

DOCTORAL THESIS

Understanding Community Capacity-Building in the Community Development Context

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ABSTRACT

The global drive for community revival has led to policies and practices around community capacity building (CCB) in different countries and disciplines since the late 1990s. This drive has further spread to Asia regions and countries, including the region of interest here, Hong Kong. However, there is no consensus on the definition of CCB nor the models and tools to assess CCB interventions and processes in the CCB and community development literature.

This thesis aims to understand the CCB process within the context of a community development programme by examining the characteristics and contextual factors of CCB in the local community development practices of Hong Kong. The study examines the perspectives and experiences of actors who have participated in the CCB process, specifically focusing on the perspectives of the project participants and community development workers in community development projects. In doing so, a qualitative research is adopted with semi-structured interviews to capture the perspectives and experiences of the actors in the CCB process. Then, a document review is used for triangulation purposes. Thirty-two semi-structured interviews are carried out, and one hundred and thirty-three documents related to CCB projects are reviewed. Also, the study adopts a thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data.

Nine CCB characteristics have been identified in the study that supports the use of a general CCB approach. The findings reinforce that there are common characteristics of CCB that can be transferable across different communities and settings. Specifically, there are four CCB characteristics found to be more common in the community development field in Hong Kong: participation, learning and skills development, partnerships/linkages/networking, and development pathway(s). Moreover, the study finds similarities and differences in the meanings of operational characteristics and contextual factors between different actors and indicates the complex interrelationships among the actors involved in the CCB process. There are multi-level contextual factors that facilitate or prevent the CCB actors engaged in the CCB process, but different actors have different foci on those factors. The findings show the importance of examining the interactions among the actors and contextual factors of CCB in the programme context. Thus, the work in this thesis suggests a CCB process model that incorporates CCB characteristics, the relationships of CCB actors and contextual factors, which fills a research gap in understanding the process of CCB in the context of community development.