

Executive Summary

Young people's participation in society is an important element of sustainable social development because it increases their sense of belonging and commitment to society. It also allows young people to unleash their creativity and uniqueness, and to help create the society that they envision. Three decades ago, the United Nations made "Participation, Development, Peace" the theme of the first International Youth Year, defining the role of young people in the participation of national and social affairs, economic development, and world peace, and also emphasizing the importance of young people's participation in shaping the future of humankind.

In recent years, there has been increased attention on young people's participation in public affairs, in particular with the concept of citizenship participation. As a member of society, young people have a right as well as a responsibility to participate in that society. Serving the community with specific posts in different platforms is a type of participation in public affairs. As such, young people can help construct society through concrete actions.

This research examines the participation in public affairs by young people in Hong Kong. The scope of participation in public affairs is very wide. This research focuses on positional participation, which implies time commitment, responsibility bearing, community service, and skills training such as decision-making and teamwork building.

This research collects data through a random sampling telephone poll, case studies on young people, and interviews with scholars, as well as interviews with long serving eminent leaders from different sectors. This research aims to explore the difficulties, obstacles, and needs of young people in participating in public affairs. Recommendations are put forward in an attempt to encourage more young people to serve the community by taking up positions.

The survey was conducted in July and August of 2015, and there were 520 respondents between the ages of 18 and 34. The case studies were conducted in July with a total of 20 young people between the ages of 18

and 33. The interviews were conducted in July and August with 5 scholars and leaders.

Key Figures of the Survey

1. Respondents affirmed the value of positional participation in public affairs.

A total of 64.4% of respondents thought that participation in public affairs could help increase young people's sense of commitment to society. The respondents considered altruism (22.7%), community care (21.1%), and a contributing spirit (19.3%) to be the three most appreciated elements of people who participated in public affairs.

The case studies noted that young people believed positional participation in public affairs to be a social responsibility. Some of them also confirmed the value of positional participation in developing personal skills, including time management, decision-making, ability to face the public, and interpersonal network building.

2. Respondents related themselves to society positively, but disbelieved their power to affect social policies.

More than three-fifths (61.9%) of the respondents said they had a sense of belonging toward Hong Kong. Over half of the respondents liked volunteering (56.6%) and were concerned about public affairs (51.3%). More than one-fifth (22.3%) had participated or were participating in the posts listed in the survey. The findings implied that young people related themselves to society positively.

However, nearly two-thirds (65.2%) of the respondents did not think they could affect the development of policy, which reflected their sense of powerlessness.

The case studies suggested some reasons for this kind of sentiment. One of the reasons was that young people comprised only a small

proportion in the public advisory and statutory bodies, rendering their voice and opinions powerless. Another reason was that they believed that society doubted the efficacy of young people's participation due to their inexperience.

3. Respondents were willing to take up positions in public affairs mainly because they hoped to improve society. Personal obstacles were a major consideration that undermined respondents' willingness to participate.

Over a quarter of respondents (28.2%) indicated they were willing to take up posts in public affairs, with most of them citing that they wanted to improve society (42.5%). This reason outweighed all other possible reasons. Statistically, young people who had taken up posts during their primary or secondary schooling had a greater tendency to show willingness to do so.

For those who thought otherwise (59%), most listed the lack of interest (37%), the lack of skills (22.7%), the lack of time (14.6%), and the lack of understanding (13.1%) as the major reasons. In other words, personal obstacles, not necessarily denial of the value of positional participation, accounted for their unwillingness.

Furthermore, a number of respondents (19.0%) revealed that they did not know how they could take up such posts. Recent data from the Home Affairs Bureau indicated that less than 100 citizens per year had showed an interest in participating in government advisory and statutory bodies by filling and mailing their résumés to the Government for inclusion in a centralized database.

The case studies noted that within a competitive society, career development would precede positional participation in public affairs among young people. The inability to take time off work was another obstacle.

- 4. Respondents believed that people who took up positions in public affairs should be equipped with certain skills. Respondents wanted to receive related training.**

Most respondents believed faithfulness (37.0%) and affinity (25.7%) made one suitable for taking up positions in public affairs. More than a quarter of the respondents (28.2%) expressed a desire to receive training to equip themselves with the skills to participate in public affairs.

The case studies showed another important factor for participation in public affairs. Peer recognition was needed as a motivator.

- 5. Respondents showed mistrust toward the government. They were not interested in joining the government. Instead, they thought it would be better to form their own groups to create a greater impact.**

Nearly two-thirds (63.6%) of the respondents did not think that they trusted the government. Statistically, this group was less willing to take up posts in public affairs. With the exception of civil servants (30.0%), respondents were not interested in taking other positions in the government. Over half (51.4%) of the respondents thought that they could have a greater impact by forming their own groups outside the government.

The case studies presented other possible reasons for why young people resisted joining the government. This included poor administration, complicated interpersonal relationships, and lack of transparency in the appointment system.

Key Findings

The study came up with the following findings for discussion after integrating data from the survey, case studies, and interviews.

- 1. Young people are positive about serving the community by taking up positional roles. Society should cherish them and help preserve this desire.**

This research shows that young people have a sense of belonging toward Hong Kong. The research also shows that young people like volunteering, and they are concerned about public affairs. They affirm the value of working in public affairs, and some even show willingness to participate. The results reveal that young people relate themselves positively to society and are prepared to participate in it. This has established a good foundation for developing society in a sustainable manner.

Young people have demonstrated this desire through participating in public affairs. The government and society should recognize this and affirm it. They should also help young people unleash their potential while eliminating the obstacles they face.

It is also worth noting that young people have a sense of powerlessness about influencing policies. There is a disparity between the objective belief that participation in public affairs can bring about change and the subjective powerlessness they feel. It is worth investigating the factors that lead to this sense of powerlessness and the consequences it could have should the situation persist or even worsen.

- 2. Young people mistrust and have a negative impression of the government, making them reluctant to join the government. The government needs to create more channels of participation for young people and attempt to improve communication and mutual trust between the two sides.**

This research shows that some young people do not trust the government. Case studies note that young people are discontent about the small proportion of young people in the advisory and statutory bodies, which limits their chances of participation. Additionally, young people are discontent about the lack of transparency of the appointment system. Some young people tend to form their own groups outside the government as a way to have a greater impact.

Young people are creative and full of uniqueness. The government should appreciate their merit by listening and taking their views seriously. By doing so, it could bring about new ideas for policy, which is a source of force for a sustainable society. The government should create more avenues for participation, such as increasing the percentage of young people in the advisory and the statutory bodies, in order to improve communication and mutual trust between young people and the government, as well as to give more opportunities for young people to serve the community through the government.

3. Due to competition in society, young people have to choose between personal career development and participation in public affairs, resulting in them putting off or even giving up their enthusiasm in taking up posts in public affairs.

The increasingly competitive employment and economic environment has made it difficult for young people's personal development. Additionally, young people are at their prime for personal development. It is reasonable for them to give priority to career development. This research shows that young people struggle with managing both career development and positional participation in public affairs. Furthermore, they often feel sorry for not able to arrange time to attend meetings, which can lead to them considering quitting their participation in public affairs. It is always the case that young people choose to put off or even give up participating in public affairs.

As a matter of fact, career development and positional participation in

public affairs are not mutually exclusive. It is crucial to balance the two. It takes time for young people to gain experience, therefore it is better for young people to start as early as possible if they have the will or the desire to do so.

- 4. Some personal obstacles prevent young people from participating in public affairs. Society needs to help young people eliminate these obstacles in order for them to reach their potential. Some young people want training to prepare them for participation in public service.**

Personal obstacles such as lack of interest, lack of skill, and lack of time stop young people from participating in public affairs.

Participation in public affairs helps young people gain more experience and improve their skills. There is no need for one to be highly trained before participating in public service because one can gain experience and develop skills on the job. Not having the necessary skills should not be a reason against participating in public affairs.

Society should help young people overcome their personal obstacles and also provide them with related training in areas such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking in order to empower young people to participate in public affairs.

- 5. Young people need recognition and encouragement from peers.**

Peer recognition is important for young people. If they can gain recognition from peers, it will help encourage young people to participate in public affairs.

However, it is not easy for young people to find like-minded peers. The lack of like-minded peers can lead to a sense of alienation, leading to a decrease in the quality of their social life. Society needs to be concerned with and consider how it can encourage and promote a culture of participation in public affairs among young people.

Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations.

1. Setting up a benchmark for non-official members ages 40 or below in government advisory and statutory bodies.

When the government appoints non-official members for advisory and statutory bodies, there needs to be a quota for the percentage of members ages 40 or below. This can create more avenues for young people to participate in public affairs and show the level of concern and trust that the government has for young people.

2. Promoting a workplace culture that is friendly toward participating in public affairs.

Some large-scale companies can provide incentives and encourage their employees to participate in public affairs. For instance, they can allow employees to take four hours of leave per month to attend meetings required for the positional participations. This accounts for around 2.5% of a month's working hours.

3. Organizing international forums or conferences for young people.

A forum or conference can provide a platform for like-minded young people from around the world to provide mutual support and share their experiences.

4. Starting a platform for dialogue.

A platform for dialogue between the government, stake-holders, and young people is necessary to enhance mutual understanding. This allows the government to understand young people's vision for Hong Kong's social development. This also helps engage young people in decision-making. This can increase young people's capacity and also narrow the distance between the government and young people, thereby strengthening mutual trust.

5. Providing training.

With regard to the skills that young people need to participate in public affairs, training in areas such as time management, decision-making, facing the public, teamwork, and so forth can be strengthened.