopark preserve geological heritages, but they should also promote sustainable socio-economic and cultural development (UNESCO, 2010). McKeever (2009), chief of Earth Science Section of UNESCO and bureau member of UNESCO Global Geoparks Network, further emphasizes a Geopark has to engage local communities and respect their traditional ways of life to promote sustainable development.

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN) was established to ‘promote a global network of geosites having special geological features’ (UNESCO, 1999, p. 2). The respective Geopark authorities can share knowledge with each other to help their governance (McKeever, Zouros, & Patzak, 2010). UNESCO also provides ad hoc support to national Geoparks through the GGN where members can benefit through the network from exchange and cooperation (UNESCO, 1999). The Hong Kong Geopark is listed among the GGN’s 92 Geoparks in 28 countries (GGN, 2013).

In order to join the GGN, national Geoparks have to meet a long list of criteria issued by UNESCO (2010). These criteria include size and setting; management and local involvement; economic development; education; and protection and conservation. Looking more in-depth into the criterion of ‘management and local involvement’, UNESCO requires that

‘the establishment of Geopark should be based on *strong community support and local involvement* developed through a “*bottom-up*” process ... Success can *only* be achieved through strong local involvement. The initiative to create a Geopark must therefore come from *local communities/* authorities with a strong commitment to developing and implementing a management plan that meets the community and economic needs of the local population whilst protecting the landscape in which they live’ (UNESCO, 2010, p. 3).

UNESCO’s Global Geoparks aim to promote sustainable human development in specific ways. First, one main aim of the Geopark programme is to enhance employment opportunities for the local residents (McKeever et al., 2010), so they can have sufficient income to achieve well-being. Second, the programme focuses on the importance of improving the quality of life of local communities without compromising or destroying the ecosystem (Azman, Halim, Liu, & Komoo, 2011) and their traditional cultures (UNESCO, 2013). Third, Global Geoparks must be attentive to the local community’s needs (McKeever et al., 2010) and garner support from the local residents (UNESCO, 2013). From these, it is clear that local involvement is integral to the human development of a Geopark.

4.2.2 Hong Kong Geopark

In October 2008, former Chief Executive Donald Tsang announced Hong Kong would set up a Geopark under the Country Parks and Marine Parks Ordinances for the purposes of protecting precious geological heritage, spreading knowledge of earth sciences and promoting sustainable socio-economic development through geotourism (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). Preparations were initiated and an

application was submitted to the Ministry of Land and Resources of China for listing the Hong Kong Geopark as a national Geopark (AFCD 2010). In November 2009, the Hong Kong Geopark was opened and became a member of UNESCO’s Global Geopark Network in 2011 (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). The Geopark, covering approximately 50km², consists of eight Geo-areas: High Island; Ung Kong Group; Ninepin Group, Sharp Island; Double Haven; Tolo Channel; Port Island – Bluff Head; and Tung Ping Chau (Figure 2).

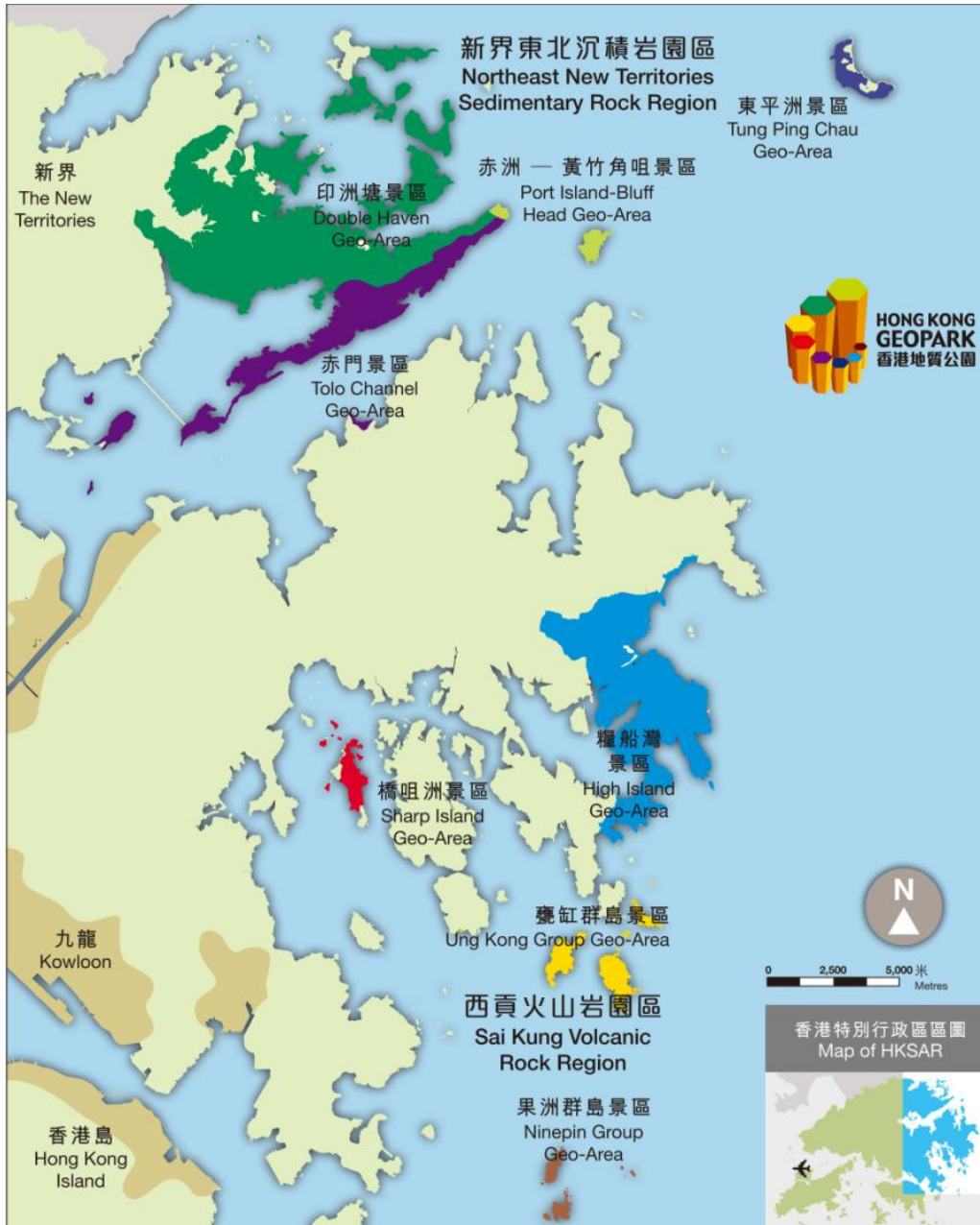


Figure 2: Map of the Hong Kong Geopark (Source from the Hong Kong Geopark (2013))

The Hong Kong Geopark is situated within the existing areas of country and marine parks, and special protection areas. It is protected under the Country Parks and Marine Parks Ordinances (Cap. 208 & 476) (AFCD 2010). At present, there are 24 country parks and four marine parks accounting for about 40% of the land area in Hong Kong (Figure 3) (HKSAR Government 2009b). The Country Parks and Marine Parks Ordinances provide strong legal protection to the geological heritages and the natural environment within the Hong Kong Geopark. Visitors are prohibited from destroying the environment. Taking any rock specimens from the Geopark may result in prosecution by the authorities.



Figure 3: Map of protected areas of Hong Kong (Red Oval: The study area) (HKSAR Government 2009b, p.12)

The Environmental Bureau and the Agriculture, Fishery and Conservation Department (AFCD) are the two main management authorities of the Geopark. The Environmental Bureau is the decision-maker in the management of the Geopark, which is responsible for formulating relevant policies and planning on conservation and sustainable development (HKSAR Government, 2010). It is not involved in daily operations of the Geopark but rather provides guiding principles for the operation body. On the other hand, the AFCD is the operation body to manage all the protected areas of Hong Kong. Duties include

the development and maintenance of country parks and special areas, protection of vegetation and wildlife, provision of facilities for the public and law enforcement. Rangers patrol the protected areas to enforce the laws and provide assistance to visitors on a daily basis. Anti-crime operations such as deterring removal of protected plants and trees are carried out regularly with the assistance of the police.

Listed on the homepage of the Hong Kong Geopark (2013), one reason why Hong Kong was able to establish a Geopark is the presence of adjacent fishing villages which represents a vital part of Hong Kong's cultural heritage. As mentioned earlier, a Geopark is not only a natural area with valuable geological heritage, but also with cultural and historical values. In the application for joining the GGN submitted by the HKSAR Government (2010), local community participation was highlighted:

'Local community engagement lays a new horizon for us to promote the objectives of conservation and sustainable development in the Geopark. Conducting sustainable tourism and revitalizing traditional cultures could generate economic gains, which are a great motive for local citizens to support conservation.' (HKSAR Government, 2010, p.35)

4.2.3 Ma Shi Chau and Sam Mun Tsai Village

The area of study covers Ma Shi Chau, a tombolo² located in Tai Po District and the adjacent village, Sam Mun Tsai Village. Ma Shi Chau falls within Tolo Channel Geo-area, which is located in the northeastern New Territories of Hong Kong (Figure 4). Sam Mun Tsai Village has a population of around 1,000 (Legislative Council, 2006) (Figure 5). The only way to get to Ma Shi Chau by road transport is to pass through Sam Mun Tsai Village and walk for approximate 30 minutes from the village. This is the way taken by most visitors.

From the Qing Dynasty (18/19th century) to 1970s, there were fishermen living on boats floating on the calm water in Tolo Harbour Channel (Puk, Liu, & Wong, 2008). They also constructed a few settlements for sheltering during typhoons in Sam Mun Tsai, where Plover Cove Reservoir is currently situated (Puk et al., 2008). Due to water shortage in the 1960s, the government commenced the construction of Plover Cove Reservoir in 1961 (Siu, 2007). Sam Mun Tsai Village was inundated by the construction and forced to be relocated with a small compensation to the residents. The villagers were told to move to the present location, Yim Tin Tsai (Yau et al., 2011). At the time of relocation, 36 families were moved and housed into small apartments (Puk et al., 2008). According to the interviews with the local residents,

² A dispositional landform in which the island is connected to the mainland by a sand bar.

the initial living conditions were poor. There was no electricity, water or toilets when they first moved in. Many elderly residents stated in the interviews that it took them a long time to get used to the new environment.

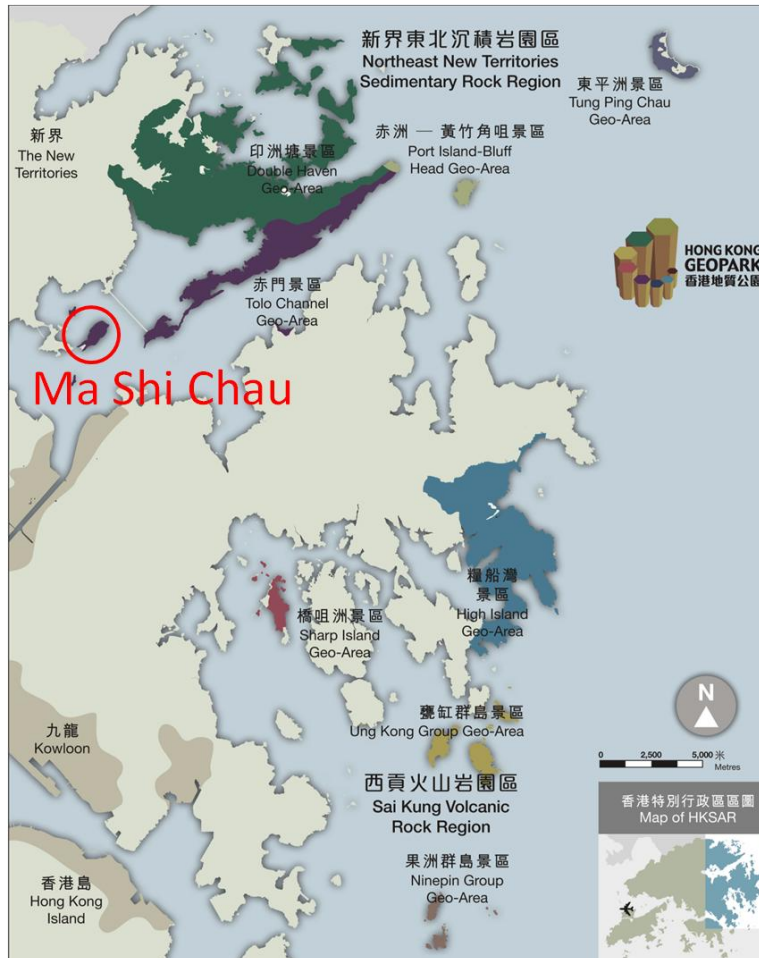


Figure 4: Location of Ma Shi Chau within the Hong Kong Geopark (Base map from the Hong Kong Geopark (2013))



Figure 5: Location of Ma Shi Chau and its adjacent village to the west, Sam Mun Tsai Village (Base map from Tian et al. (2009, p.3))

From the 1970s onwards, there were large-scale reclamation projects along the Tolo Channel to develop the new towns of Tai Po, Ma On Shan and Shatin. These projects caused severe water pollution, which in turn lowered the number of fish in the Channel. The livelihood of fishermen was threatened. Some villagers decided to quit fishing and work in urban areas (Puk et al., 2008).

In the governance of the Geopark, the government has given the local NGOs with the tasks of engaging the local communities (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). Green groups are one of the main stakeholders in the development of the Geopark (Figure 6), so they 'pioneer community engagement in order to fulfil the requirements of the GNN' (HKSAR government, 2009b, p.94). The NGOs involved in the Geopark play an important role in promoting community participation. The government is actively making connections with the local NGOs involved, so that both the government and the local communities would gain mutual trust and benefits through the network of the NGOs (HKSAR Government, 2009b).



**Figure 6: Geopark stakeholders
(Hong Kong Geopark, 2013)**

Established in 1997, the Tai Po Environmental Association (TPEA), the NGO that I worked with in the research, is a registered charity in Hong Kong aiming to promote environmental education and conservation through trainings, workshops and engagement activities (TPEA, 2013). The TPEA operates a Geo-educational centre in the study area and organizes guided tours to promote the knowledge of geo-conservation and earth science in Hong Kong. They also conduct activities to engage the local

communities and promote local culture to visitors (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). Apart from TPEA, there are two NGOs involved in the governance of the Geopark: the Association for Geoconservation and Sai Kung District Community Centre (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013). Interviews with the officials from the TPEA indicate that NGOs plays a crucial role in connecting the government and the local communities. The government relies heavily on the NGOs to engage the local communities.

4.2.4 Reasons for choosing the case

A study of all the local communities in the Hong Kong Geopark is not practical within the scope of this research. The scope has to be narrowed down to one specific community to understand its complexities. I shall conduct an *instrumental case study* (Stake, 2000, p. 437) – that ‘a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue’. The case is used to understand the outcomes of the Geopark by borrowing the ideas of development from Sen.

Two conditions examined by Yin (2009) can help justify the use of a case study: first, the research questions seek to gain better understanding of the current governance and explain the present participation of the local community. This requires obtaining more detailed descriptions of the case. With limited time, I can only focus on a particular area in the Geopark. Second, the study is based on contemporary event which is an ongoing countryside development programme. It is therefore feasible to obtain first-hand data from the field. This research aims not to generate any theory nor test the validity of any theory, but to improve the understanding through in-depth examination of the case (i.e. local community participation in Sam Mun Tsai Village) with insights from the Capability Approach.

I have chosen Ma Shi Chau as the studied Geo-area for the following reasons: First, village settlements of the study area are concentrated in a small area and they are easily accessible by road transport. Interviews and observations could be done in a more efficient way. Second, the TPEA, a local NGO involved in the study area, was willing to help my research. Without the help of the TPEA, much more time would have been spent in searching for interviewees.

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 Literature Review

An extensive literature review was conducted at the initial stage. Concepts such as community participation and Geopark were reviewed. Legislations on countryside management, relevant Geopark policy documents and information on the study area were examined to contextualize the research. Literature on Capability Approach and participation was also reviewed to familiarize myself with the

academic debate. To ensure the quality and accuracy of the information obtained, peer-reviewed articles were mostly used and critically reflected upon (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey, 2011).

4.3.2 Interviews

Coming from a different part of Hong Kong, I would have encountered difficulties to gain entry to the village without the help of a gatekeeper. The TPEA operates an educational centre in the village, so it has built up a close relationship with the residents. In the beginning of my fieldwork, the TPEA introduced me to different groups of people in the village. Through this network, many residents were willing to be interviewed. However, receiving help from the TPEA could also be a problem in the data collection. During the interviews, I realized that some interviewees could have mistakenly thought that I was an employee of the TPEA, and this could affect their answers in the interviews – they might have given me answers that would be more favourable to the TPEA. For the sake of obtaining unbiased answers from the interviewees, at the beginning of each interview, I identified myself as a Master student at Lund University and not associated with the government or the TPEA.

Interviews were conducted between 23rd January and 7th March with the TPEA and the local residents. All were face-to-face interviews conducted in Cantonese, which is the mother tongue of the researcher and the local community. Interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility for asking more in-depth questions (Bryman, 2012). The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to one-hour-and-a-half and totalling approximately 25.5 interviewing hours. Two officials from the TPEA were interviewed: the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the organization and the manager of the educational centre. 15 local residents were interviewed including the head of the Sam Mun Tsai Village, four current and former fisherman representatives, a restaurant owner, a store owner, a boat operator, a driver, helpers in the TPEA's activities as well as other residents who did not have any connections with the TPEA. In the beginning of each interview, the nature of the study was clearly explained. Consent was sought for voice-recording interviews. Some quotes were later translated into written English.

At the early stage of data collection, I heavily relied on the TPEA to help me find appropriate subjects for interviewing. My intention was to interview various sectors related to the Geopark development, so that I could draw a general picture of the impacts of the Geopark on the local community. I successfully achieved my goal by interviewing different groups of residents. However, I later understood that these respondents might be more favourable to the Geopark, as they enjoyed closer relationships with the TPEA. Thus, at the later stage, I looked for interviewees myself by standing at the entrance of the village. I conducted convenience sampling to interview residents who have no connection with the TPEA.

Information received from these people help balance the opinion given by the people connected with the TPEA. In fact, in either way, the selection of interviewees was based on *non-probability sampling*, which may lead to questions on whether the sampled population properly represents the community in the research (Bryman, 2012). The sampled group cannot fully represent the population, even though efforts have been made wherever possible to increase the representation of the population in the village. At any rate, this research can at least provide some ideas for more in-depth research in the future.

Despite the fact that I can speak the same dialect (Cantonese) as the local community, I come from another district of Hong Kong. Some respondents appeared to me that they avoided answering sensitive questions, or they deliberately made very short answers. They might be afraid that I would submit their responses to the government. They might therefore have given responses considered favourable to the government and avoided critical comments. A false response would affect the creditability of the research. To ensure the validity of the research, I corroborated the responses of each interview with careful observations.

Throughout the research, requests were continuously made to the Geopark Division of the AFCD for an interview. I intended to incorporate government's point of view in the research, and to verify the responses received from the local community. However, the government insisted that they could not spare any time to answer my interview questions due to the heavy workload. Inquires to the AFCD by email were not responded to within the time period of 5 months (from January to May 2013) for this research. Without the cooperation of the government, I could only collect data from interviews with the TPEA and the local community, participant observations and limited amount of government materials. Some information, particularly those obtained from the interviews, without being confirmed by other parties, is therefore left to be verified.

4.3.3 Participant Observations

During the research, relationship was built with the local residents and the NGO. Within the three months of data collection, I made approximately 15 visits to the study area. With the intent to improve the quality of data collection, participatory observations were also conducted (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

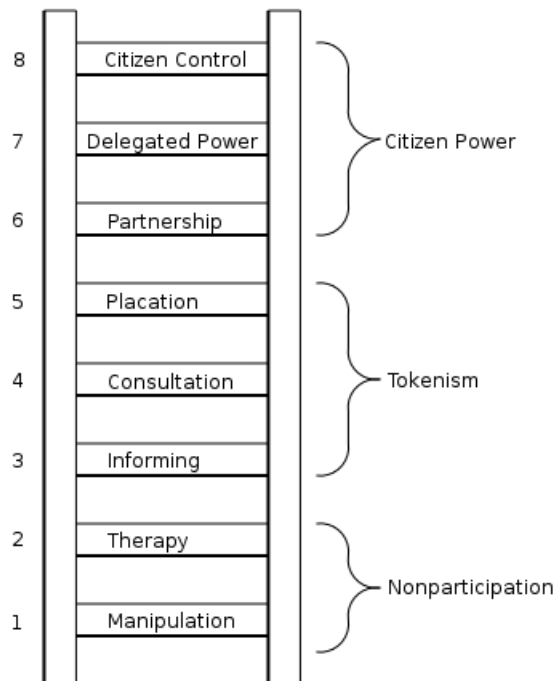
I participated in two public guided tours and two school tours to Ma Shi Chau between January and March 2013. These tours introduced the geology of Ma Shi Chau to the participants. The tour guides were people from other parts of Hong Kong with a profound knowledge of geology. These tours did not

aim to promote (direct) local community engagement, but I could observe the impacts of the Geopark programme, such as an increase in the number of visitors, on the local community. Apart from the guided tours, I also took part in two community workshops on 10th March and 14th March. Participants of these workshops came from a community centre in Tai Po and a secondary school respectively. Each workshop lasted for 3 hours consisting of a wide range of activities such as visiting fish farms, learning local arts, making fish nets, rowing fishing boats, to name but a few. Local villagers were employed as tour guides and activity assistants to the activities.

4.4 Operationalizing the Capability Approach

4.4.1 Process Freedom

To operationalize the process freedom, it would be useful to reference the process freedom to a model and determine the level of participation in decision making. In fact, there are many different typologies of citizen's participation as participation can mean different things for different individuals (Cornwall, 2008). Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Figure 7) introduced in 1969 is one of the best-known typology (Choguill, 1996; Cornwall, 2008). It is the most widely cited typology of participation (Bovaird, 2007) and remains frequently used to this day (Brooks & Harris, 2008; Collins & Ison, 2009; Cornwall, 2008; May, 2006).



**Figure 7: Ladder of participation
(Arnstein, 1969, p. 217)**

Arnstein (1969, p.216) argues that “citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables have-not citizens presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be included in the future”. Different rungs on her ladder reflect different power and control hold by citizens. In the eight-rung ladder, the bottom rungs belong to manipulation and therapy, which fall into the level of non-participation. In this category, absolute power is given to authorities that community is prohibited from participation in decision making. Stage 3, 4, 5 are informing, consultation and placation, which fall into the category of Tokenism. In these levels, citizens can express their opinion but citizens are still excluded from decision-making. Their opinion is heard, but the authorities would still act according to their decisions. Stage 6, 7, 8 are citizen control, delegated power and partnership, which belong to the levels of citizen power. Citizens are imitated in decision-making bodies, or even they have the full managerial power to make decisions (Arnstein, 1969).

Arnstein (1969) stresses that real participation only takes place at the top levels of the ladder. Participation can be manipulated at the levels of tokenism because decision-making bodies can selectively listen to citizen’s opinions and reject those public opinions that they think inappropriate. He believes that a true public participation can redistribute the power of the government and ensures ‘have-not citizens’ (p.216) to be included in making important decisions. Julian, Reischl, Carrick, and Katrenich (1997) state that real participation empowers citizens to promote better community development, participation without any influences to the authorities is useless. Mark (2008) adds that higher rungs ought to be preferred over lower rungs. This study will apply Arnstein’s model into the case of Geopark in order to operationalize the process freedom.

4.4.2 Opportunity Freedom

Operationalizing the Capability Approach has remained doubtful among scholars such as Comim (2001); Sugden (1993). As evaluation of a policy should be ‘judged in terms of her (participant’s) own values and objectives’ (Sen, 1999, p. 19), accessing the capability set has to come from ‘the perspective of the participants’ (Schischka et al., 2008, p. 231). It is difficult to determine which capabilities should be used for evaluation (Ibid.). In order to operationalize the Capability Approach more effectively, Nussbaum (2000) made a universal list of ten ‘central human capabilities’ to construct a theory of social justice. Though Sen opposes to endorse a definite list of capabilities, he uses the word ‘basic capabilities’ in some of his literatures, e.g. Sen (1979, 1993, 1999), to prioritize a number of important capabilities that should be achieved at least to a barely minimum level for survivals.

Capabilities vary over time and space, and different individuals also have different sets of capabilities. A researcher might make a study biased if a pre-set list of capabilities is included (Robeyns, 2000). Especially in my case, coming from an area outside the local village, I might impose my values when considering which capabilities should be included. To minimize bias, I chose not to have a pre-set list of capabilities. Capabilities were to be found out through interviewing the local residents.

Sen (1999) emphasizes the selection of capabilities should go through *democratic processes*. Public discussions can help identify their values and needs (Ibid.). In doing so, Schischka et al. (2008) and Alkire (2002) adopted focus group methods in their case studies for promoting public discussions in order to capture the list of capabilities from the participants' perspective. Focus group method, however, was not deemed appropriate in my study. First, after discussions with the NGO, I realized it was not easy to gather a group of residents at the same time. Second, my interview questions involve personal values that many respondents prefer having one-to-one interview to ensure privacy. Third, I did not want one person's values to affect the other in a group setting. Due to the above reasons, I conducted face-to-face interview with every single respondent. Without having a pre-set list of capabilities, questions such as 'What are your values in life?' or "What do you want to pursue in life?" were asked to determine their values.

5. Findings

This chapter outlines the results of the interviews conducted with the local community and the TPEA, the observations made in the study area and the reviews of relevant documents. The chapter is divided into different sub-topics as follows: -

- Socio-economic standings of Sam Mun Tsai Village
- Process Freedom
- Opportunity Freedom

5.1 Socio-economic standings of Sam Mun Tsai Village

Sam Mun Tsai Village has never been considered important in academic research, thus the amount of literature concerning the study area is minimal. Throughout the research, I had to gather an extensive amount of primary data about the socio-economic characteristics of the village which not only is useful for the investigation of the thesis, but also for other future research on the village.

Sam Mun Tsai Village consists of a significant amount of old and retired people. In the daytime, retired people gather in groups. Despite the proximity of the village to the town centre (20 minutes by mini-bus), many grown-ups have to reluctantly move out from the village because of insufficient space. A standard house in the village occupies an area of merely around 40 m². Some young people might have returned to the village from the urban area to look after their parents, yet the proportion of young people remains low.

Among the working population, nearly all work outside the village. The occupations of the people predominantly involve labour-intensive work, for example, in the construction industry. In the village, there are two restaurants and two small stores run by local residents. Some people raise fish in their fish farms, operate boats for tourists or run business by turning their fish farms into leisure fishing sites for visitors. The fishing industry has been fading out due to the diminishing amount of fish in the sea and the skyrocketing cost of fuel. Besides, many young people are not willing to be fishermen as they consider the work too demanding and prefer getting a job in the town.

Education level is generally low in the village. Most people of older generations are illiterate. They started to work as fishermen in their youths. No formal schooling was implemented at that time. Many middle-aged residents received primary education as there was one school in the village from 1960s to 1980s. However, in traditional fisherman's culture, education has not been attached much significance especially in the old days. Earning a living as soon as possible was considered more important than education. Younger generations receive much better education as nine-year compulsory free and universal education was introduced in Hong Kong in 1978 (HKSAR Government, 2012).

My field observations show that residents maintain good relationships with their neighbours. Even though there are as many as 1,000 residents in the village (Legislative Council, 2006), some interviewees claim they can remember everyone's surname and recognize all faces. Adults gather in groups to play mahjong³ or horse-gambling at leisure. Small children spend their time running and playing in the public space. Many residents leave their front doors open telling me that no one would steal anything from their house. The living environment is very friendly. Village meetings take place every month to discuss important issues related to the village. There are also a number of annual social functions such as singing performances during the Chinese New Year.

³ A traditional Chinese card game played by four people

5.2 Process Freedom

Though Sam Mun Tsai Village is a village next to Ma Shi Chau, respondents have very little knowledge about the Geopark development. In their daily conversation, they do not talk about any Geopark issues. Most respondents have heard of the term 'Geopark' either from the NGO or the government, but no one was able to list all the three objectives or which year it was established. Only the head of the village and the helpers of the TPEA's activities have better understanding of the Geopark. The rest do not care about the Geopark development or do not know what a Geopark is. A few of them do not even know Ma Shi Chau is a part of the Geopark nor realize Ma Shi Chau has unique geological features. Discussions on the Geopark in the village are minimal to nonexistent:

"The first time ever I got to know the term 'Geopark' was when the NGO set up an educational centre in the village... Is the purpose of the Geopark about protecting the environment?" (Mr. Shek, 44, driver)

"I have heard of the word 'Geopark', but do not know where it is... I guess the objective of setting up a Geopark is conservation... I don't know much about it." (Mrs. Ng, 40+, housewife)

The idea of setting up the Hong Kong Geopark can be traced back to December 2007 when a pro-government party member submitted a motion on 'Establishing a geological park in the eastern part of the New Territories', which was subsequently passed by the Legislative Council (2007). In May 2008, the government conducted a research on creating a Geopark and concluded that it would be feasible to establish a Geopark. In October 2008, former Chief Executive Donald Tsang announced that Hong Kong would proceed with such establishment. Half a year later, the Hong Kong Geopark was officially opened (HKSAR Government 2009b). It was entirely the government's initiative to create a Geopark, rather than an initiative by the local community. Residents in the local community have never made any request to promote any development projects, such as eco-tourism:

"We have never proposed to create a Geopark to help increase the employment opportunity of the village. Some residents like to have more tourists, but then others prefer a quiet environment without any disturbance from the tourists. There has not been a consensus among the residents on whether to promote eco-tourism or not. So, it was not our idea to implement the Geopark project" (Mr. Shek, village's head)

In *A Study on the Planning and Management of Hong Kong Geopark*, the earliest official policy document of the Geopark written by the HKSAR Government (2009b), the preliminary objectives of setting up the Geopark were listed as conservation, recreation and education. These three goals aim at benefiting all Hong Kong citizens rather than promoting the socio-economic development *specific to the local communities*. The document consists of 129 pages introducing a wide range of Hong Kong's geological features and the general planning principles of the Geopark. However, no section on participation of local communities was included. Even in the application to the Chinese government for gaining the status of National Geopark (HKSAR Government, 2009a), there was no information about local community participation.

Only when it came to the application for the GGN (HKSAR Government, 2010), was there a section on public engagement policies mentioning that the government had been considering local communities as an important stakeholder in the management of the Geopark. According to the application, consultations were conducted to develop relationships with local communities. It also stated that engagement activities such as setting up geo-education centres and conducting geo-tours and activities, had significantly promoted mutual trust between the government and the local communities. The government was hopeful that both parties would gain mutual respect and benefit (HKSAR Government, 2010).

One would question why there were no mentions of community participation in the early documents, but the term started to appear at a much later stage - in the application documents for the GGN. One possible reason given is in order to enter the GGN, the governance of the Geopark has to engage the local communities, and otherwise the application would not be approved. In the case of Hong Kong, lack of emphasis on local community participation suggested that the authority might not truly think involvement of local people is important. Local community engagement could have been considered as a mere means for Hong Kong to gain an international status (by entering joining the GGN), rather than for the overall development of the local communities.

Despite the government's claim that they consulted local communities, all respondents said they had never been asked for their opinions on the development of the Geopark by the government. They did not know there would be a Geopark programme until they read the news. Even though there are formal communication channels between the village's head and the government, the government never asked for his opinion:

“There were no consultations at all... The government does what she wants to do. I only got to know the establishment of the Geopark by reading a newspaper.” (Mr. Shek, village’s head)

“I have never received any information about the development of the Geopark from the government. Like the construction of columbarium in Ma Shi Chau, I only got to know what was happening through the NGO.” (Ms. Cheung, around 50, store owner)

“I have never seen any visits of the government officials. Of course, they have never asked for our opinion on the Geopark. They do not care about what we want to pursue in the development programme.” (So Mui, female, retired, 50+)

The role of the TPEA is crucial for the governance of the Geopark as it conducts tours and workshops to engage the local community. In the interview, the CEO of the TPEA described the NGO acts as a ‘catalyst’ between the government and the local community, because there is a deep-rooted mistrust between the two parties. It is apparent that the poor relationship originated from the relocation of the village:

“I don’t trust the government... Our village had to move for the overall benefit of Hong Kong (for building the reservoir). But the compensation was little... After relocation, the amount of fish dropped significantly due to water pollution caused by reclamation.” (Mr. Shek, village’s head)

“The government was so unfair to our village. The other five villages affected by the construction of the reservoir were moved to the town center.” (Mr. Lai, 70, fisherman representative)

“Because of relocation affairs many residents nowadays take a negative attitude towards the government. Soon after the relocation, life became difficult.” (Mrs. Ho, 80+, fisherman in the old days, but retired for 40+ years)

The ill-will attitude towards the government, especially among the older generations, has remained until today. It therefore provides a good opportunity for the TPEA to be a middle person and try to ease the tensions between the government and the community. In fact, the CEO of the TPEA is an indigenous person from the district who has much in common with the local community. He is well trusted and respected by the villagers. The residents feel much more relieved to talk to him than the government. The TPEA has become a platform for the two sides to communicate in the development of the Geopark.

5.3 Opportunity Freedom

Albeit the local residents seem to be excluded in decision-making process, they are engaged in the daily operation of the Geopark. Through participating in engagement activities, various kinds of opportunities are given to the local community. The engagement activities are divided into two groups: those related to the NGO and those not.

Every year, the NGO conducts around 50-70 different workshops that involve the local community. These activities are either funded by the government, or participants have to pay participation fee. Local villagers are hired to assist in the workshops such as being tour guides to share their history or culture, orienteer activities, and lead visits to their fish farms (Figure 8), knitting fishing net (Figure 9), etc.



Figure 8: A fisherman introducing his fish farm to a group of students



Figure 9: A fisherman teaching a participant to knit a fishing net

Apart from activities related to the NGO, residents also participate in other forms. To list a few: restaurant owners make more food to meet with the increase number of orders (Figure 10), boat operators offer more trips to Ma Shi Chau (Figure 11), shop owners sell more food or drinks, and so on.



Figure 10: Restaurant owners making food for their customers



Figure 11: Boat operators giving visitors a ride to the Geopark

It is indeed difficult to generalize the values of the villagers. Different people have their values in life that can be very different from others. Here I will present the most common values that are shared by the residents. A lot of interviewees mentioned health and being well-nourished are the most important in their lives. Almost all respondents older than 50 state health as their most important life value. Many respondents suggest well-being of the next generations (e.g. their sons or daughters can set up their own families, they live healthily and happily, etc) as a central pursuit. Family harmony is also considered a key value among the respondents. The young generation generally considers money as a vital component in their lives. One respondent (Mr. Shek, 40, driver) replied that they could use money to support the family. Only a few respondents stated the importance of the natural environment:

“We have a close relationship with the nature. We were born on a fishing boat. We need ocean to provide us food and employment.” (Mr. Ho, 63, fisherman)

With an increasing number of visitors, certain groups of individuals benefit economically through conducting the activities mentioned above. The TPEA opened its educational centre in the village on 15 February 2009 providing some residents with part-time job opportunities to assist in the daily operation of the TPEA. These jobs include cleaning the educational centre, transporting materials for organizing workshops, giving tours to their fish farms and helping in different workshops:

“I help to clean the educational centre. The income is quite little, but still better than nothing. I can use the money to have tea (have breakfast).” (Mrs Shek, 70+, retired)

“My income has been increased. I can earn more money by allowing people to visit my fish farm and operating boats to bring people to the Geopark. I am happy because of more work.” (Mr. Cheung, 63, fisherman representative)

Apart from those people who have direct relationships with the TPEA, some others earn more income in their own business. These people include store owners, restaurant owners and boat operators:

“With more visitors, I sell more food and drinks. So, I actually earn more money nowadays.” (Ms. Cheung, ~50, owner of the store)

“I earn a bit more money nowadays especially in the weekend. Sometimes, the restaurant can be totally full.” (Mr. Shek, 62, restaurant owner)

Villagers generally support the development of the Geopark and many interviewees feel happier than in the days before the Geopark was established. Their happiness comes from different ways: some

residents who engage themselves in the workshops are pleased to meet people from outside the village. They can also share their knowledge and culture to other people in Hong Kong. They think their lives are more meaningful as they have made some contributions to the village as well as the society of Hong Kong. Some residents enjoy the sense of liveliness brought by the visitors – they like to have more people around. A few residents stated that they had become more joyful because they got to know more about the natural environment:

“I introduce the history and the culture of this village in the workshops. I feel happy because I get to know people from outside the village, and share with students the techniques of catching fish.” (Mrs. Ho, 60+, fisherman)

“I am happier because more visitors coming to the village makes my life less boring.” (Mr. Ho, 65, fisherman)

“I am glad to know that there is something important next to our village which has to be preserved. I also think that the Geopark has raised my environmental awareness.” (Mr. Cheung, 53, labour worker)

People who help with the workshops of the TPEA have especially learned various new skills. Some have understood more about the history of the village, as they have to tell the history to the visitors. Others have improved their communication skills by talking to different participants in the workshops. The TPEA also organizes orienteering workshops from time to time to let school students apply their map-reading skills. Those residents who help in these workshops have learned how to conduct orienteering. It is also common to find some villagers selling fish in front of their houses on the weekend. Their marketing strategies have also been improved:

“Before joining the workshop, I did not know how to conduct orienteering. But since I helped the organization with the orienteering workshops, I have developed my orienteering skills.” (Mrs. Ho, 60+, fisherman and helper in the community workshops)

“Through participating in the workshops, I learned how to speak in front of the public. I met people from all walks of life and learned how to communicate with people. I am no longer the frog underneath a well.” (So Mui, female, 50+, retired)

“Some residents would like to sell dried fish to visitors. But they had no marketing strategies. They only put a box of dried fish on the pavement and thought that people

would come to buy. We taught them to make signs to show the price; otherwise people would not know they were selling fish” (Dr. Yau, the CEO of the TPEA)

Not all respondents support the development of Geopark. A few said that the noise made by the visitors can sometimes be annoying. They treasure the quiet living environment, but are bothered by the disruption caused by the visitors. Some have seen people taking stones and shells away from Ma Shi Chau. Some mentioned that they were afraid that the Geopark might affect their current fishing practices:

“Sometimes, the whole village can get very noisy, and some people take the geologic rocks back home” (Mrs. Ng, 40+, housewife)

6. Analysis & Discussion

Based on the findings I listed in the previous chapter, this chapter will look more in-depth into the case and relate the findings to the Capability Approach. Discussions will be divided into two aspects:

- Limited Process Freedom
- Increased Opportunity Freedom

6.1 Limited Process Freedom

6.1.1 Level of informing

From the findings, there is *prima facie* evidence that the level of participation in decision making lies at the level of informing in Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation. The word *prima facie* was used because the information gathered from the interviews with the Sam Mun Tsai Village only supports the community’s point of view. Numerous attempts were made to contact the government, but the government declined to participate in any interviews or provide any information about community participation. There is also no publicized government document detailing the consultation conducted specific to *this* village. Here, it has also revealed a problem of a lack of transparency in the government that effective environmental governance should have, as listed in the United Nations Environment Program’s Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992. Whether there have been any consultations with residents in Sam Mun Tsai Village, especially at the early stage of planning of the Geopark, remains questionable. Solely based on the interviews with the local community, some residents got to know the Geopark development when they read the news. Putting information onto the

media is an act for the government to offer a one-way flow of information without getting any opinion from the local community. According to Arnstein (1969), informing can be described as a government's tactic to make participation legitimate. In the meantime, informing which falls in the levels of tokenism, means that participation is actually manipulated (Ibid.). By applying the Arnstein's model to this case, it can be seen that the degree of the local community participation in the Geopark's decision-making process is indeed low.

Arnstein's ladder of participation is extensively concerned with power and control, which demonstrates a power struggle between the 'have-not' citizens hoping to climb-up the ladder and the authorities preventing the citizens from climbing (Collins & Ison, 2009). The goal of participation is to let citizens gain full power and control (at the top rung of the ladder: Citizen control). However, it would have been problematic if the local residents had *full* decision power on the governance of the Geopark in this case. First, the local residents have low awareness on the development of the Geopark, which will further be discussed in Section 6.1.2. They are not willing to participate in the governance and thus do not want to take up any power that is available to them. Second, the local residents were not even aware of the possibility of turning their living area into a tourist place before the Geopark was implemented. Even though the Geopark has made important contributions to human development, the Geopark would not have been implemented if the citizen could have a full power to make a decision. I hereby do not share the view that a higher rung of participation is necessarily better than a lower one. It should also be highlighted that participation should not solely concern with the level of involvement, but also the *mode* of engagement. Communicative rationality could perhaps be developed for the planning of the Geopark. Through different communication forms, the authority and different local communities can learn about different dimensions of the issue from each other and thus develops a collaborative plan of the governance of the Geopark. The two parties can construct the ends and the means through reasoning and achieve consensual understanding (Willson, 2001).

My discussion also involves the possibility of self-organization to manage a natural reserve area. In fact, Ostrom, Janssen, and Anderies (2007) argue that many environmental problems cannot be solved by a *panacea* because a solution works at one place does not mean that it can work in the other. Ostrom (2009) suggests a diagnostic multitier framework to analyze sustainability of socio-ecological systems. She has identified ten subsystem variables that impact on the likelihood of self-organization to manage a natural resource. The Geopark could be seen as a resource here, as fishing stocks can be generated by the area. One of the variables, *importance of resource to user (U8)*, particularly applies to this case. It is

clear that the local residents do not consider the Geopark important. Many, especially those without any connections with the TPEA, do not even have direct connections with the Geopark. The Geopark is detached from the livelihood of many residents. With a low importance of resource to the local residents, it would lower the likelihood of self-organization (Ostrom 2009).

6.1.2 Political Culture of Sam Mun Tsai Village

As discussed in Section 2, the overall political participation in Hong Kong has increased in the recent decade. Nevertheless, it was observed that the local residents were not willing to talk about politics. The development of the Geopark has never been a topic of concern in the village. Interviews conducted with the local residents explain the main reasons for not participating in the governance of the Geopark.

First, due to the rural-urban migration, the proportion of old people is high in Sam Mun Tsai Village. In a research conducted by Kam (2000), he states that Hong Kong is an exceptional case in the world that elderly people are less involved in political affairs:

“There are so many old people in this village... They prefer their lives to be simple and want to enjoy their lives. Don’t expect them to care about the development of the Geopark.” (Mr. Cheung, 53, construction worker)

Historical and cultural reasons can help explain the low engagement of the elderly people in this case. Hong Kong was a British colony for more than a century before it was handed over to China. During the British colonization, there was a strong control of the government. Many people felt as though they were living in a ‘borrowed place’ with a sense of powerlessness (Lau & Kuan, 1988). Democratization only began when the first election in Legislative Council took place in 1985 (Lam, 2004). Even though Hong Kong has returned to Chinese sovereignty, many elderly people were too accustomed to the authoritarian control of the British that they do not want to participate in political affairs (Kam, 2000):

“I am only a small potato in the society... I was not taught to be critical or to think through the important issues in my life.” (Mr. Ho, 63, former fisherman representative)

Besides, influenced by the values of Confucianism, it is a general belief that older people earn respect and power from the family and the society (Kam, 2000). However, it is no longer common to have big families in Hong Kong (Ibid.). As people nowadays have fewer children, they get less financial support from their children when they reach their retirement. Hong Kong does not have a very comprehensive

social security system to provide benefits to the disadvantaged groups. Some elderly have to tighten their belts during their retired years:

“What I care most is whether I have enough food to eat... The government has not provided us with enough social security. Basically, I need to rely on myself... Yes, the Geopark is important, but it is not more important than my basic needs.” (Mr. Shek, 80+, retired for 40+ years)

“I need to have enough food before talking about the protection of the environment. For the sake of environmental protection, I don’t eat, I don’t live? This is ridiculous.” (Mrs. Ho, 80+, retired for 20+ years)

Bounded by the stringent resources given by the government, some elderly residents still worry about their materialistic needs. Some have to work until they become very old. They cannot spend time and efforts getting involved in political issues. As Kam (2002) suggests, elderly people have nowadays become not as powerful and high standing to make decisions as they used to be.

Again, with the philosophical influence of Confucianism, the Chinese culture is characterized as harmonious and family-oriented. People try to avoid conflict with the government (Lau & Kuan, 1988). Some local residents stated that even if they had different ideas on the development of Geopark, they were not willing to speak their minds. They would rather behave harmoniously to conceal their dissatisfactions:

“What is the point to talk to the government? Even if we voice out our opinion, will there be a difference? I better keep my mouth shut and try to avoid direct conflicts with the government.” (Mrs. Ho, retired, worked as a fisherman before retirement, 80+)

Kam (2000) also explains how early political experiences of old generations would affect their willingness to participate in politics. It is true that the old people in Sam Mun Tsai Village experienced social instability in the Second World War and witnessed Chinese refugees escape to Hong Kong from the Civil War in Mainland China. Many elderly residents stressed that lives were difficult as they had to work all day long to earn a living. They were also forced to move out from the old location because of the construction of the reservoir. The interviews also indicate that there has been deep-seated mistrust between the government and the elderly residents. All these have discouraged these older groups of people to neither get involved in politics nor avoid further conflicts with the government. Lau and Kuan

(1988) shared the view that many Hong Kong people believed that politics was 'dirty' that good citizens should stay away from. Many elderly in Sam Mun Tsai Village, indeed, think the same and try to prevent themselves from getting involved in politics:

"If the Geopark issue becomes too political, our villagers are not going to be benefited at all. Politics is so complicated." (Mr. Shek, village's head)

Apart from the high proportion of elderly people in the village that hinders the discussions about the Geopark, the low education level of the village is the other. According to the study conducted by Mayer (2011), education helps promote political participation. In his work, he also cited various reasons to explain why advancement in education helps increase the level of participation, which include the development of cognitive skills, the general knowledge of politics, the improvement in social skills for discussions in politics, the cultivation of political interest and so on. My research collaborates with Mayer's work that the low education level of the residents is a reason for not participating in the governance of many development programmes such as the Geopark:

"We are fishermen. I only finished primary school education. I have never studied history or English. How can a fisherman know the complexity of environmental protection and the Geopark?" (Mr. Ho, 63, former fisherman representative)

In fact, some respondents think that they have no ability to understand the 'complex' Geopark issue and have a sense of powerlessness – they think that their involvement does not make a difference on the Geopark governance:

"There are so many old people in this village ... They don't even know the word 'environmentalism'. How can they be concerned to the Geopark's development?" (Mr. Cheung, 53, construction worker)

At the village level, discussions on the Geopark development are rather minimal. A village meeting is held every month that every household is invited to attend. It is an important means of disseminating information and discussing important matters that are concerned with the village. Social functions such as different performances or celebrations are widely discussed. On the contrary, issues related to the Geopark have never been mentioned in the meetings:

"I usually join the monthly village meeting. We mainly talk about different social functions such as the 45th anniversary of relocation of the village. We have never talked

about issues related to the Geopark in village meetings.” (Mr. Cheung, 53, construction worker)

6.1.3 Implications to Sen’s Capability Approach

Community involvement in decision-making process is an important means to empower citizens, so that policy makers are obliged to take citizens' needs into account when they formulate policies. It is in line with the concept of *agency* that people have the ability to choose what they want to pursue (Alkire, 2005). People’s agency is imperative in development programme, as pointed out by Sen (2004), people are not only considered as *patients*, but also *agents*:

‘The people have to be seen... as being actively involved - given the opportunity - in shaping their destiny, and not just as passive recipients or the fruits of cunning development programmes.’ (Sen, 1999, p. 53)

However, this case study shows that the local community has not been actively involved in the decision-making process. The authority proposed the establishment of Geopark in the government’s Policy Address and since then started to implement accordingly. Objectives were set without thorough consultation exercises with the local residents in Sam Mun Tsai Village. It has come into sight that the objectives of the Hong Kong Geopark were set without thoroughly taking into account the needs of the local residents. In fact, many respondents stated that there is no direct relationship between their pursuits and the existence of the Geopark:

“The highest pursuit in my life is being healthy. The Geopark has no relationship with my health.” (Ms. Cheung, owner of a store, ~50)

It actually corresponds to the *constructive* aspect of democracy as Sen (1999) proposes. Political freedom can help formulate values and priorities, and identifying the needs. Without comprehensively knowing the values of the local community, the objectives have mismatched the needs of the local community. Putting into Sen’s terms, the authority has treated the local community as *patients* rather than *agents* that the local community has been put aside in the process of setting up the Geopark, so they have had no ability to pursue their most important values such as health and harmony.

6.2 Increased Opportunity Freedom

Many respondents think that there is *no direct relationship* between their pursuits and the Geopark, but it is found out that the Geopark, to a large extent, has given the ability to the local residents to actualize

their own socio-economic development, according to their own values. Most local residents support the development of the Geopark. Many feel happier than the days before the Geopark was established. However, as argued by Sen (1992), 'being happy' is not the overall metric to assess wellbeing, which opposes to the utilitarian approach. Happiness is only one of the many operatives that constitute wellbeing. Other criteria, such as being healthy, being nourished and so on, have to be considered to assess a person's well-being. An undernourished person may be happier than a nourished person, so it is difficult to conclude that a happier person has more capabilities to actualize his/her own values (Sugden, 1993). It is acknowledged that there has been an increase in happiness after implementing the Geopark programme, but in order to obtain a better understanding of well-being, it is necessary to look at other opportunities that contribute to development.

Thanks to an increase in the number of visitors, there are certain groups of people who benefit economically from the Geopark development. Shop and restaurant owners have better business, fishermen can nowadays earn more money by selling their fish to visitors or using their fishing boats to carry visitors to the Geopark. The money that they earn can be used to do things that they value:

"Money is important to me... With money, I can have better food." (Mr. Shek, restaurant owner, 62)

"I earn more money nowadays. My sons can go to private school to receive better education. The teacher-and-student ratio is a lot smaller than other public schools." (Mr. Shek, labour worker, sometimes works to operate boat for visitors, ~40)

According to Sen (1992, 1999), economic gains can be seen as the *instruments* of achieving well-being and also the *means* to freedom. This case study collaborates with Sen's views on income, most respondents do not think income is good for its own sake, but it is a means for them to lead the kinds of lives they value or have reasons to value. For example, with more income generated from giving tours to the Geopark, Mr. Shek can have the ability to provide his sons with better education opportunities by going to private school.

Apart from an increase in economic income, there are other opportunities that the members of the local community have achieved in the Geopark. Those who help in the TPEA's workshops have learned new skills such as orienteering, communication, knowledge about the history and culture of the village. It is also important to highlight that the local residents' participation in the workshops is purely voluntary.

Local residents are not forced to participate, but rather they are free to make their decision whether to help in the TPEA's workshops:

"No one forced me to help in these workshops... With the skills that I have learned in the workshops, it's possible for me to look for a job elsewhere." (So Mui, female, retired, helper of the NGO, 50+)

Most people like So Mui who help in the TPEA's workshops, are retired. However, as they have been learning new skills and sharpening their skills in those workshops, they will be more likely to get employed if they want to get a job. The discussion here is not focused on the functioning (being employed), but the capability (they can *choose* to work). In this sense, the Geopark has increased the capability of some people like So Mui to get a job.

In a study conducted by Schischka et al. (2008) to apply the Capability Approach to two poverty alleviation programmes, participants' capabilities were increased not only by learning new skills but also discovering capabilities they already had. This case study also corresponds to their findings that some people taking part in the TPEA's activities are using their skills that they learned in their youths, and these skills became valuable in the workshops:

"Nowadays, we don't need to row a boat manually. We use petroleum to operate a boat." (Mrs. Lai, ~70, helper to demonstrate rowing techniques, Figure 12)

"My mother taught me how to make bracelets when I was small. I made many of them in the childhood and some were sold in the market... I am now back to make bracelets again to teach participants in the workshops." (Mrs. Ho, 60+, helper to teach participants making local arts, Figure 13)

The examples above indicate the Geopark not only helps some local participants to learn new skills, but also recognizes the skills that they already had and utilize these skills have become valuable again in creating new opportunities for themselves. As mentioned by Schischka et al. (2008), human development is not only learning new skills, but also discovering the capabilities that they already had.

Opportunities of many people have been increased in the Geopark, but a few respondents think their opportunities have been reduced. Some fishermen are afraid that the Geopark would restrict the areas for fishing, even though there has not been any restriction so far since the Geopark was established. As detailed in the study conducted by the HKSAR Government (2009b), the implementation of the Geopark

should not have any impact on the number of fish. In fact, it is quite unlikely that the government would restrict the fishing area because the government would like to keep the culture of traditional fishing villages (Hong Kong Geopark, 2013).



Figure 12: Mrs. Lai demonstrating the traditional way of rowing a boat



Figure 13: Mrs. Ho teaching young participants to make local arts

As discussed in Section 4.4.2, it is necessary to find out local community's values in order to operationalize opportunity freedom. It is surprising to find out that many respondents value family harmony to a very large extent. In fact, harmony does not appear on either the Nussbaum's list of capabilities or Sen's basic capabilities. Many respondents would like to avoid conflicts or arguments among the family members. They also hope their family members will treat each other with respect. Many respondents value a happy family life which reflects in the traditional Chinese culture. A Study conducted by Kwan, Bond, and Singelis (1997) shows that family harmony is important for contributing to a person's well-being in Hong Kong society. Apart from harmony, many respondents are concerned about the well-being of next generations. They want their children to be wealthy and lead their lives happily. They also hope them to be in good health conditions. It is suggested by Chuang (2005) that Confucian ethics has been influencing many Chinese people's interaction on family harmony and well-being.

The findings of my research concur with Sen and Robeyns (2003) that we should not endorse *one definite* list of capabilities. The selection of capabilities varies across different regions and cultures. This study area is a traditional fishing village in Hong Kong where people are ethnically Chinese. Many residents still inherit traditional Chinese values, particularly Confucian ethics.

7. Conclusions

In the midst of the undemocratic situation in Hong Kong, the government has been aiming to promote sustainable socio-economic development in the Geopark project, even though democracy has been well-acknowledged to be an important driver to promote sustainable development. Inspired by Sen's Capability Approach, process and opportunity freedom were analyzed to evaluate the objective of the Geopark. It is found that process freedom is limited in the development of the Geopark as the level of local participation in decision making is low. Community participation has not been attached much significance in the government's documents. No government's consultations were conducted in the early stage of establishing the Geopark to ask for the residents' opinion. At the village level, this research indicates that the local people are not willing to participate in any political affairs including the governance of the Geopark. Despite the claim that the overall political participation of Hong Kong has increased, the local residents in this case have remained reluctant to be involved in the politics. This case may suggest that the increase in political participation of Hong Kong is only confined to the urban context; it has not seen any increase in this rural village.

Although the Geopark has not been successful in supporting process freedom, it has made significant contributions to human development as it promotes opportunity freedom. The local residents stated there was no direct relationship between their values and the Geopark. Nevertheless, most of them are pleased with the Geopark programme. The increase in income can provide a means for them to increase their capabilities. Through the TPEA's workshops, some residents have acquired new skills and discovered capabilities that they already have, which are all important contributions to human development. Besides, it is discovered that the local residents value extensively family harmony and well-being of the next generation. The research has provided valuable empirical evidence that there should not be a definite list of capabilities in evaluating a project.

7.1 Policy implications

As Sen (1999) pointed out, process freedom and opportunity freedom are important in human development. Without either of the two, it would result in unfreedom. This case shows process freedom is limited in the governance of the Geopark. Therefore, to fully achieve the objective of promoting the sustainable socio-economic development of the Geopark, it is recommended that the process freedom has to be raised. Local communities ought to be engaged in the governance of the Geopark in multiple ways. First, many respondents stated that they had no *direct* relationship with the Geopark. The needs of the local community seem to have been misunderstood by the government. It is advisable that the government should include members from various local communities living in the Geopark in the decision-making body, so that local residents can make a real influence on the policies. Visits to the local communities should be made regularly by government officials, so that the policies of the Geopark can be improved in accordance with the comments given by the local communities.

Second, this case study shows that the TPEA has played a vital role in bringing the local community and the government together, as there is a strong distrust between the two parties. It would be extremely difficult for the government and the local community to genuinely communicate with each other and strive for a better governance of the Geopark. It is therefore suggested that the NGOs can play an even bigger role in the governance where their involvement should not be limited to the operational level, but also in the policy-making level. They should be included in the decision-making body to reflect residents' opinion to the government.

Last but not least, the case indicates local residents are not empowered in the governance of the Geopark, as some think environmentalism is such a "complex" concept that they do not understand.

They also do not show any interests in governing the Geopark. In order to enhance the governance, it is necessary to raise their awareness of the Geopark. It is recommended that workshops and forums be conducted in the local communities, so that they can be more engaged in the Geopark.

7.2 Reflections on the use of Capability Approach in evaluating the case

It is surprising to find out that the local residents in the case are not concerned about their process freedom, but they are happy about the development of the Geopark. They show no interest in participating in the governance of the Geopark for various reasons (as discussed in Section 6.1.2). Even though process freedom is limited, many residents are satisfied with the Geopark because of an increase in opportunity freedom. In the interviews, no respondents expressed their desire for more freedom, but most of them said they would consider leading a happy life of paramount importance. In fact, from the eyes of many respondents, freedom is merely a means to happiness. Respondents want to receive good education, healthcare, and be well-nourished for the sake of happiness. They never considered freedom as the end of development in this empirical study even though Sen's claim that freedom is both a means and an end of development. This case has raised some doubts about Sen's concept of development. First, there is no denying that the Geopark has made positive contributions to protecting the natural resources and promoting sustainable human development. If the local community was given the freedom to choose whether or not to protect the area, I do not think that they would have chosen the option of preserving the area. It would not be good to promote sustainable development if we solely think from a freedom perspective, as this case might result in a destruction of the natural environment. Second, although most residents are not concerned about the Geopark, this is their freedom to do so. If the local residents are happy with the current governance, staying aside from the decision may still be a rational choice. I, therefore, have some reservations about the claim that freedom is the best indicator of development as it is only a means to the ultimate good (i.e. happiness) and would argue that happiness could be a better indicator. My thought also corresponds with the newest UNDP's Human Development Report 2013 that measures of 'subjective well-being' have increasingly become popular to measure well-being and human development.

7.3 Future Research

This research is limited to a case study of a local community involved in the Geopark. There are many other villages located in different regions of the Geopark which have totally different socio-economic settings. Engagement level of various communities can also be different. It is difficult to make an overall evaluation of the Geopark, unless more case studies have been conducted. As mentioned earlier, this

research aims to enhance understanding of the issue, but not to make generalization. Therefore, it is suggested that more case studies of different local communities can be conducted, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The idea of this case study originated from the debate of democracy and sustainable development. I used the insights of the Capability Approach to conduct an evaluation of the objective of the Geopark. In fact, this is merely one of the many approaches that is related to democracy (particularly process freedom) and can be used for evaluation. It would be useful to use other cases and frameworks to look at how democracy affects sustainable development in Hong Kong.

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9. Appendix - Interview guide

Interview with NGO

Interviewees: the head of the TPEA and the manager responsible for the educational centre

- What has your organization been doing in involving the local community in the Geopark programme? What kinds of activities have been organizing, how many people are engaged?
- What is the importance of engaging the local community in the project?
- How success has it been in engaging the local community? Any difficulties so far? Are they willing to join the activities?
- What benefits do you expect the local community would gain from the project? Based on the answers, why do you expect them to gain these benefits?

Interview with the local community

Interviewees: Local residents living in Sam Mun Tsai Village including village's head, present and former fisherman representatives, owners of a restaurant and a food store, a boat operator, the TPEA's activity assistants, and other residents who do not have any relationship with the TPEA

- Have you heard of the Hong Kong Geopark? Do you know what it is?
- What are the objectives of the Geopark?
- Have you participated in any of the Geopark activities?
- What do you think of your participation?
- Do you feel engaged in the Geopark management?
- Do you think you make a difference in the Geopark?
- What are the impacts of the Geopark on your life?
- Do you support this Geopark programme? Why / Why not?
- What criteria do you think important in a development programme?
- Do you think the Geopark programme meets the criteria that you listed as a good development programme?
- What are your values? What do you want to pursue in life? What is the relationship of your values and the Geopark?