

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Same Roots, Same Origins: The Synergy of Geology and Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper aims to inform Members about an ongoing local engagement and intangible heritage conservation project of Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark (HKUGGp), entitled “Same Roots, Same Origins”.

2. Background

2.1 As a UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp), HKUGGp strives to follow the following core principles of UGGps:

- (a) UGGps are just not about rocks or geological heritage. The purpose of UGGps is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between the geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritage;
- (b) UGGps are established through a bottom-up process, involving relevant local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area (e.g. land owners, community groups, tourism providers, indigenous people, and local organisations); and
- (c) UGGps empower local communities and give local people a sense of pride, strengthening their identification with the area.

2.2 A key goal of UGGps is to engage local communities and obtain their firm commitment. This is also one of the major goals of HKUGGp.

3. Local Communities in HKUGGp

3.1 There are many communities and villages within HKUGGp. Many of which were once densely populated, and a few of which were once trade or education centres in the region. Most of these communities peaked in the 1950s to 1960s, and declined rapidly since then due to industrialisation, better living conditions and job opportunities in the city, and the migration wave to European countries.

3.2 Today, many of these communities have become mostly deserted, with just a few elderly inhabitants staying behind. The farmland is abandoned and overgrown, and many of the village houses have become dilapidated. Owing to the lack of development pressure, the natural and geological resources in these communities have been generally well preserved. However, the intangible cultural heritage of these communities would gradually be lost as there have not been any formal and systematic records.

4. “Same Roots, Same Origins” Project

4.1 The aim of the “Same Roots, Same Origins” project is to support the core principles of UGGps by engaging and empowering the local communities, helping them conserve and promote their intangible cultural heritage, and contributing towards their revitalisation.

4.2 The project began with meeting stakeholders based upon the common goals of revitalising the communities. A wide variety of capacity building activities and local engagement projects were discussed. A sustainable partnership usually takes months and even years of communication and cooperation to build up.

4.3 Project activities included:

- (a) Collection, restoration and preservation
 - Old photos, artefacts, historical relics, household items, farming and fishing tools, village houses, etc.
- (b) Rediscovering and conserving culture, history and stories
 - Desktop research, interviewing local and overseas villagers
 - Interpreting and transferring the gathered information into

- exhibitions at Story Rooms and publications
- (c) Capacity building in the communities
- Training, exchange visits and sharing; local engagement projects; geotourism activities

5. Progress of the Project

5.1 Following extensive engagement with the Ap Chau community, which included interviews, research, collecting historical items and capacity building, the first product of the “Same Roots, Same Origins” project – the Ap Chau Story Room – was opened in April 2018. The story room, converted from the island’s former primary school, showcased the former activities and stories of the Ap Chau community.

5.2 The story room is managed by the Ap Chau villagers, who also assume the role of interpreters to share with visitors their own stories. To improve accessibility to the island, HKUGGp liaised with ferry operators to launch a new ferry service from Ma Liu Shui to Ap Chau, which runs on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

5.3 During the project, a large number of stories and materials about Ap Chau and its inhabitants were gathered, but some of them did not fit into the context of the story room. These stories and materials were compiled into a more comprehensive book about the history, culture and life stories of Ap Chau and its people, which was published in April 2019.

5.4 The “Same Roots, Same Origins” project on Ap Chau was a success on many fronts. The original goal of facilitating the revitalisation of local communities through conservation and promotion of their cultural heritage was achieved through the project.

5.5 The success of the Ap Chau project set an example for other local communities, leading to many of them expressing an interest in similar cooperations. HKUGGp took this opportunity to expand the “Same Roots, Same Origins” project to other communities, the next being Kat O, which is a neighbour of Ap Chau.

5.6 Kat O was once a large community with long, rich history. It was once a trade centre in the region with a population of several thousand. Although most of its inhabitants left the island decades ago to migrate overseas, the 300-year-old Tin Hau

Temple is still in good condition, and many of the villagers come back to the island to participate in village events.

5.7 With the support of the Kat O villagers, both local and overseas, HKUGGp compiled information on the history, culture and heritage of Kat O. Hundreds of interviews of villagers were conducted, and experts in the history of southern China, as well as in temple architecture and decorations, were consulted for this project. The valuable materials gathered are presented in the Kat O Story Room, which was recently set up in an annex of the Tin Hau Temple. Hundreds of Kat O villagers returned to the island to witness and support the opening of the Kat O Story Room on 6 October 2019.

6. Way Forward

6.1 The success of the Ap Chau and Kat O examples lies not only in the conservation of their cultural heritage, but also in the process of engaging these communities, benefitting them through building up ownership toward their communities.

6.2 Following these successful examples, HKUGGp will continue to explore the opportunity to expand the “Same Roots, Same Origins” project to other geopark communities. Progress has been made with the Kau Sai Chau community, as well as the seven villages of the Hing Chun Alliance. The next phase of this cooperation project will be the Kau Sai Chau Story Room, which is scheduled to open in late 2019.

7. Advice Sought

7.1 Members are invited to note the progress of the “Same Roots, Same Origins” project and to give their views on the planning and on-going work of HKUGGp as stated above.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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