

# Implications of Community Participation for Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism

## -- A Case Study at Yim Tin Tsai, Sai Kung, Hong Kong

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### ABSTRACT

In order to pursue sustainable development, the concept of community participation is becoming more and more important for rural tourism, and community residents will become the main body of tourism development. Taking Yim Tin Tsai in Sai Kung, Hong Kong as a case study, this paper explores the various subjects of community participation in Yim Tin Tsai, analyses in depth the mode of community participation in Yim Tin Tsai in the process of rural restoration and tourism development, and explores the positive and negative factors affecting the community participation in the development of rural tourism in an attempt to provide corresponding research materials and references for the sustainable development of tourism and community participation in other rural areas.

### KEYWORDS

Sustainable Tourism; Rural Tourism; Community Participation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the proliferation of commercialisation and homogenisation of attractions around the world, tourists have instead begun to seek the "authenticity" of tourist destinations[1], wanting to experience authentic local cuisine, simple folklore, and more.

As a result of this shift in tourism demand, destination operators or governments have begun to adjust their tourism products to explore and develop more enclosed and private living areas. However, this may cause varying degrees of disturbance or even intrusion into the lives of indigenous or permanent residents. This phenomenon is most prominent in rural tourist spots, where tourists entering the living areas of villagers will inevitably generate noise, rubbish, and so on, affecting the original lives of the villagers and imposing a burden on them. In addition, tourists from different places will bring their own cultures, concepts, religions, etc., which will affect or even conflict with the original cultural environment of the villages[2]. In the long run, villagers will resent tourists and developers, and even resist their continued development in the areas concerned. The number of tourists may also exceed their own cultural and ecological carrying capacity, ultimately causing damage to the original appearance and authenticity of the countryside.

In the balanced relationship between tourism and community, many scholars have made explorations, such as Tosun Cevat (2000), who argued that community participation in developing countries has participatory limitations, structural limitations, and cultural limitations, which requires the improvement of social governance structures, as well as the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and multinational tourism companies [3].

Community participation is a very important concept in sustainable tourism development, and studies have pointed out that community attachment and community participation are key factors influencing support for sustainable tourism development [4, 5]. Community participation has significant value for tourism in terms of economy, and also identified positive impacts of community participation on social and cultural aspects in rural areas [6]. Improving residents' community participation is not only beneficial to tourism ontology, but its also has economic, social and ecological benefits [5]. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to community participation and involve the community in the whole process of tourism development, planning, operation, management, supervision and benefit distribution as much as possible.

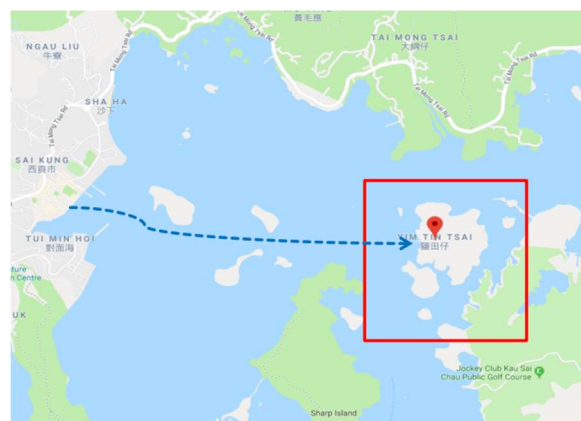
The Hong Kong Government introduced the New Nature Conservation Policy (NNCP) in 2004[7], which imposes administrative restrictions on the activities of residents in conservation areas, largely restricting the livelihood and development of local residents and arousing the dissatisfaction and opposition of many residents. Until 2018, the Hong Kong government set up the Rural Conservation Office, which began to pay attention to the needs of villagers and carried out restoration plans for Hong Kong's rural areas, such as repairing bridges and roads and renovating houses, aiming to help revitalize the countryside, with the more typical ones being the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, the Hing Chun Yeuk, and the Lai Chi Wo. However, these villages have also experienced various problems on the road to development, such as the publicity and development of tourism, which has led to a large number of tourists entering the villagers' living areas and affecting their normal lives. The negative effects of the "double-edged sword" of tourism have ultimately reduced the enthusiasm of villagers to continue to develop and support tourism.

Yim Tin Tsai in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, is one of the ancient villages in Hong Kong with a long history, and its restoration work and tourism development pay much attention to the community participation of villagers, with few conflicts arising from the relevant stakeholders[9], and in recent years, it has received better development and prospects for sustainable development. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze the specific methods and measures of community participation in tourism development and sustainable development of Yim Tin Tsai in Saigon, hoping to provide experience and inspiration for the development of sustainable tourism in other rural areas.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF YIM TIN TSAI, SAI KUNG, HONG KONG

### 2.1. Nature Overview

Yim Tin Tsai, also known as Yim Tin Tsai, is an island in the Sai Kung district of Hong Kong, China, located in the Sai Kung Inland Sea. It has a diverse ecological landscape and a unique natural scenery. Its area is less than 1 square kilometer, with very poor resources and scarce arable land. It takes about 15 minutes to reach Yim Tin Tsai by boat from the Sai Kung Pier in Hong Kong.



**Figure 1.** Location of Yim Tin Tsai

## **2.2. Humanities Overview**

The residents of Yim Tin Tsai originated from Wuhua County, Bao'an, Guangdong Province. In the early days, the original residents of the Hakka people here used sea salt as their main trade commodity, and set up fields to dry salt, and also relied on the sale of salt to make a living. In its full bloom, more than 400 people lived on the island, making a living by drying salt, fishing and growing rice. By the 19th century, Yim Tin Tsai had developed into one of the five major salt fields in Hong Kong, and its salt production could supply the entire Sai Kung district.

From the 1960s the village began to migrate outward, mainly to Europe to earn a living, due to the urban development of Hong Kong and the boom in salt transportation from the mainland. By 1998, Yim Tin Tsai had become a completely uninhabited island. since 2010, the original inhabitants of the village have pushed for the revitalization of the village in the hope of changing the status quo of a deserted island.

In addition, Yim Tin Tsai was one of the major missionary areas in Hong Kong in the early days. By the middle of the 19th century, the entire village was practicing Catholicism. St. Joseph's Church on Yim Tin Tsai Island, built in the 1890s when Father Joseph of Austria came to Yim Tin Tsai as a missionary, was awarded the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award for Excellence in Cultural Heritage Conservation in 2005, and was again awarded the Award of Merit for the Salt Farm Restoration Project ten years later.

## **2.3. Tourism Development Overview**

At present, the Tourism Strategy of Yim Tin Tsai is relatively well planned, including tourist transportation, tourist attractions, tourist food and tourist souvenirs. Due to the small size of Yim Tin Tsai, several hours are completely sufficient for sightseeing, therefore Yim Tin Tsai does not provide accommodation type products to tourists.

Yim Tin Tsai has a total of 12 humanistic and natural landscapes: St. Joseph's Church, salt field, Village office, House of Father St. Blessed Joseph, Ancestral home of Father Chen Chi Ming, Centennial camphor tree, Twin Pavilions, Jade Belt Bridge, Living Spring Well, YTT Cultural Relics Exhibition Room (Chengbo School), Hakka village house, Han Dynasty ruins. The island also offers ocean scenery, with mangrove forests dotting the coastline. The Salt and Light Conservation Center also offers a wide variety of themed activities such as eco-tours, island tours, and pilgrimage tours, as well as workshops for visitors to experience the production of sea salt.

Boats run daily (except Mondays) between Sai Kung pier and Yim Tin Tsai. Adult round-trip ferry tickets and admission tickets to visit YTT Cultural Relics Exhibition Room cost HK\$70, and visits to churches are free-will donations.

Yim Tin Tsai features a Michelin chef's restaurant that blends Cantonese cuisine with Western favorites. There are also some classic seaside delicacies run by villagers, the most distinctive of which are the traditional Hakka Chaguo.

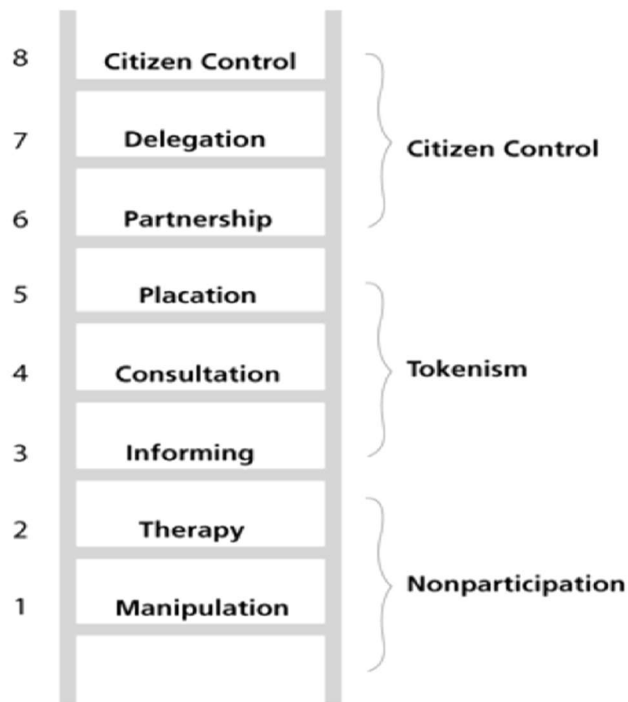
Between 2013-2019, the number of visitors to Yim Tin Tsai has been relatively stable, reaching a maximum of 37,108 a year and a minimum of 25,728. Visitors arrive by way of individual, groups, visitors and tour company, with individual and groups being the main modes of arrival.

# **3. RELEVANT CONCEPTS AND THEORIES**

## **3.1. Arnstein's Ladder**

Arnstein's Ladder is an academic theory developed by Arnstein in 1969 that describes the different stages of civic engagement through the metaphor of a ladder[8]. Arnstein's ladder of participation

showing hierarchical rungs of different levels of participation from the lower rungs of ‘Nonparticipation’ including Manipulation and Therapy, the mid-level rungs of ‘Tokenism’ including Informing, Consultation, and Placation, to the highest rungs of ‘Citizen Control’ including Partnership, Delegation, and Citizen Control.



**Figure 2.** Arnstein’s Ladder

The theory was initially used to assess the degree of political participation of urban citizens, and later also applied or adapted to the field of citizen participation in urban construction planning, etc., which is less studied and utilized in China at present. The theory has a good fit with describing community participation in rural tourism, so this paper will also try to describe the degree of community in Yim Tin Tsai through Arnstein's Ladder.

### **3.2. Theoretical Framework for Community Participation**

Tosun (1999) based on Arnstein's Ladder, extended its three broad categories, namely Nonparticipation, Tokenism, and Civic Control, into Coercion, Induced, and Spontaneous. He also elaborated on four aspects of each model of participation, namely Nature of participation, Degree of empowerment, Communication channels and Involvement of external parties. Table 1 shows the specifics of their definitions and extensions.

Based on the specifics of Table 1, the following section will match the different levels of hierarchies such as the level of community participation based on the analysis of community participation patterns in Yim Tin Tsai.

**Table 1.** Forms of Community Participation (Tosun,1999)

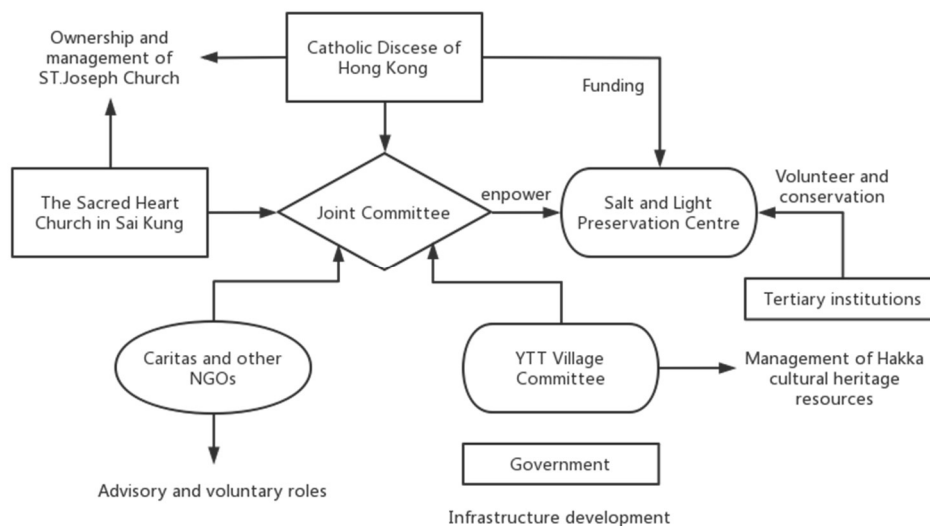
Forms of Community Participation	Defining Characteristics	
Spontaneous	Nature of participation	Voluntary, Active; self-planning Participate in whole process of development: decision-making, implementation, sharing benefit and evaluation.
	Degree of empowerment	High, Bottom-up approach: host community has full access of development matters.
	Communication channels	Informal interactions, self-planning, direct/face-to-face interactions.
	Involvement of external parties	Limited, mainly on providing assistance to host community, not taking control.
Induced	Nature of participation	Manipulated, Passive; degree of tokenism Participation in implementation and sharing benefits.
	Degree of empowerment	Medium, Top-down approach: by consultation, choice between proposed alternatives and feedback.
	Communication channels	Formalized structure of implementation, mostly indirect communications.
	Involvement of external parties	High degree of involvement, government is usually the decision-maker.
Coercive	Nature of participation	Passive, high degree of tokenism and manipulation. Represent as paternalism or non-participation. Participation in implementation stage only, not necessarily sharing benefits.
	Degree of empowerment	Low, Top-down approach: limited or no consultation, choice between proposed limited alternatives or no choice.
	Communication channels	Formalized structure of implementation, indirect communications, opinion of host community may not being heard.
	Involvement of external parties	External parties such as government take full control on development matters.

## 4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL IN YTT

### 4.1. Existing Community Involvement

The main community participants in Yim Tin Tsai can be divided into six parts: the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, the Sacred Heart Church in Sai Kung, Yim Tin Tsai(YTT) Village Committee, NGOs, Salt and Light Conservation Center and the Joint Committee.

The most important of these participants is the Joint Committee, which is the institution that provides and sets the direction for the development of this small island and has a Chairman of the Joint Committee; the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong is the institution that owns and manages St. Joseph's Church, and the Sacred Heart Church in Sai Kung focuses on actively organizing and participating in the religious affairs; and the Salt and Light Conservation Center, a non-profit-making group set up by villagers on their own initiative, is supervised and monitored by the Board of Directors, and the Executive Committee is responsible for co-ordinating the work of different task forces and promoting the policies of the Board of Directors[9]. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held each year to review and approve the Audit Report and to discuss development issues. The main role of the YTT Village Council is to monitor the work of the Salt and Light Conservation Center and to be assisted by representatives of the Village Committee as needed.



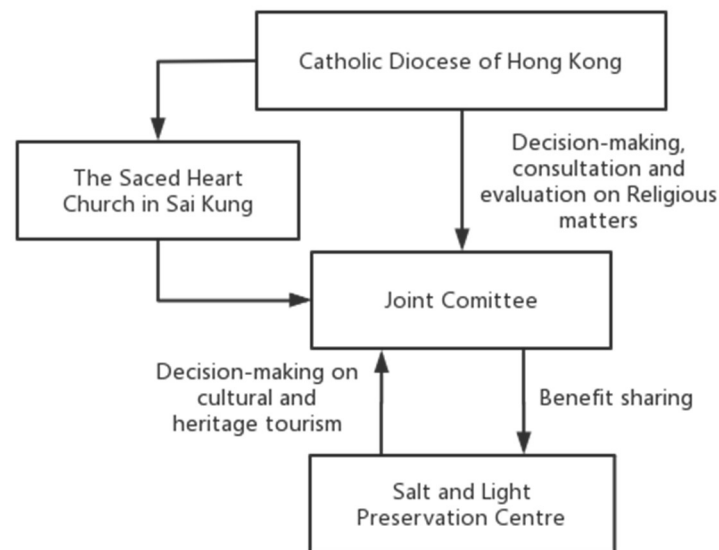
**Figure 3.** Community involvement model

As can be seen through the figure 3, there are other organizations in addition to the ones mentioned above, the Salt and Light Conservation Center actively seeks cooperation and volunteer services with tertiary institutions. It has provided heritage services and docent training to students of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and recruited volunteers to go to Yim Tin Tsai. The government also provides infrastructure for tourism development in Yim Tin Tsai. The Government is not in control of the development of Yim Tin Tsai, and there is no third-party commercial company that can determine the development path of Yim Tin Tsai, everything is decided by the Joint Committee, every villager was able to actively express their views.

### 4.2. Forms of Community Participation

According to the theoretical framework of community participation in 3.2, combined with the community participation model of Yim Tin Tsai, it can be inferred that the stage of community

participation in Yim Tin Tsai, is: Spontaneous. The nature of participation, degree of empowerment, communication channels, and the involvement of external parties all fit with it.



**Figure 4.** Forms of community participation

As can be seen from the diagram, the high level of community participation and clear institutional responsibilities have created a virtuous cycle of interaction between the community's main responsibilities. The Salt and Light Conservation Center offers training courses, round-trip kaito (i.e. tourist transportation), guided tours, and workshops, such as sea salt making workshops, Hakka tea and fruit making classes, and guided tours around the island. You can also search for related information on the official website of the Salt and Light Conservation Center. In terms of community service, Salt and Light Conservation Center had openly recruited volunteers as guides or facilitators from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 2017. As the good community engagement model of Yim Tin Tsai and the sustainable development of tourism attracted the attention of the government, the government launched a three-year tourism pilot scheme in 2019 to develop Yim Tin Tsai into an in-depth tourism attraction at home and abroad based on the organization of arts festivals. After the government's intervention in tourism, the number of tourists visiting Yim Tin Tsai increased greatly, even exceeding the village's load capacity at one point, so the villagers, who are the main body of the community, spoke out to the government through the village committee and the Salt and Light Conservation Center in the hope that the government would invest in projects to preserve the culture of the village.

In the process of heritage and ecological conservation and tourism development in Yim Tin Tsai, villagers, volunteers, heritage experts, artists and curators, as well as tourists visiting the site, have formed an open and communal community through mutual communication and joint participation.

## **5. INSIGHTS FROM YAN TIN TSAI'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL**

Firstly, unlike most cases of rural tourism development, the initial and direct purpose of the development of Yan Tin Tsai is not tourism development, but cultural preservation, ecological conservation and rural restoration in pursuit of rural revitalisation. During the restoration process, Yan Tin Tsai has gradually improved its tourism-related industries and services. Therefore, the

tourism industry in Yan Tin Tsai is formed on the basis of the concept of sustainable development, conservation and revitalisation, which is "conservation first, development later".

Secondly, the high-intensity cohesion of residents in Yan Tin Tsai Village is brought about by collective memory and cultural ties. Collective memory can be a certain tree or a certain path in the village. Cultural ties mainly refer to the Hakka culture. Yan Tin Tsai villagers migrated from the Hakka people, so there are strong similarities and resonances in customs, food and language, which firmly unite the villagers. Therefore, in other village tourism development, it is important to be adept at finding collective memories and cultural connections to unite community subjects in order to achieve virtuous community participation with a unanimous voice.

Thirdly, religion is a special social ideology with a strong sense of identity and cohesion. At the early stage of the restoration of Yan Tin Tsai, the Salt and Light Conservation Centre made use of the power of religion to attract investors from all walks of life in the Catholic Church to make donations or collect donations for St. Joseph's Church, and gained a certain amount of financial support. In other districts, if villagers consist of common beliefs in religion, totems, and so on, it is important to make good use of its strengths.

Fourthly, talents from all parties should be brought in. Lack of expertise and human resources can lead to difficulties in community participation. The development of tourism requires not only expertise and professionals related to tourism, but also ecological conservation, cultural preservation and sustainable development in the overall development and planning of villages. For example, Yan Tin Tsai has natural resources such as salt pans, sea and mangroves, as well as cultural resources such as Catholicism and Hakka culture. In addition, activities such as art festivals are also included in the process of tourism development. Therefore, Yan Tin Tsai needs professionals in different fields such as botanists, environmental experts, sociologists, artists, etc. A large number of human resources are needed to support the restoration of the village and the development of tourism. Due to their relatively low level of education, villagers often do not possess systematic professional knowledge, and most of them complete their professional problems under the guidance of relevant experts, whose professional knowledge serves as an intermediary for their community participation.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Community participation can effectively make rural tourism a sustainable industry. From the point of view of enterprises or development investors, their nature is an economic subject that seeks to maximize profits, and at the same time, they have the absolute initiative and right to speak on the development and planning of tourism resources, and their social and environmental responsibilities can only be relegated to the back seat. Therefore, in the development process, the investor is prone to ignore the needs and voices of the aborigines, ignore the protection of the rural environment and the assessment of the carrying capacity, ignore the depth of the excavation of the rural culture and so on. Eventually, due to the anger and opposition of the villagers, the depletion and destruction of resources, etc., the tourist destination will lose its market competitiveness and will not have the concept of sustainable development and sustainable tourism. Once villagers are involved in all aspects of tourism planning and development, relevant people with certain professional knowledge trusted by villagers (e.g. Mayor Chan Chung Yin of Yim Tin Tsai) act as villagers' representatives, conveying villagers' wishes and exploring a tourism development model suitable for the village on the basis of conservation, truly allowing villagers to be the deciders of the path of rural development and to be the masters of this piece of land.

Rapid urbanization has led to the loss of many ecological resources, such as green spaces, wetlands and forests, as well as the gradual disappearance of many time-honoured traditions, customs and intangible cultural heritage. However, the countryside has well preserved these valuable heritages, which belong to all mankind and to the groups that should have these cultural inheritances, and no



government or developer can decide whether they should continue to exist or not. It is very important to develop the unique landscapes and well-preserved cultural resources in the countryside appropriately. We should not completely disregard the human touch and care for them, and seal them up in a hermetically sealed enclosure for the preservation. On the contrary, we should learn from the case of Yim Tin Tsai and develop the concept of an eco-museum. Just like Yim Tin Tsai, which has been described as "a museum without locks", it has not been shy in displaying to visitors from all over the world its unique culture, the salt fields on the small island which are blessed with natural resources, the traditional salt-making process, the specialties of its cuisine, and so on, so that conservation can be formed in the midst of development, and development will continue to be carried out in the midst of conservation.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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