

UNVEILING THE POTENTIAL OF THE TUNG CHUNG NATURE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE TRAIL: A FEASIBILITY STUDY

The proposed Tung Chung Nature and Cultural Heritage Trail (TCH Trail) on Lantau Island offers a unique opportunity to combine natural beauty with cultural heritage. However, a critical knowledge gap exists regarding visitor understanding and local villager perspectives on this trail. This research aims to bridge this gap by employing a mixed-method approach:

- On-site Observations: Direct observation of the TCH Trail and surrounding areas will provide insights into visitor behavior and use patterns.
- Interviews: In-depth interviews with local villagers will capture their expectations, concerns, and potential benefits associated with the trail.
- Document Analysis: Existing government documents and historical records will be analyzed to understand the cultural and natural heritage of the area.

The study will also analyze the existing Tung O Ancient Trail, its heritage values, and potential synergies with the TCH Trail. Finally, the feasibility of extending the TCH Trail to connect with nearby recreational, cultural, and ecological resources will be assessed. By analyzing stakeholder opinions and potential conflicts, this research aims to inform the development of the TCH Trail, fostering sustainable tourism and community engagement on Lantau Island.



INTRODUCTION

Lantau Island, Hong Kong's largest, transformed from a tranquil retreat to a vibrant hub following the relocation of Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) to Chek Lap Kok in the 1990s. This pivotal moment triggered the development of northern Lantau into an economic corridor centered on aviation and logistics. As a strategic "Double Gateway" under Hong Kong's "2030+" plan, Lantau Island aims to balance economic development with cultural heritage. The north leverages its location for businesses, fostering a "bridgehead economy" with new commercial spaces and attractions. However, "2030+" emphasizes balanced development, ensuring the south remains a haven for nature and cultural treasures. This "balancing development and conservation" approach ensures economic growth flourishes alongside irreplaceable cultural heritage, creating a sustainable smart community for Lantau's future. Heritage trails offer a unique opportunity for governments to promote understanding and community engagement through tourism.

- Uniqueness of the the TCH Trail:**
- TCH Trail being a proposed trail offers the opportunity to analyze the feasibility of integrating natural and cultural heritage into a new tourism experience.
 - It can potentially connect the existing Tung O Ancient Trail. This creates a more holistic experience showcasing both Lantau's cultural richness and natural scenery.
 - By studying the Trail, we can explore how heritage trails can be developed with the involvement of local communities, ensuring their needs and concerns are addressed for sustainable development.

OBJECTIVE

- To comprehensively assess the feasibility and potential improvements of the proposed TCH Trail.
- Understand the views and perspectives of local villagers towards the proposed TCH Trail on Lantau Island.

METHODOLOGY

On-Site Observation: Researchers will conduct site visits to the proposed TCH Trail and surrounding areas, including the existing Tung O Ancient Trail (TOAT).

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with local Villagers: Interviews with villagers residing near the proposed TCH Trail and along the TOAT will be conducted. This will gather insights into their perceptions of the trail, potential impacts on their lives and environment, and their hopes for the project's development.

Document Analysis: Existing government documents, historical records, and cultural heritage reports will be analyzed. This will provide a foundation for understanding the historical significance, cultural traditions, and natural values of the area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature provides a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of heritage trails and their implications for official heritage discourses. Barber (2019) classifies heritage trails into three distinct types: government-generated, market-oriented, and community-based, offering insights into their developmental trajectories, engagement with heritage sites, and intersections with urban issues. Lorimer (2011) and Sheller & Urry (2006) delve into the concept of walking mobilities and the dichotomy between tourists and locals, while Timothy & Boyd (2015) examine trails and tourism across various contexts, emphasizing the interplay between supply and demand factors. The narrative then shifts to the context of Hong Kong's cultural tourism evolution, spurred by a quest for local identity and governmental interest following the Asian Financial Crisis (Barber, 2019). The impacts of heritage trails are contingent upon their setting and typology, as evidenced by Kline's (In this special Issue) economic analysis of craft heritage trails, which underscores the imperative of inclusive planning. Community engagement with trails, as explored by Hanrahan et al. (In this special Issue), is hindered by challenges such as inadequate business support and funding (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Fagence's insights suggest the potential benefits of clustering amenities around nodes to enhance visitor experiences, prompting considerations regarding node design and stakeholder reactions.

Overall, the literature provides a nuanced understanding of heritage trails within the broader discourse of tourism and urban development, shedding light on their complexities, challenges, and potential contributions to heritage preservation and community development agendas. **However, we found that there is little literature on local residents' views of this heritage trail.**

RESULTS

- Key Heritages along TCH Trail:**
- Tung Chung Fort*
 - Tung Chung Battery*
 - Ma Wan Chung fishing village
 - Fu Tei Wan Kiln^
 - Hau Wong Temple, Tung Chung

- Key Heritages along TOA Trail:**
- Sha Lo Wan village^
 - San Shek Wan village^
 - Sham Shek village^
 - Sam Shan Kwok Wong Temple
 - Tai O fishing village
 - Yeung Hau Temple*
 - Tai O Heritage Hotel
 - Kwan Tai Temple

*Declared monument
^ Archaeological Site



Site Visit



Having walked the proposed trail, we found that most areas still retain a strong residential atmosphere (?) for the villagers. The natural landscape is beautiful but remains undeveloped; some cultural heritage sites are hidden in the mountains, and their value needs to be uncovered. We can also find mangroves growing in tidal areas which shows the areas contain high ecological value.



In Sha Lo Wan, some villagers have explicitly posted signs stating that tourists are not welcome. In contrast, at Sham Shek, we observed tea houses specifically set up to attract and serve tourists. This indicates that villagers' attitudes towards tourists vary: some welcome them, while others prefer not to be disturbed by their presence.

Interview Findings

No. of people interviewed:



No. of people holding key roles in community:



*Some villagers helped with the building infrastructural facility such as roads and bridges before although they are not playing key roles in the community

No. of people being indigenous:



Understanding on local historic landmarks:



*Most of them can only name 2-3 historic landmarks

No. of people with religious background:



No. of people visiting existing heritage trails in Hong Kong

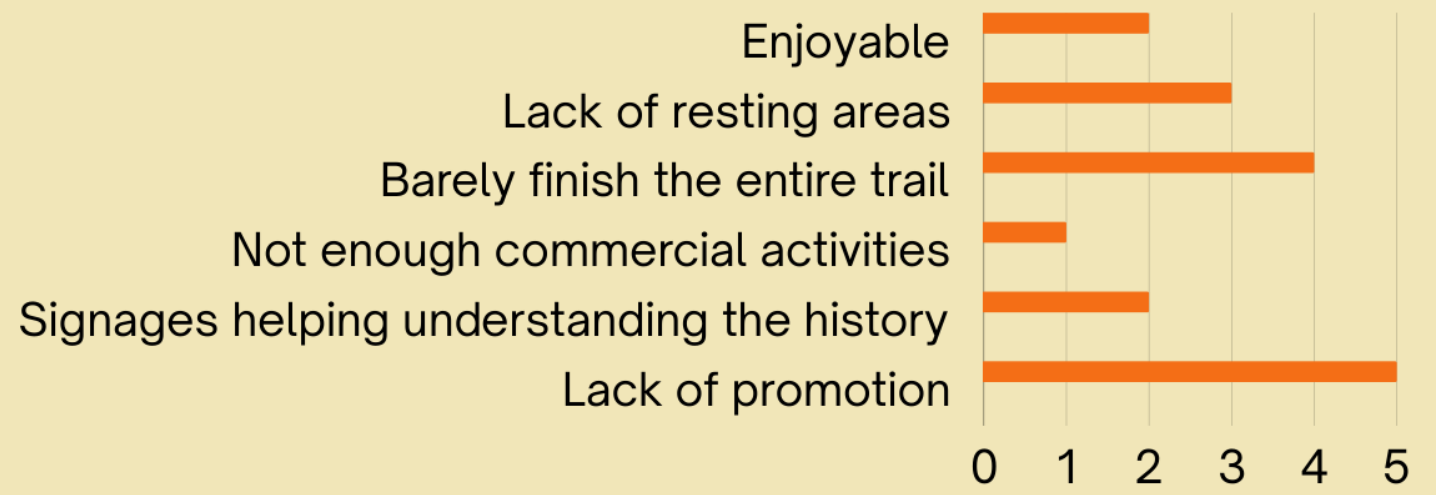


*Around half of the interviewees mix up heritage trails and hiking trails

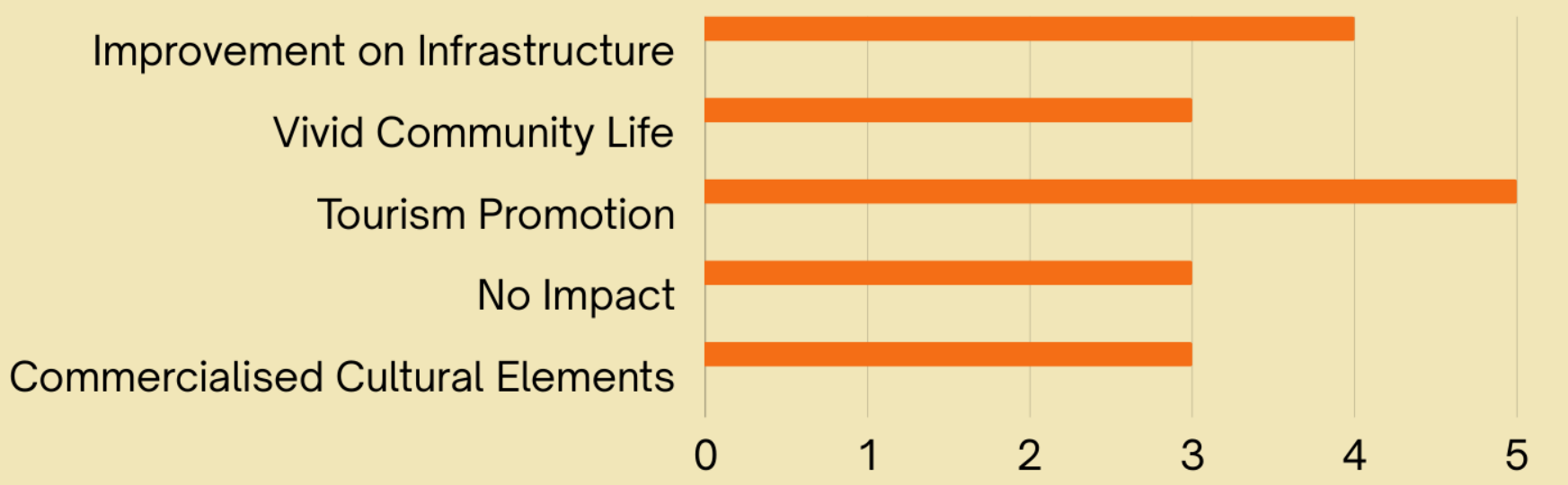
No. of people heard about proposed TCH Trail before the interview:



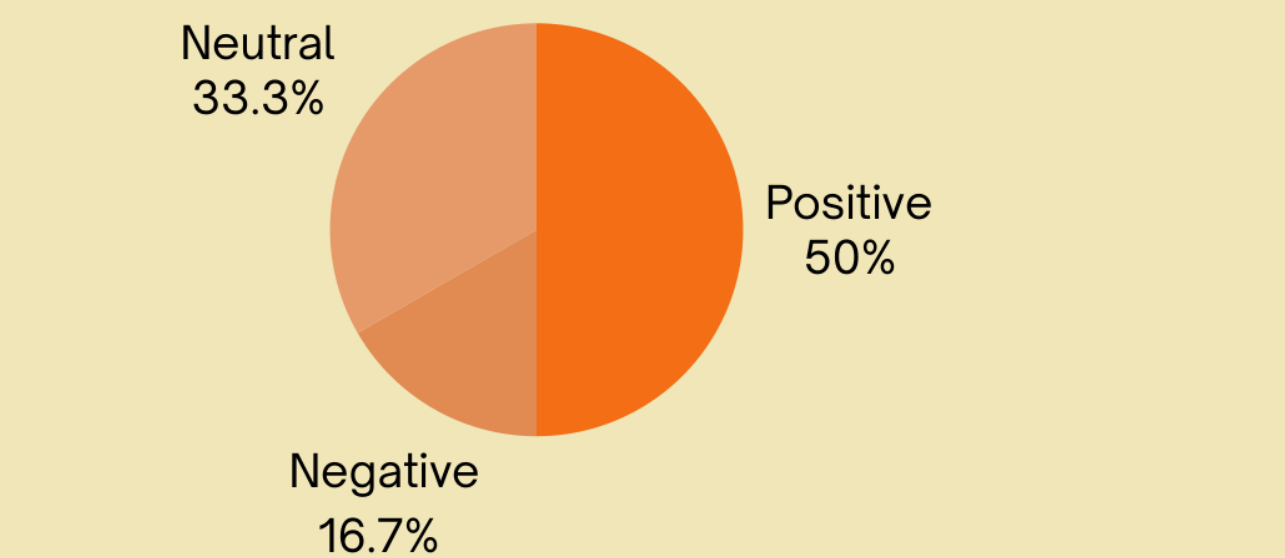
Experience on existing heritage trails in Hong Kong



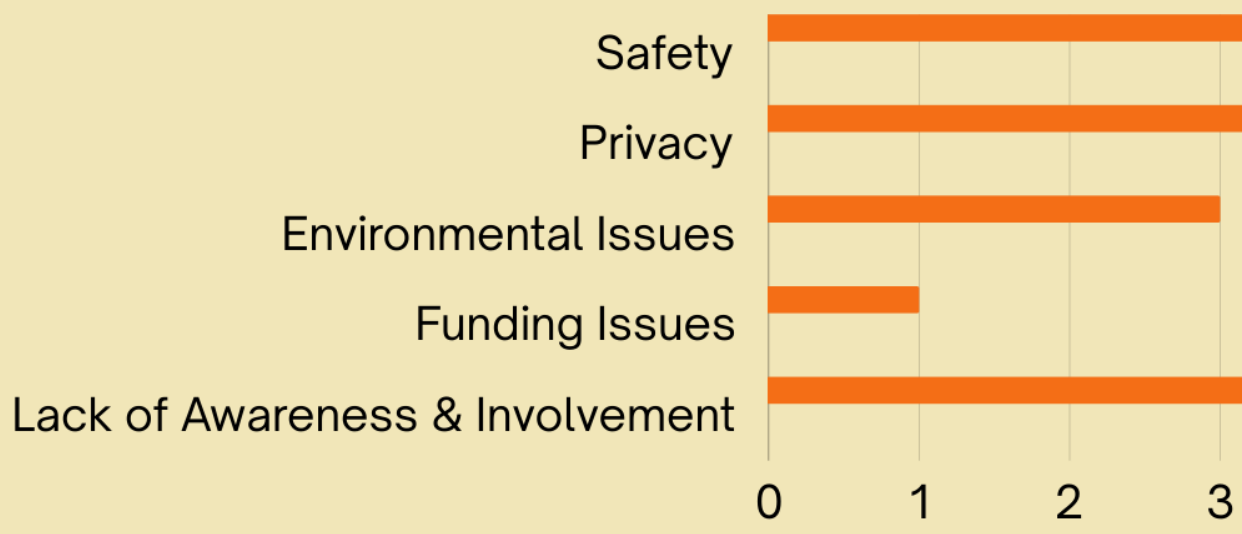
Anticipated Impact of Proposed TCH Trail on local community



People's opinions on the proposed TCH Trail



Concerns regarding the proposed TCH Trail



KEY FINDINGS

- Main Issues for Heritage Conservation**
- Risk of Demolition: Old buildings with Grade 2 or 3 statuses are at risk of being demolished if they do not receive adequate support.
 - Maintenance Challenges: Even with support, maintaining these buildings, particularly their roofs, is challenging and costly.
 - Financial Viability: Converting these buildings for public use is often not financially viable due to the high costs involved. There is hope for government subsidies to aid in maintenance and reconstruction, but the current subsidies, which are in the tens of thousands, fall short of the millions needed for proper restoration.

Balancing Tourism and Village Life: The influx of tourists on the heritage trail raises concerns about noise disturbances and disruptions to village life. While some villagers may benefit from increased tourism, it is crucial to balance these needs. A potential solution is to reroute the trail to avoid directly interfering with villagers' core activities, thereby reducing disturbances while still promoting tourism.

Enhancing Trail Attractiveness: The current heritage trail, though acceptable, lacks attractiveness and vibrancy. There are few commercial elements, such as coffee shops or resting areas, which could make the trail more engaging for tourists. Collaborating with businesses through public-private partnerships (PPP) could introduce these elements, enhancing the overall appeal and vitality of the trail.

RECOMMENDATION

- Enhance Community Engagement:**
- Involve local residents in the planning & development process→meets the needs of both tourists & local community; enhance their sense of belonging
 - Tools: community meetings, participatory planning sessions
- Cultural Preservation:**
- Support conservation of cultural practices & landmarks→increased funding, providing professional support or more robust conservation programs
 - help maintain the cultural identity of the area
 - enhance educational value of heritage trail
- Development vs. Conservation:**
- Address delicate balance between development & conservation→facilitating discussions among villagers, conservationists, and government officials
 - Policies could be crafted to allow for sustainable development→respects heritage & modern needs of community
- Improve Trail Attractiveness:**
- Preserve both hard heritage (e.g. historic buildings & temples) and soft heritage (e.g. local people's practices, festivals & traditional food)
 - better conserve the spirit of the place & enhance its attractiveness
 - Informative signs, local cafes & rest areas make the trail more favourable to visit
 - Consider cultural events/festivals→coincide with the trail experience to draw more visitors
- Minimize Tourist Disruption:**
- Design the trail that respects daily lives of the villagers→rerouting parts of the trail/creating specific tourist-friendly zones that do not interfere with local activities
 - Separating vehicular road & pedestrian road in some segments (e.g. Sham Wat Wan)→enhance visitors' walking experience