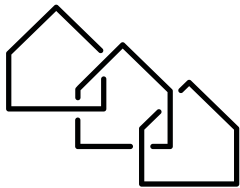


開拓一個以社區主導的鄉村復育模式  
Developing a Community-led Model in  
Countryside Revitalisation

# VILLAGE COMMONING

# 鄉村互助自理



## 實施指南 Implementation Guidelines

主辦機構 Organiser



THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG 香港大學  
faculty of architecture 建築學院



Division of Landscape Architecture  
園境建築學部

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


# Introduction

*Village Commoning: Developing a Community-led Model in Countryside Revitalisation* is a research initiative established in 2021 at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), funded by the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme of the Hong Kong SAR Government. Led by Ms. Vincci Mak, Senior Lecturer at the HKU Division of Landscape Architecture, the team utilises “commoning” as a conceptual framework to derive a community-led model of village revitalisation that enables local stakeholders to take a greater role in initiating revitalisation of their village assets.




While Hong Kong has seen a lot of village revitalisation schemes in recent years, this project stands out as it pays special attention to the needs and aspirations of local villagers, hoping to engage the village community more fully in the process. The proposed model also emphasises cooperative governance and the collective management of resources that can lead to the creation of new values, fostering a sense of pride and ownership of place by empowering the community as a whole.



## OUR VISION

-  Commoning is an important social practice that can strengthen village identity and enhance social well-being
-  Effective collaborations between different stakeholders can maximise the benefits of village revitalisation
-  This methodology can help enhance the cultural and ecological values of rural villages, thus enabling long term sustainability

## OUR WORK

-  **RESEARCH**  
Reviewing and analysing a series of international case studies of commoning practices that mobilised collaborations between different stakeholders
-  **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**  
Hosting of a series of engagement exercises to gather feedback from relevant parties
-  **DISSEMINATION**  
Synthesising all research findings and feedback from public engagements

## WHO WE ARE

- Principal Investigator and Project Leader: Vincci Mak
- Co-Investigator: Maxime Decaudin
- Project Manager: Scarlet Cheng
- Research Assistant:  
Michelle Ho, Maisy Lai, Candace Lam, Parco Law, Jack Mok, Marco Yeung

## Thank you to all the villages who have participated in this research project:

- Kau Sai Fishermen Village
- Po Toi Island
- So Lo Pun Village
- Yung Shue Au Village

## Special Thanks

- Prof. Thomas Chung
- Prof. Shenjing He
- Prof. Jeffrey Hou
- Prof. Wai-fung Lam
- Prof. Daren Leung
- Prof. Pun Ngai
- Prof. Suh-Hyun Park
- Ms. Ada Wong, JP
- Dr. Cecilia Chu
- Dr. Samuel Chu
- Dr. Billy Hau
- Dr. Winnie Law
- Ms. Hermion Au
- Mr. David Bollier
- Ms. Celia Chan
- Ms. Yu-nam Chan
- Mr. Colin Chan
- Mr. Louis Chan
- Ms. Katie Chick
- Mr. Eric Ho
- Mr. Charles Lee
- Mr. Kenny Li
- Mr. Joseph Sou
- Mr. Yuk-on Tsang
- Tombolo

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# Commoning is...

## COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

Communal organisation and collective use of resources have long been part of the economic life of rural communities around the world. In recent years, these practices have been increasingly associated with the notions of “commons” and “commoning”, which are inspired by the research work of political scientist Elinor Ostrom. She argued that common resources can be well-managed by communities that benefit the most from them and that their regulation should be addressed at the local level, through collaborations with community associations, local authorities, and other Non-Profit Organisations (NPO).



Nobel laureate and political scientist Elinor Ostrom

## AN ALTERNATIVE COOPERATIVE GOVERNING APPROACH

The involvement of community is a key factor to the success of the commoning approach and therefore contrasts against the state-led and market-led systems in managing resources.

Ostrom listed eight pre-conditions for a successful commons:

- Resource boundaries and access rights should be clearly defined
- Rules for appropriation and provision should fit local conditions
- People affected by these rules must be able to participate in modifying them
- People in charge of monitoring should be accountable to all resource users
- When someone breaks the rules, they will face graduated sanctions depending on the seriousness of the offence
- Rapid, easily accessible and low-cost means of dispute resolution must be available
- Community members' rights to self-organise should be respected by outside authorities
- All conditions mentioned above should be organised in multiple layers of nested enterprises

## TYPES OF COMMONS

Scholars Emil Sandström, Ann-Kristin Ekman and Karl-Johan Lindholm defined three main types of commons that represent most forms of collectiveness but their divisions are not mutually exclusive:



Production Commons

Before the industrial revolution, production commons was essential for places that relied on natural resources for making a living, as it helped solve issues such as resource scarcity, over-extraction, and sustaining rural livelihood. While most villagers no longer make their living primarily from these commons, some of them still retain important meanings to local communities. It is sometimes reconmissioned into new commons.



Associational Commons

Most of these were developed under the new economic conditions of the 20th century aiming at modernising rural life. It is established to address shared social and economic interests of villagers. Its organisation is formal, addressing official matters and formulating plans of action. Associations meet regularly to manage common concerns and may occasionally draw in outside partners.



Symbolic Commons

It refers to commons that is related to lineage, kinship, and ownership of place, and carry important symbolic meaning and value for villagers. It comes in many forms and is often connected with historical and cultural narratives that are important in shaping village identities and internal social relations.

## Examples of Traditional Commoning Practices in HK



Fresh water fish ponds in Yuen Long, 1978  
 Photo: HKSAR Government

Agricultural and Fishery Industry  
 Production

The agricultural and fishery industry is a key factor that influences the use of natural resources and management of communal facilities in rural contexts. Commoning initiatives include irrigation systems to manage water resources, joint efforts to wholesale harvests to designated markets, and communally-managed tendering systems.



In 2003, villagers from the seven villages in Hing Chun Yeuk crowd-funded and built this plaza in Lai Chi Wo

Yeuk  
 Associational

Dating back to the Ming Dynasty, Yeuk is a self-governing alliance among villages and is formed based on common interests such as self-protection, infrastructure development, trade, and resource management. Some Yeuks are still active in villages today.



St. Joseph's Chapel in Yim Tin Tsai, Sai Kung  
 Photo: HKSAR Government

Shared Beliefs & Traditional Festivities  
 Symbolic

Villagers may have common beliefs within their own community, and many of these are also shared among different villages. Although most have moved away from their rural residences, their common goals and beliefs have direct relations to certain places in the village as well as efforts for improvement works. Annual traditional festivals also bring villagers back to the village and strengthen their community bonding.

# Implementing Commoning

## Government Units

How you are currently engaging in countryside conservation:

- Set out policies, rules and regulations to manage resources and ensure the greater good of all citizens
- Establish strategic directions and long-term planning for development and conservation in the countryside
- Provide support and assistance to sustainable development
- Provide funding to foster research and community engagement

G1

G2

G3

G4

What more you can do in implementing ideas of commons and commoning in countryside conservation:

- Adopt the idea of commons as a shared resource in developing policies, rules, and regulations in order to foster incentives of all stakeholders to collaborate in resource management
- Adopt the approach of commoning as a mechanism to empower and foster stewardship in stakeholder groups as strategic directions and long-term planning for development and conservation in the countryside
- Review and consider in what ways and what kind of support and assistance government units can provide for stakeholders to facilitate the development of commons and commoning with equal representation
- Review current research and community engagement funding support, re-consider how stakeholders (NPOs / institutions, village communities, and etc.) can have equal opportunities and representation in seeking funding, and explore incentive programs specific for nurturing village community-based commons and commoning

## Villagers

How you are currently engaging in countryside conservation:

- Sustain clanship and village bonding through continual organisation and conservation of traditional and cultural practices
- Work towards a sustainable development of their own villages
- Collaborate and liaise with external parties (government units/ NPOs/ academic institutions) to see how their villages' ecological and cultural assets can serve and benefit the greater good of society
- Manage village assets per village traditions and expectations

V1

V2

V3

V4

What more you can do in implementing ideas of commons and commoning in countryside conservation:

- Focus more on the community bonding development, and adopt a commoning approach when organising activities
- Consider village tangible and intangible assets as commons and develop a commoning mechanism to organise the management of these commons among fellow villagers
- Consider how the definition of community can be extended and managed through the approach of commoning, so that government units, NPOs, institutions, and the general public can co-manage the commons together as they all have shared interests in these assets
- Review how the management of village assets can be innovated by implementing commoning approaches; conduct periodic review of how to advance the commoning approach in achieving the common goals of all stakeholders

## Non-Profit Organisations & Academic Institutions

How you are currently engaging in countryside conservation:

- Spearhead innovative research and development of new knowledge to fuel rural development
- Provide expertise knowledge, help establish communication channels among various stakeholders, and foster community empowerment to facilitate local villages' revitalisation aspirations and needs
- Help establish awareness of what village assets are in countryside conservation
- Help liaise and support day-to-day logistics of village revitalisation with local communities
- Promote public awareness in rural sustainability through public engagement and educational programmes

N1

N2

N3

N4

N5

What more you can do in implementing ideas of commons and commoning in countryside conservation:

- Generate and share knowledge about commons and commoning to stakeholders, and suggest framework for implementation
- Facilitate collaboration among stakeholders through the mode of commoning, and to foster the establishment and implementation of commons through a co-creation process
- Facilitate inclusive understanding of village assets through the concept of commons; help liaise such concept among all stakeholders for the management of the commons
- Help co-manage the commons with other stakeholders as an on-going and day-to-day effort through the commoning approach
- Develop public engagement and educational programmes that promote and advocate the ideas of commons and commoning with equal representation of all stakeholders

## General Public

How you are currently engaging in countryside conservation:

- Be invested in the sustainable development of Hong Kong's countryside
- Participate in activities that promote the conservation of Hong Kong's countryside
- Help organise countryside conservation activities with the government units, NPOs, academic institutions, and villagers
- Be a stakeholder of Hong Kong's countryside and share your view of how it should be conserved and developed

P1

P2

P3

P4

What more you can do in implementing ideas of commons and commoning in countryside conservation:

- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of the sustainable development of Hong Kong's countryside, in which the ideas of commons and commoning help establish a sustainable relationship among the environment, economy, and culture
- Engage in countryside conservation activities that foster the promotion and implementation of commons and commoning
- Apply the ideas of commons and commoning when collaborating with government units, NPOs, academic institutions, and villagers in organising countryside conservation activities
- Build up an awareness and positioning to acknowledge the various roles of the stakeholders involved, so as to establish a more sophisticated mode of collaboration in commoning

# Implementation Guidelines

Villagers

Government Units

NPO & Academic Institutions

Public

## I Brainstorming

- ✓ Common goals for revitalisation initiatives
- ✓ Shared resources available in the village

Other organisations such as academic institutions or NPO can help facilitate or lead villagers' discussions at this stage

V2

### Review and assess resources

e.g. land, money, heritage, cultural assets, professional knowledge, human resources...

V3

### Identify stakeholders

Laying out the roles of each stakeholder and the power relationships between them

V1

### Assess the opportunities and constraints of the village

Consideration needs to be given to whether the villagers can take full responsibility for the project when operating it, or whether collaboration with other agencies is required

V1

### Establish long-term and short-term common goal

Formulating a long-term shared vision and setting short-term goals to gradually implement village revitalisation

P1

## II Ideation

- ✓ Village-recognised organisation/ association
- ✓ Shared resources from various sources
- ✓ Stakeholders interested in co-managing the resources
- ✓ Project plan

Contacting relevant government units for policy support

Holding consultations or participatory activities to collect villagers' feedback on the content of the project

V2

P3

P4

### Draft project plan based on the common goals

Gathering information, conducting visits and related research

V2

N3

N4

### Organise resources and defining resources

Identifying project sites, sourcing funding, liaising with professionals...  
Establishing an accountability system and related rules, such as who is responsible for monitoring, who has the right to use or withdraw resources, and how to resolve conflicts...

P3

P4

N2

### Engage with stakeholders

Communicating with different stakeholders  
Understanding how each party can contribute their expertise or skills  
Understanding the needs and considerations of each group  
Identifying the role of each stakeholder

V1

G1

G2

N1

### Establish a village-recognised organisation/ association

Villagers empowering this group (e.g. charities, company limited by guarantee, societies, organisations...) to make relevant decisions  
Developing a multi-level governance structure (project /resource /stakeholder) based on the power-sharing structure of the organisation

## III Establish Commoning System

- ✓ Project governance model
- ✓ Resource management plan
- ✓ Operation plan

Set a period for pilot phase, and make prompt adjustments  
Assess long-term objectives are regularly

G1

N2

### Formulate a project and resource management plan

Including responsible units and roles, such as co-ordination, finance, administration...

### Develop an operation plan

Including responsible units and roles, such as day-to-day operations, event planning, marketing...

V4

N4

### Manage the project and review regularly to make sure it is working towards the common goals

Monitoring the progress and execution of the project  
Coordinating among all parties

V4

N4

### Manage resources and assess regularly the quality and condition of shared resources

Overseeing and optimising the use and distribution of resources  
Ensuring the shared resources are well managed to balance the interests of various stakeholders  
Providing conflict resolution methods and sanctions for those who break the rules

N4

P3

P4

### Work closely with stakeholders and maintain close and transparent communication

Organising regular progress updates and consultation

## IV Sustain Village Commoning

- ✓ Review, reflect and evaluate regularly
- ✓ Balance the common interests of various stakeholders

Capacity building is important in shaping common vision among villagers

G1

G3

G4

N4

### Review the mechanism timely and update promptly

Monitoring project effectiveness and progress  
Holding regular meetings to review and evaluate the effectiveness of projects, the use of resources and the manner in which decisions are made



Village Commoning



# Conclusion | Key Findings

## I Establishing Village Association as Commoning Structure

Village association serves as an excellent foundation for initiating the villagers to come together for community matters. Many villages in Hong Kong have a well-established association or committee with a long-standing history, which is also governed by the Rural Representative Election Ordinance (previously known as the Village Representative Election Ordinance). However, not all of them have the structure and mechanism most optimal for fostering and initiating village commoning amid contemporary countryside development.

This is why in recent years there is an emergence of supplementary or additional associations established by village communities to particularly handle their village revitalisation matters in a structured format in which villagers can share their wide range of interests in reviving their village, and the expertise and efforts they can contribute.

A shortcoming observed in these recently emerged associations is that they often lack the statutory rights necessary for achieving the village revitalisation matters they aspire to do so. In view of this, authorities may consider how they can review to grant more rights for these associations to achieve their commoning agenda under the existing legal framework.

## III Navigating Power Relations

The power dynamics of Hong Kong's countryside has evolved much through time. The current power dynamic is a legacy of diaspora of villagers in 1960s / 70s, strong governmental countryside policy, emergence of NPOs / green groups, and rise of stewardship of the countryside among the general public.

Re-entering the picture after decades of inactivity, villagers now interested in village revitalisation have to navigate a system with policies built up for environmental protection and public good rather than solely for the villages' benefits.

Review and rethinking of the currently more dominating NPO-led revitalisation model will be needed, to allow for more local villagers' involvement in key roles by embracing community leadership.

Recent governmental countryside policy has seen a change to also consider villages' cultural and traditional significances as part of conservation. Evidence is also seen that villagers are riding along this to re-engage in the power dynamic to have a stronger voice in countryside matters.

To develop long-term sustainable collaboration mode, a new mechanism will need to be established that fosters mutual respect, inclusivity, and equal representation among all stakeholders.

## V Forming New Models of Rural Practices

Leveraging on the new commons (as mentioned in IV), villagers will need to learn how to establish new models of rural practices to sustain livelihood in future revitalised villages.

While Hong Kong's village revitalisation initiatives are now largely sponsored by government and philanthropic funding (with the aspiration to serve as seed funding to help kick start self-sustaining operations in the future), at the moment new models of rural practices are still being experimented.

Evidence is seen that some villages try to refrain from receiving outside funding but aim to develop their own new models of rural practices. However, outstanding issues such as aging population and lack of infrastructure remain, and they may hinder the new models of rural practices to be developed.

Nevertheless, the process of exploring options for new models of rural practices helps foster commoning. The success in identifying an optimal model of rural practices will be vital in the long-term success of Hong Kong's village revitalisation.

## II Expanding Definition of Community

One of the characteristics of Hong Kong's villages is that the existing clanship and traditional family-focused structure is strong. While this is good in keeping the bonding among fellow villagers, it also makes local villagers less open to accept interested outsiders as part of an expanded community.

Having said that, currently there are more cases that villagers are accepting newly-settled members and village revitalisation practitioners as part of their community. Their new energy, knowledge, and wide range of expertise have added value to a new type of collaboration and contributed to the sustainable development of rural villages.

Living in a communal setting, sharing and managing the resource together requires open communication and mutual respect among all members of a community, including existing and new. Community members may consider establishing agreement prior to any collaboration with clear positionings of each stakeholder and the rights and responsibilities involved. This may help build trust and ease future misunderstanding.

## IV Transforming Old Commons to New

Old commons were formed in the old days in relation to the context and everyday life of the past. When considering to revitalise old commons, how they may relate to the current needs and aspirations of the villagers nowadays should be considered.

For instance, villages in Hong Kong nowadays no longer rely on agricultural and fishery productions. Reconmissioning of production commons may deem less practical, but can instead revive and uphold cultural values related to rural practices associated with local traditions valued by the village community. The symbolic aspect of the old production commons is being celebrated.

In other cases, symbolic commons related to religious practices and events hold significant value to bond the village community together when nowadays members reside at different parts of the world. Reconmissioning of symbolic commons and related associational commons becomes important in continuing it as an inheritance and even more so in establishing a refreshed value among the next younger generation of the village community.

Existing community members' knowledge about traditional practices has also become an asset that may be able to form a new type of commons — knowledge commons — critical in passing on information and skillsets related to the history and culture of the village. The process also helps foster new values based on their rich cultural heritage and traditions, and promote a sense of place ownership and pride, as well as community empowerment.

## VI Fostering Stewardship through Capacity Building

Nowadays, there are many capacity building programs initiated by NPOs. While some villagers join, members from external groups and the general public are more active.

Villagers may know better what their village revitalisation may need, if they take charge of curating their own capacity building programs while inviting NPOs to support, this may induce stronger participation among villagers and foster stronger stewardship.

Also, authentic skills and knowledge should be harnessed timely through the elderly and current generation, to build up knowledge commons for future generations. Evidence is seen that some villages are already doing so by book publishing and village website documentation, but more room is needed for villagers to grow their own interest to do capacity building.

# JOIN our Community

1. Enter our website: <http://villagecommoning.hku.hk>
2. Select "Village Commons"

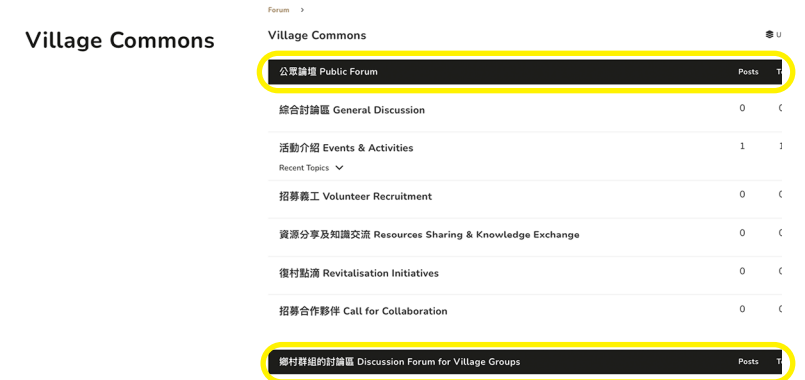


3. Select "Sign up" and fill in your personal information

The image shows the registration form on the Village Commons website. The 'Sign Up' button in the top navigation bar is highlighted with a yellow circle. The registration form itself is also highlighted with a yellow border and contains the following fields: 'Join us today!', 'Username \*', 'Email \*', and 'Village/ Organisation/ Identity \*' (with a sub-note: 'For accessing your group's private forum' and an example 'e.g. HKU/Public'). Below the form, there are two lines of text: 'I acknowledge that I agree to receive an email to set a new password and have read the Privacy Policy.' and 'After registration, you will receive a confirmation email with a link to set a new password.' A 'Register' button is at the bottom.

4. Check the confirmation email we sent you and set a new password via the link
5. Sign in to the site when you're done!

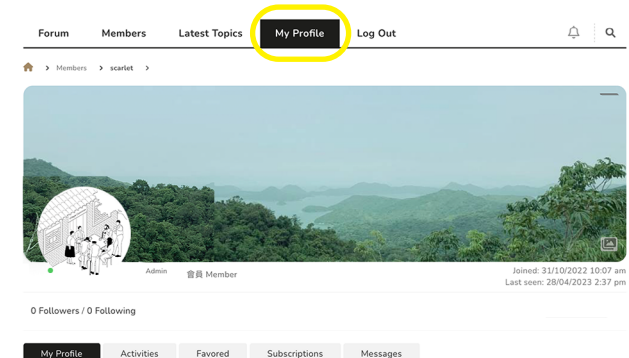
6. You can browse, leave comments and subscribe to the public forum or the private chatroom of your village/ exclusive group you belong to



7. If you want to start a new discussion topic, you can click on the relevant forum and click "Add Topic"



8. If necessary, you can update your personal page and user information on this page



# Resources Hub

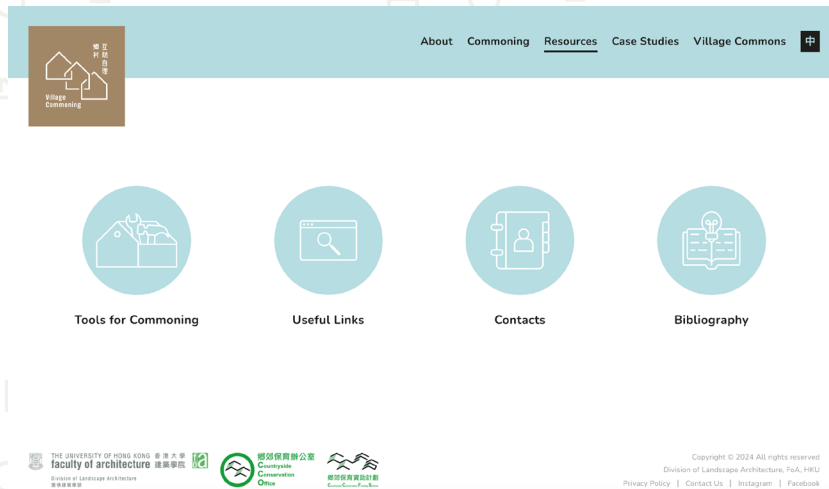
# Contact Us

1. Enter our website: <http://villagecommoning.hku.hk>


2. Select "Resources"




3. Browse related information



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更多資訊及查詢

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互助  
自理  
鄉村

Village  
Commoning