

Assessment of Public Engagement Approach in Various Project Stages: The Case Study of Central Market, Hong Kong

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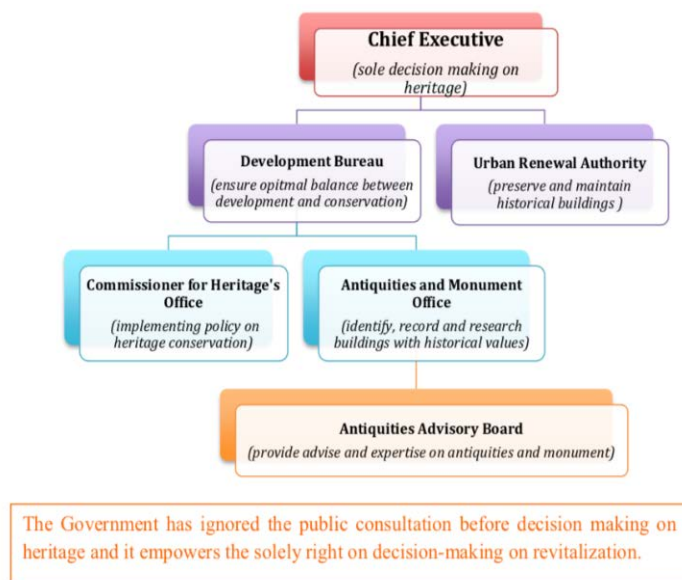
Abstract: The present research evaluates the public engagement approach in various project stages. Hong Kong had long been criticized as top-down and executive-led jurisdiction by overlooking the importance of cultural heritage and public concerns on public projects. It was suggested to the government to engage public and provide sufficient public consultation. Thereby, the government announced a series of revitalization and conversion measures in Policy Address in 2008. To carry out the measures, there were voices, because of diverse and sometimes conflicting interests, over the effect of revitalization project. On the other hand, studies reveal that there are benefits of revitalization and enhancement of public engagement approach. In pursuit of the subject, the present research aims at studying the Central Market as a case study pilot project. In October 2009, the Policy Address announced that the Central Market be revitalized. Tasked to implement the project, Urban Renewal Authority (URA) continued to adopt the people-oriented approach as the guiding principle in its core business and in heritage preservation and revitalization so as to create a sustainable development. Between government and the public, URA acts as a bridge for communication. As between URA and the public, URA conducted public consultation, set up an ad-hoc committee in January 2016 to be in charge of the project and will continuously inform the government and public with the updates and project progress. The main objectives of the present research are to assess the advantages and challenges in different stages of public engagement approach, to evaluate the engagement system, to give a comprehensive view for participation of stakeholders, and to find out effective strategies to enhance civil engagement. Research was achieved through interviews to key persons in the project, questionnaire that was distributed to community and experts in the field. Case Study of the Central Market was studied and investigated using different sources, such as newspapers, journals, etc, to evaluate the degree of public engagement in the project. Both detailed qualitative methodological approaches of interview, questionnaire, and case study, act as a synergy to demonstrate the research objectives and provide the comprehensive perceptions on the revitalization project. The results show that public participants in revitalized project have generated considerable value enhancements to social-cultural, environmental, political and economic aspect. This study provides valuable insights that the public participation can make positive contribution to sustainability in the city. The findings indicate that no any single system is flawless therefore seeking both public opinions and professional advices are also important as a comprehensive approach to achieve higher sustainability of the building.

Key words: revitalization, public engagement, public governance, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of urban planning and development projects, Hong Kong is characterized by top-down and executive-led government jurisdiction. Historically, as a British colony, the power of the Hong Kong government was greatly centralized, therefore the general public had little influence on decision making in government-led projects. Because of calling for democratization and decentralization in the 1990s, public have more opportunities for engagement. After handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China

in 1997, there was an increasing public interest in heritage conservation, different stakeholders including local residents, have been taken part in discussions and appeals for heritage conservation movements.



Following the guidelines set out in the Government's Urban Renewal Strategy, URA implements a "people first, district-based, public participatory" approach for its four core businesses i.e. redevelopment and rehabilitation, as well as heritage preservation and revitalization holistically, to create a sustainable and quality living in Hong Kong. URA acts as an interactive bridge between government and public in Hong Kong. To examine the public involvement in revitalization project, the Central Market, under supervision by URA, is chosen for study. It is a rare case that Central Market being in the prime commercial area in Central had been for so many years left dilapidated and

Figure 1 – Organization Chart for Heritage Conservation in Hong Kong

unattended to, it attracted tremendous attentions and provided insights into the major issues in public engagement in heritage conservation. The consensus among different stakeholders and public were built up through the series of elaborate public engagement exercise. The public aspirations on design and useage were adopted by URA. Although there have been many voices on enhancing public engagement, there are very few papers reinstating the significant role of public governance in revitalization projects. Public governance is the most essential drive to control time, budget, quality of projects and complies with existing statutory requirements. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To evaluate the degree of public engagement under current governance approach.
2. To examine the advantages and challenges stemmed from major social concern and social benefits to the neighborhood.
3. To assess whether the existing public engagement framework is comprehensive for local situation with a benchmark.
4. To recommend improvements on existing a public engagement framework for enhancement of public participation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hong Kong Government has long been criticized that there is not enough public engagement and only favors on the privileged groups on economic development [1]. Though the government has launched a series of conservation, conversion, revitalization and redevelopment measures in 2007 [2], the society are still questioning whether the measures can fulfill social benefit and whether the public projects have considered enough on social needs. In response to the social skepticism, the government has put a lot of resources on conducting public engagement to involve higher degree of public participation in public projects [3]. Since revitalization projects, which have been put forward in many districts are closely affecting the lifestyles and living quality of local communities, this paper is to rethink whether enhancing public engagement within the decision-making process for revitalization projects can help facilitate balance of interests under current governance approach. In below literature review, this is to study public governance model, the significance of public participation and the public engagement model.

2.1 Public Governance

Governance is related to the processes of interaction and decision-making among actors involved in collective problem, often in terms of 'good governance'. Governance may take many forms, but the ultimate concept concerns ways of 'creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action',

normally with reference to the activities and structures of governments [4]. A variety of entities can govern. The Human Development Report issued in 2002 claimed that “good” governance rid societies of corruption, give people the rights, and provide capacity to participate in the decisions-making on those policies affecting their daily lives [5]. “Good” governance generates rooms for sustaining the environment [6]. Others views good governance as participatory and transparent that foster long-term collaboration among public sector, voluntary and local concern group.

Beside the criticizing conventional governmental system which is top-down and closed decision-making process, there is increasingly focused on local and community governance modes which is horizontal, inclusive and participatory form of the governing process contributes to an ideal form of administrative process to foster local knowledge and action to be linked [7]. Collaborative governance involves the government, community and local individuals working together in a collective decision-making process focusing on the dynamic of network process (covers both the informal and formal relationships), governance structure, power balance, and effective communication modes [8].

Advocates of collaborative governance highlight better reciprocal understanding and expectation as well as multiple sectors voluntary participation [9]. Another benefit of collaborative governance is to provide a new participatory space for stakeholders to work together and agree on solutions in urban decision-making processes [10]. Collaborative governance can produce long-term agreements that resolve local conflicts and even generate social and relational outcomes via collectively seeking solutions to shared problems [11]. Furthermore, broad stakeholder participation and the quality of interactions among different parties can create unexpected process-based innovative alternatives [12]. Having said that, critics dominated by the regimes of powerful actors do not believe community-based approaches, such as ‘ideal-typical and normative prescriptions’ worked well [13]. Community based collaborative governance’s emphasis of a horizontal, network-based governance structure, while critics of the approach have emphasized the tendency for central government to exert a vertical, hierarchical influence as a hybrid nature of governance, or complex hybrid form of government/governance, where both horizontal networks and vertical modes co-exist [14].

2.2 Public Engagement / Participation

According to the International Association for Public Participation, public participation is defined as the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process with 5 stages in the planning of public engagement including: 1. Define initiative/project, goals, participants, timelines and resources / budget; 2. Determine level of public engagement and choose techniques through the worksheets; 3. Implement the public engagement; 4. Make recommendations and/or decisions and share results; and 5. Evaluate the public engagement process. With the term of Public participation in the 1992 Rio Declaration, Principle 10 of which refers to ‘the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level’, coupled with ‘appropriate access to information’, states’ facilitation of ‘public awareness’ and ‘effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings’, it means that public participation is the vital part of sustainable development. Sustainability models are emerging with aspirations to the public participation for resolving the disagreements and conflicts between the government and public. So, community participation and satisfaction are extremely important for the revitalization project.

The relationship of Public Engagement and Governance are co-related, there are keep rising of concern by government on the issues of supporting and promoting high-quality, ongoing public participations [15]. And public participation is also a vital part in decision-making process and leadership is necessary for consistent and effective public participation activities. Several benefits generated from the public engagement campaign are as followings:

1. Significance of the decision making on the revitalization project: shifted from the importance of governance to local interest;
2. Support: transformed from Top minority (upper-middle-class) to a Bottom majority (grass-roots);
3. Changed the community interests: historic and architectural to the cultural and societal;
4. Increasing arguing from public perceptions at the development initial stage rather than through lobbying to reflect opinions from public on revitalization project, and better than evaluation by a designated expertise / professional.

In contrast, Beresford (2002) [16] notes two fundamental contradictions in public participation: enhanced political interest, but public dissatisfaction; official priority but very limited achievements and resourcing. Governments are investing considerable time and resources in the field of collaborative governance as it proliferates throughout many sectors. The increased public involvement that collaborative governance brings is often more costly than traditional forms of governance [17]. One study has shown that involving the public in science and decision-making costs about twice as much for a project than when the work is performed without public involvement [18]. And the outcomes of collaborative governance are still highly uncertain [19]. For these reasons, it is important that collaborative governance is only introduced and used when really warranted and various forms that it can take should be carefully designed.

2.3 Benchmark to Assess Public Engagement Mechanism

Yang (2005) [20] suggested that a comprehensive public engagement mechanism shall comprise the major criteria, including legitimacy, fairness, transparency and early involvement of public etc. to generate an effective communication and positive interaction for building trust between the government official and the public [20]. Alternatively, Yan (2017) [22] proposed that a sound mechanism is stemmed from the degree of public participation (e.g. from control taken by citizens, consult citizens to pacify the citizens etc.) which means he suggested a large degree of public involvement in the consultation system results to a higher effectiveness of public engagement [22]. Below is the comparison between two theories and to suggest the one which is fittest to be the benchmark for further assessment of case study in this paper.

Table 1 – Public Engagement Benchmark Comparison

	Yang's Theory (2005)	Yan's Theory (2017)
Rationale	Trust	People Involvement
Structure	A standardized framework	People-oriented framework
Approach	Mix with top-down and bottom up	Bottom up
Assessment Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legitimacy - Transparency - Sufficiency of Time for public consultation - Fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Openness - Degree of Participation (Passive Versus Active) - Level / Depth of Participation (Influence of participants)
Means of Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information gathering - Consultation (e.g. Survey, questionnaire etc.) - Feedback / Interaction (e.g. Public Forum/Workshop etc.) - Mediation of conflicts (e.g. Press launches / Meetings arranged by District Council etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation in Decision-making process (e.g. provide opinions in design brief and scope of works etc.) - Vote (e.g. public have the rights to agree and disagree the decisions)
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With a clear standard to design public engagement framework - To streamline the process of the public engagement mechanism → efficiency & a certain degree of effective obtained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasize on rights of democracy - Encourage people to express and public discussion - Higher acceptance by public due to rights of decision-making back to public
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elitism / Professionalism may dominate the public majority as most power is still possessed by the authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inefficiency / Ineffectiveness if no consensus be reached; - Policy failure if manipulation of politicians occurs

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methods adopted for the study being the combination of interview with URA Representatives, questionnaire with the target respondents comprised residents living or familiarized of

Central, as they are the most be affected the group and case study of Central Market. Figure 2 and table 2 show a clear research framework for this study.

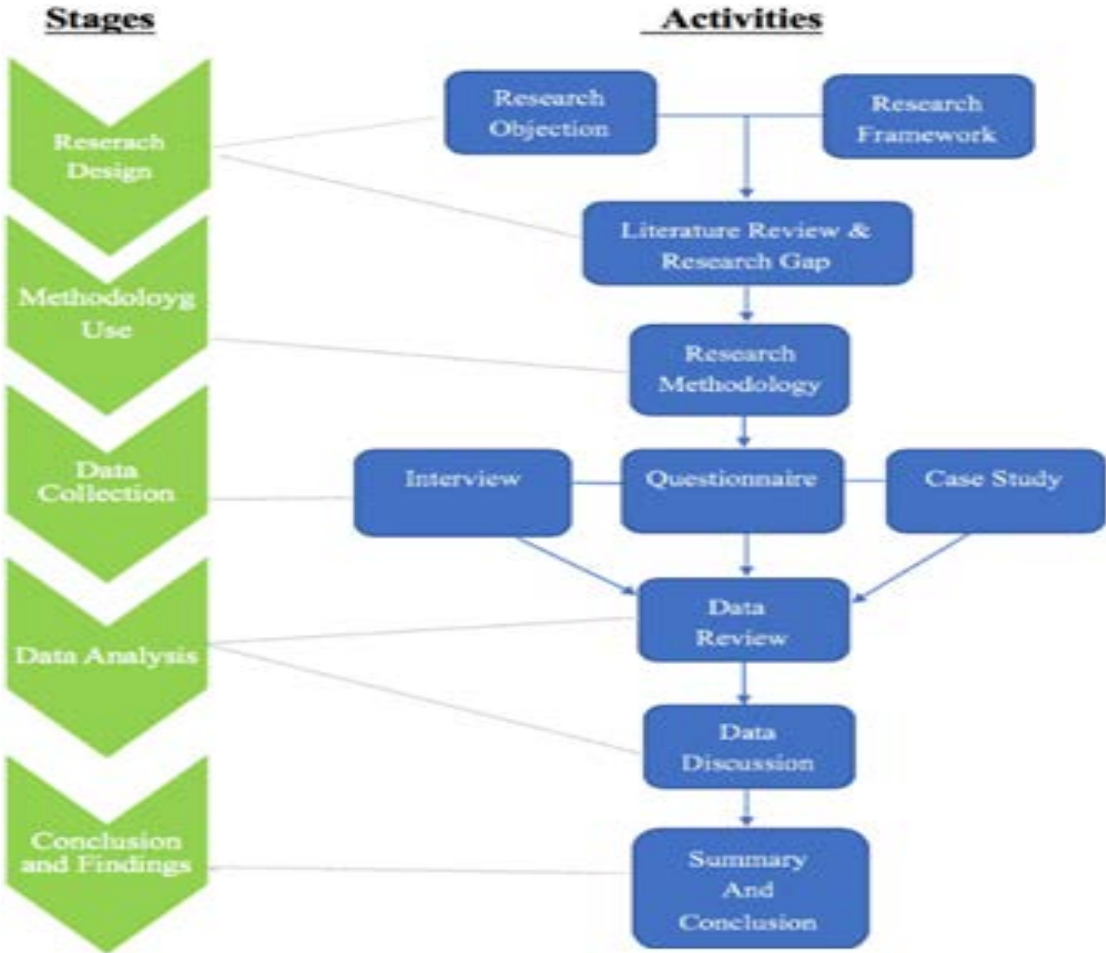


Figure 2 – Research Methodology

4. FINDING FROM INTERVIEW

4.1 Factors Contribute to Revitalization Decision Making

The AHP decomposes a complex multifaceted problem into a hierarchical structure consisting of the goal (at the top of the hierarchy) and criteria (at the bottom of the hierarchy). Based on literature review, 12 most significant factors affecting decision making of revitalization are identified and categorized under 4 main categories: economic, social-cultural, environmental and political as shown in Figure 3. Implementation of the AHP method in the revitalization project - Central Market by Urban Renewal Authority (URA) was carried out according to following procedure:

- Step1: Setting up hierarchy to break problem down into components and carried out building
- Step 2: Pair-wise comparison matrix to compares the identified factors for establishing AHP structure
- Step 3: Assigning priorities ratio based on qualitative scale of 1-9 (higher value, greater importance)
- Step 4: Establishing priority vector to provide the relative weights for each factor on a scale out of 1.0
- Step 5: Logical consistency ratio helps to check the achieved results are acceptable ($\geq 10\%$)
- Step 6: Linearly combine the various priority matrices to achieve the final rank for each factor

4.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis showed that social-cultural aspect average weighted 0.325 (for the 5 respondents) is the most important among environmental, political and economic aspect, weighted 0.312, 0.312 and 0.052 respectively, consistency ratio is 0.1%, from the level 2 criterion. These results demonstrate that social-cultural factors such as social inclusiveness, cultural and heritage value is a prime aspect in

revitalization decision making. Calculated weight 0.490 showing that regulations is the highest priority in level 3 sub-criterion under economic aspect. Followings are economic viability (w=0.449) and economic viability (w=0.062), consistency ratio is 0.8%. This highlights the challenges of compliance to relevant regulations and the future economic viability and balancing the development cost. Weighted data showing that social inclusiveness (0.599) is the most important in level 3 sub-criterion under social-cultural aspect. Followings are cultural traditions (w=0.219) and economic viability (w=0.183), consistency ratio is 3.3%. Instead, social inclusiveness and cohesion is the major concern in revitalization decision making under social-cultural aspect. Reuse structural elements (w=0.481) is the highest priority factor in level 3 sub-criterion under environmental aspect. Followings are landfill waste (w=0.452) and recycling materials (w=0.067), consistency ratio is 0.4%. Considering the environmental aspect, people see the potential to conserve by reusing of structural elements. Lastly, data analysis showed that indication public involvement with the highest weight (0.447) is the most important among government policies (w=0.436) and stakeholders' interest (w=0.117) in level 3 sub-criterion under political aspect, consistency ratio is 0.1%. This indicates that the larger the extend of public involvement, the higher the satisfaction of the revitalization project.

Table 2 – Data collection methods

Data Type	Source	Description	Quantity / Data
Interview	Transcription from URA management interview	Semi-structured questions using AHP are asked to gain the first-hand information from the standpoint of URA for determining relationship of various factors relevant to governance, decision making	5 interviews
Questionnaire	Conduct street poll with designed questionnaire at various location near the vicinity	The data collected from surveys using AHP can help to examine the extend of public participatory	50 questionnaires
Case Study	Report, documentation and statistics data from meeting notes, journal and website etc.	Information gathered for public engagement benchmarks comparison and assessment	<u>Stage 1:</u> meeting notes <u>Stage 2:</u> Report for 6000 questionnaires, 2 charrettes <u>Stage 3:</u> Report for 4000 questionnaires, 1 public forum

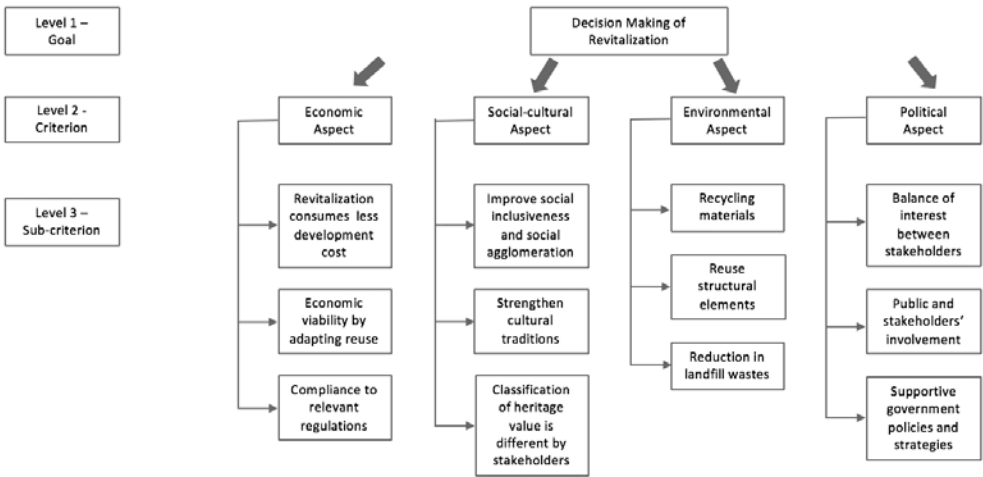


Figure 3 – Decision making factors of revitalization under governance approach

4.3 Discussion and Policy Implications

The combined results of interview in qualitative analysis (generated from part 1 & 2 of the interview question) and AHP analysis (generated from part 3 of the interview question) highlight the ways in which the factors related to community-initiation can contribute to revitalization decision making. As a result, several policy recommendations are made for revitalization in current governance approach. The social-cultural concerns the involvement of local community in revitalization project can strengthen their sense of belonging and allows them to express their idea regarding living environment therefore enhance social inclusiveness. This is a relative successful bottom-up model of revitalization. In regard to environmental aspect, the interview results show that government officers perceive positive impact on environment by reusing structural elements. The ultimate objective of any revitalization approach should maintain the integrity of the individual heritage building and preserve the original urban form and pattern of the surrounding area [23]. For political aspects, the decentralization of decision making can be achieved by launching policies to facilitate public involvement in revitalization. As a result, positive sense of belonging can be enriched. Regarding the economic, it concerns of compliance with existing regulations such as fire safety requirements would affect the ease of revitalization because of compressing cost and time engaged in obtaining building and planning approvals from relevant government departments.

5. FINDING FROM QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

5.1 Evaluate the degree of public engagement under current governance approach

Figure 4 shows the hierarchy display of level of public engagement by used analytical hierarchy process (AHP). It is also the quantify related factors for ranking based on their level of importance. There are included 5 criterions for the evaluation of level of public engagement under existing governance approaches: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. Sub-criterions are developed to show the items that need to elaborate of those 5 criterions.

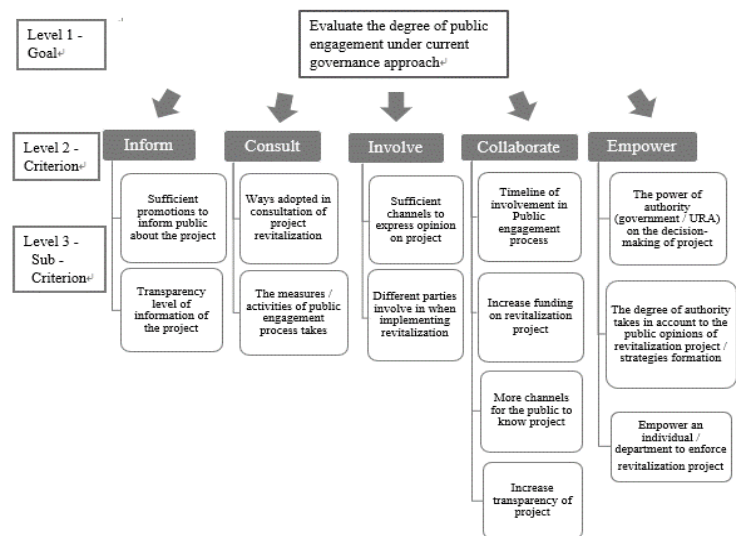


Figure 4 – Evaluate the degree of public engagement under governance approach

5.2 Data Analysis

Part I: Background information and Personal details

The age group of majority interviewees are between 30 – 39, and most of them are living or working within the district are around 3 – 8 years. Around 90% of interviewees know that what revitalization project is but they do not express their views on the revitalization projects before. Nearly all of them understand that Central Market is under revitalizing, but some of them do not know the progress of revitalization work.

Part II: Knowledge on Revitalization Project of Central Market

Most of interviewees know about the Central Market but they have limited knowledge of the revitalization project of Central Market, also not much of them have been visited it before. Only 1 interviewee expressed his/her view on the revitalization project of Central Market, the others are mentioned that they have no idea / not interested on it. It showed that Government and URA did not promote the message of revitalization of Central Market much at the initial stage of consultation process.

About 60% of interviewees do not have any idea of the parties who has overseen the revitalization project of Central Market. And followed by it, about 16% of interviewees selected URA that has the sole power to oversee revitalization project of Central Market. More than 80% of interviewees stated that they knew the project through media / News, then followed by through Peer / Forums / Facebook and Government Gazettes / Websites. About 42% of them stated that they can express their views on the project through media, and only 28% of them mentioned that they can express opinions through Government websites. People considered that they can only express their views through unofficial channels mainly like media rather than official website set up by government / execution parties. Moreover, the data collected which show that the revitalization project is not so attractive to the people who working / living nearby to visit. It seems that the promotion works of the message of revitalization of Central Market to public are not enough.

Part III: Opinions on Revitalization Project and Public Engagement Process

Most of interviewees selected that Government / execution parties should be established more channels for public to know about the project, also followed by increase the funding and transparency of the project, those 3 elements can help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of project. Moreover, majority of interviewees selected that benefits to the community and public recognition as the most important factors when considering revitalization project of Central Market, then followed by the revitalization feasibility and public recognition. Those factors are crucial to lead the project being execute successfully. In addition, most of interviewees will decide to express their views under the situation which related to their own interests and think that Government / execution parties should establish more open and public ways such as street polling for the public to express their views on the project.

Part IV: To examine the degree of satisfaction of public participation, sufficient channels to express views and level of transparency of information on revitalizing project of Central Market under Governance approach

It mainly shows that interviewees rated the part of consult then followed by involvement in the public publication process are the most important criteria compared with others. Also, it shows that the similar level of importance of information transparency and sufficient channels of the project to the public to know about it, with the equal importance level between the sub-criteria of sufficient channels to express opinion on project and different parties involve in when implementing revitalization. Meanwhile, interviewees rated the measures / activities of public engagement process take that is a moderate importance of factor adopted in consultation of project revitalization. Finally, although the power of authority (Government / URA) on the decision-making of project are override others sub-criteria and parties, interviewees also rated a certain level of the importance level that the execution parties need to take in account of the public's opinion towards revitalization project / strategies formation throughout the whole process and empower an individual / department to enforce revitalization project. For overall comment on the project, people stand moderate on the performance of revitalization project which implemented execution parties.

6. CASE STUDY: ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM

Case Study Research is conducted to assess if URA's mechanism is comprehensive for absorbing public opinions. First, the criterion for benchmarking have been developed (see Figure 5); Second, a case study will focus on URA public engagement report published by URA - "Urban Floating Oasis: Public Engagement" in 2013 and "The Central Oasis- Design Concept Roving Exhibition" report in 2011 and its result report of Central Market questionnaire surveys [24]; Third, URA's approach and process public engagement will be evaluated and analyzed if it can fulfill the criterion.

6.1 Data Collection

Public Opinion Survey in 2010 & 2011 - The public engagement programme started with Public Opinion Surveys conducted by AC Nielsen on 2010 and 2011 [24]. The opinions and results were generated by conducting street poll that focused on uses and general concepts and mainstream direction of building design. Design Concept Roving Exhibition - According to the Central Oasis: Design Concept Roving Exhibition Report published by URA in 2011, since the Central Market Revitalization Project

was announced in 2009, the Community Advisory Committee had received the public opinions on future use of the building and their expectation [25].

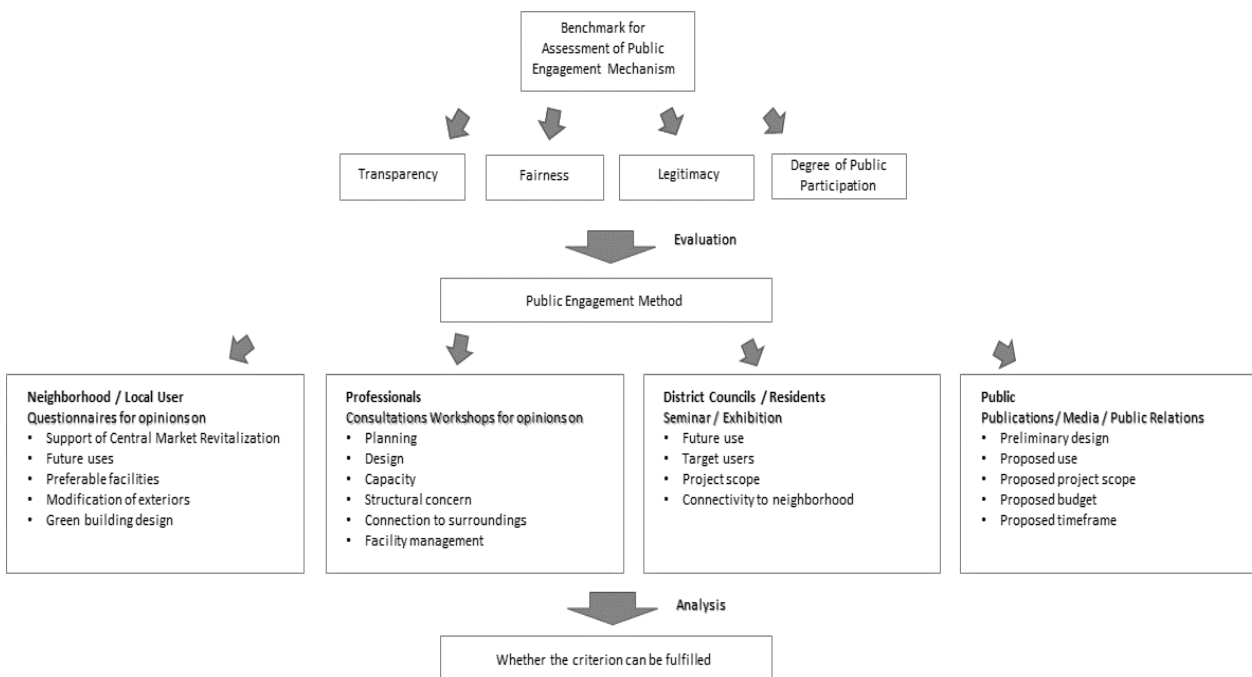


Figure 5 – Work Flow for Case Study Research of the Public Engagement Process

6.2 Data Analysis

As shown in Figure 6, the above is a flow chart to explain the consultation process of stage 1 – 3 URA’s public engagement process. This paper is to analyzed whether URA’s public consultation process could achieve a comprehensive approach:-

Public engagement methods that incorporated public views in the scope defining via open and fair consultation strategies, including absorption of public views, workshops for brainstorming, publications of public media for interaction of the authority and public in order to meet the above criterion. In that, it enables absorption of public voices as public participation; the project information, process and result of public consultation etc. were released to public to achieve transparency; After the absorption of public view, URA has attempted to generate / consider feasible public opinions into the project design direction, so that the general public can feel being respect, in order to achieve legitimacy; And, the consultation process is open for all and public have equal right to participate, so as to achieve fairness. The survey shows that community satisfaction in revitalization is very important for the revitalization project. The process and result of surveys achieved a high degree of transparency for revealing the details to public. Others criterion were principally fulfilled. It is advisable that URA surveys could absorb more public views on design intent, e.g. taking the example of Kai Tai Fantasy Competition held by the Development Bureau and Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO) for Kai Tai development [26], URA could hold a public design competition (subject to time and budget consideration etc.) to allow more public input. The exhibition helped absorption of public views and professional opinions. Most criterion were principally achieved and encouraged participants. URA studied the feasibility and generated the practical alternatives under a practicable solution to strike a balance between construction cost and social benefit, so as to maximize public interests. Under the analysis of the benchmark, URA’s public engagement was able to achieve the criterion in an efficient approach as analyzed in the above. To achieve a comprehensive approach, it is advisable that URA may arrange public design competition to consolidate public input in design intent, subject to time and budget consideration. Also, URA is able to maintain collecting public views which can fulfill the criterion while ensuring public authority / professionalism to take lead in the project.

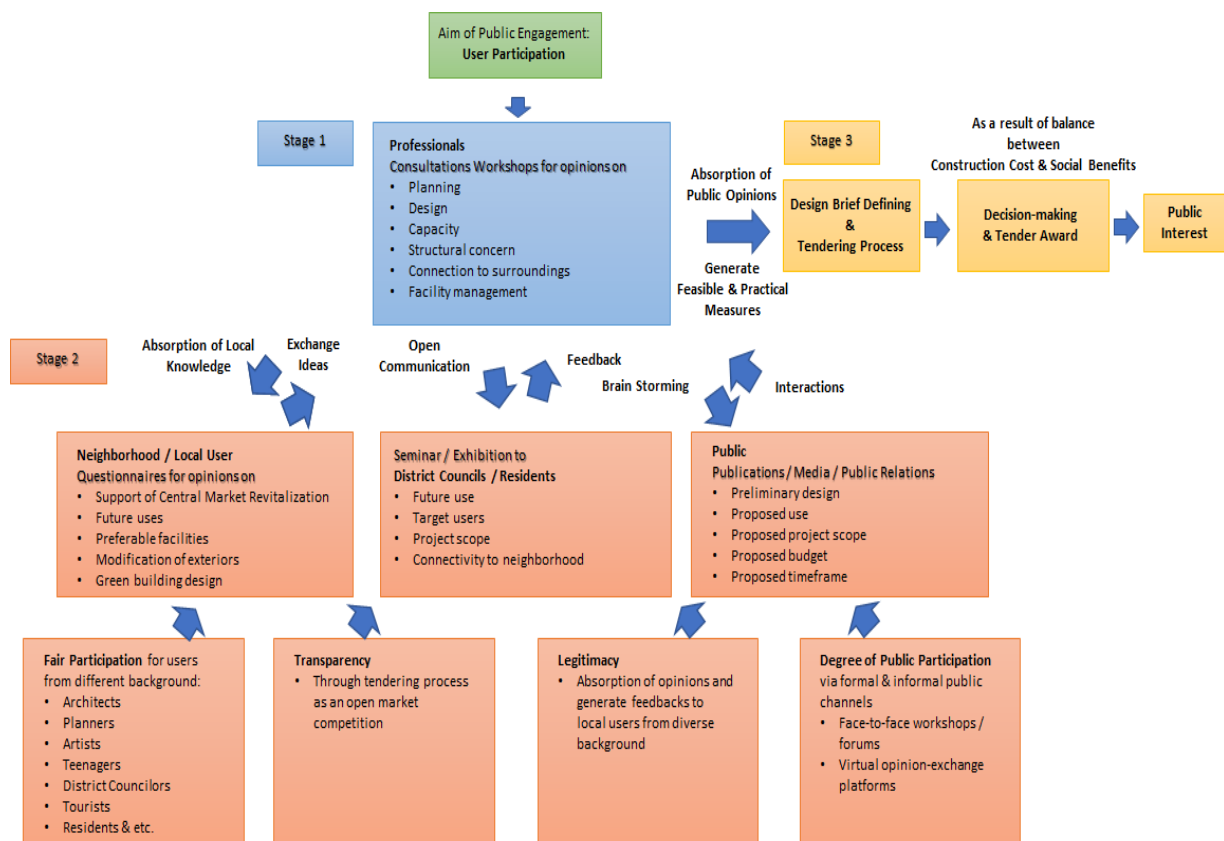


Figure 6 – The Public Engagement Approach to Carry Out Public Consultation

7. CONCLUSION

The interaction of governance and public engagement is important to public revitalization project. Public participation should be engaged in decision-making and considers social benefits. It can also help public to better understand the project requires to fulfil social expectation, practicability and the compliance of statutory requirements [27]. To balance diverse groups from conflicting interests, decision-makers shall define stakeholder's interests and concern, then to formulate the best suit public engagement mechanism for the project implementation and provide adequate publications and measures on public relations strategies to explain their decisions to stakeholders that how social values and concerns are being absorbed. This is to convince the society and liaise supports from the public. Under the current governance approach, the revitalization of Central Market has involved sufficient of public participation overall. This paper recommends the officials to arrange strategies on public relations and social liaison teams to increase mutual trust between the government and the public.

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