



JOCKEY CLUB
MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SOCIAL
LAB

賽馬會“創不同”
社會創新實驗室

The Park Lab

How does a free and happy
park look like?

About Us

JOCKEY CLUB
MAKE A DIFFERENCE



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社會創新實驗室

Launched in 2016, Jockey Club Make a Difference Social Lab is Hong Kong's first community-initiated public services innovation lab. We run labs with government agencies and citizens to design services and policies for a better public life, through community participation, design thinking and co-creative experiments.

With generous support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Make A Difference Institute is running four lab projects from 2016 to 2019, through which we develop a set of tested Social Lab methods and tools that work in Hong Kong. Our lab projects to date:

The LIBoratory Project	September 2016 – January 2017
The Park Lab	April – July 2017
Healthy Street Lab	March – July 2018
Market Lab @ Aldrich Bay Market	March – July 2019



About Make A Difference Institute


MaD believes in the social potential of creativity. Through participatory programmes, we inspire and empower young people all over Asia to come up with innovative responses to our time's challenges.

Founded in 2009, our long-term goal is building a creative civil society. Our portfolio includes the Jockey Club Make a Difference School, Jockey Club Make a Difference Social Lab, MaD Good Lab, urban pioneering projects, creative ventures with corporates, arts and cultural organisations as well as regional exchanges. Focusing on the creative industries, our annual MaD Festival is a multifaceted programme that explores innovative practices and fosters synergies across silos and countries. Attended by 1,300 participants from over 100 cities in Asia and beyond, we invite aspiring changemakers to join at different entry points – from gaining awareness to acquiring knowledge and taking actions.

Since 2014, MaD has been steered by the Make A Difference Institute, a community-initiated organisation and a registered non-profit under Section 88 of the Hong Kong Inland Revenue Ordinance. Before then, MaD was an anchor project of the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture.

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A woman in a purple top and black pants is holding a baby. Next to her is a red stroller. The scene is outdoors in a park with trees and a building in the background.

“Social Lab is a good platform to show that government bodies can play the role of a facilitator: we discovered the importance of connection, for example, through facilitating community groups to join hands to provide different services for the neighbourhood, to make the activities and facilities in the park more responsive to the people.”


Doris FOK

Assistant Director
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

“Seeing that we are members of the Lab Team, people gave us a lot of valuable feedback, unlike the complaints we usually get. We hear a lot of their voices and this helps us to run the park.”

Alan CHAN


The Lab Team
Manager of Lai Chi Kok Park
Leisure and Cultural Services Department



“Nowadays, people give opinions that are accusing or criticising in nature. Carrying out projects in the community often brings conflicts among different groups. The Park Lab, on the other hand, works in an inclusive and understanding manner. It is humble, participatory and it listens to all stakeholders in the community.”

Ambrose CHEUNG, JP

Chairman
Sham Shui Po District Council



“When we talk about community needs, the public, even the residents, may not exactly know what they are. Through the process of ‘observation–interview–opinion collection–prototype experiment’, the community has come up with solid ideas of their needs. This has helped cultivate community cohesion and awareness.”

Hahn CHU

The Lab Team
Environmental Activist

Executive Summary

In partnership with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), the Park Lab had set Lai Chi Kok Park in Mei Foo as the lab base between April to September 2017. Together with 24 publicly recruited citizens, four LCSD Leisure Managers, the Mei Foo Children & Youth Integrated Service Centre of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong and a team of social designers, we began a five-month action research process to explore how a free and happy park looks like, and consequently how might parks respond creatively to the needs of the local communities.

Using a user-centred design thinking approach, the Lab Team conducted design observation of park users, connected with system and community stakeholders through public engagement activities, and co-created five prototypes that sought to improve existing park services and unleash hidden potentials of the park. These prototypes included:

- **Park for People and Pets**
experimented with setting up a double-gated, inclusive pet park with education elements using one of the lawns in Lai Chi Kok Park.
- **Inside out Park**
transformed a lawn into a fun water play area without excessive play rules to explore the potential and perception of free water play among children and parents.
- **Dialogue in the Park**
proposed a set of DIY loose play equipment that could be assembled together by children and parents, to depart from existing pre-fabricated play equipment and explore the possibilities of inter-generational play.
- **Park in the Dark**
explored the potential of and demand for the park to become a space for community building in the evening, through staging a film screening and a music concert at two locations in the park.
- **Parkour Fitness Workshops**
organised parkour workshops in the park to understand how parkour athletes and other park users negotiated the use of play equipment in the same space, and sought to broaden public imagination of the usage of park equipment.

The five experiments touched on a diversity of issues related to park services innovation, while they were developed out of the particular case of Lai Chi Kok Park, they also hinted at a paradigm shift needed to gradually transform public parks from mere recreational spaces into sites of placemaking and community development. Apart from the five prototypes proposed, the Lab Team has observed these potential areas for improvement:

- **Open up park spaces for public and communal initiatives:**
Open up park venues and simplify venue rental application procedures for nearby residents and local groups to allow more self-organised initiatives to bring the open spaces alive; facilitate freer use of park space for creative experiments and communal events
- **Encourage diversity and inclusion in parks:**
Incorporate principles of inclusion and non-segregation in the spatial design of parks and their management; encourage different types of users (from different races, ages to species) to share park spaces; shape parks as a communal space of new learnings and encounters
- **Transform parks into creative play space:**
Depart from confining sets of pre-fabricated, monotonous plastic play equipment to create space that embraces the spirit of free play and that is not bound by excessive regulations to unleash the true potentials of parks; facilitate young users to improvise and create their own play environment as much as possible so parks will never become obsolete
- **Develop more user-centred park facilities through public participation:**
Understand deeply about user profiles, their needs and usage patterns; involve community users in planning and designing park services and facilities so they would suit users' needs better and foster community ownership

To provide more agile public services, we need to understand community needs deeply, be experimental to create alternative scenarios and build in community collaboration in the service models. We hope these recommendations can be taken on board by the LCSD, and join hands in creating better parks in the future for our beloved city.



1

Background & Method

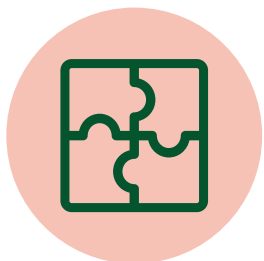
What is a Social Lab?

A Social Lab can be seen as a laboratory where we experiment with finding small, local solutions to (big) social problems. However, in this lab we do not wear white coats or work behind closed doors; instead, we find place outside, in neighbourhoods where real life takes place. The Lab Team is multidisciplinary – citizens, civil servants and professionals work together to find out where challenges lie and experiment with alternative scenarios, to come up with new services and policy recommendations.

Each lab project is a temporary existence, yet it offers a way to address questions such as: who is (not) organising policy making and designing services and processes, who is (not) invited, who defines what “quality” is, which challenges are (not) addressed and which pathways are (not) explored and why.

Launched in 2016, Jockey Club Make a Difference Social Lab is the first community-driven public service innovation lab in Hong Kong. As an independent NGO, we run labs with government agencies and citizens to design better services and forward-looking strategies through community participation, design thinking and co-creative experiments.

Our core values:



Co-creative

Convene a cross-sectoral lab team with civil servants, community stakeholders and citizens.



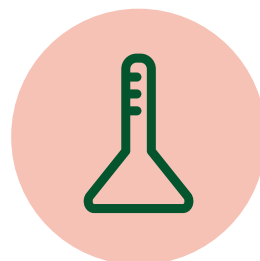
User-centred

Understand social issues empathetically and identify community needs.



Participatory

Design community engagement activities to facilitate idea exchange, build new relationships and co-design solutions.



Experiment-driven

Build service prototypes to test citizens' response and collect evidence for policy recommendations.

Why now and why is MaD doing this?

Our starting point is TRUST. Trust is lacking in Hong Kong. Millennials, in particular, are keen to participate in the public sphere, to deeply understand issues and be empowered to create better communities in Hong Kong. However, civic engagement is still largely in the format of one-sided consultations, creating disconnect and dissatisfaction with little citizen participation. When the Jockey Club Make a Difference Social Lab (JC MaD Social Lab) came into being, we asked these questions: what if citizens and civil servants can work together, learn together and experiment together? Can we have a new method to build trust among different stakeholders? What does it mean to design policies using a more creative, user-centred approach?

As a prototype before the launch of JC MaD Social Lab, we experimented with a one-week “Lab Sprint” in 2015 with Kennisland, a think-and-do-tank from Amsterdam which runs social labs in different Dutch cities, as our lab partner. We explored issues faced by the homeless and elderly communities in Sham Shui Po. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, the Lab Sprint was over-registered within a short time, the Lab Team made interesting discoveries, and interesting community initiatives were born in just a week. There was a thirst for platforms that encourage more participatory and empathetic public service design, and a need to bring in stakeholders from the system to have a bigger impact.



Understanding homeless community in Sham Shui Po



Kennisland, a think-and-do tank from Amsterdam, was our lab partner at the one-week “Lab Sprint”



Watch a video to learn more about the “Lab Sprint”:
<https://youtu.be/gwp4w1tvYUU>

With generous support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Make A Difference Institute is running four lab projects from 2016 to 2019, through which we develop a set of tested Social Lab methods and tools that work in Hong Kong. Our first lab, the LIBoratory Project, took place between September 2016 and January 2017. The Park Lab is our second lab project in the series.

Our Social Lab Method

Our Social Lab is initially informed by Amsterdam-based think-and-do-tank Kennisland's "Feed-Forward" methodology, named after the idea that each step serves as feedback for undertaking future actions. We adapted and modified the method after our first lab, the LIBoratory Project, and made further revisions at the Park Lab according to contextual needs.

Step 1

A four-step approach

Field Research

- Map out key stakeholders, devise interview guides and collect stories from the field
- Observe user behaviour and interview users afterwards for understanding the issues



Step 2

Collective Ethnography

- Write citizens' stories as a team to piece together a collective ethnography of the district



Step 3

Story Analysis & Collective Evaluation

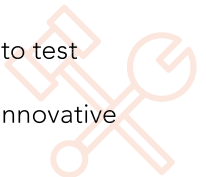
- Analyse stories, tease out red threads and identify service gaps
- Host open-to-all "collective evaluation" meetings where community members are invited to verify findings and the Lab Team reaches out to potential partners



Step 4

Prototyping

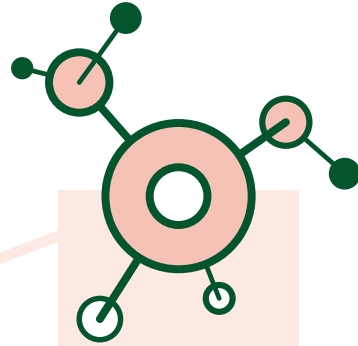
- Create small-scale, iterative experiments to test assumptions and fine-tune users' needs
- Evaluate experiments and come up with innovative solutions leading to policy suggestions



Characteristics of this method



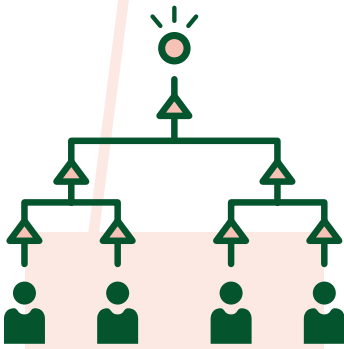
Creating a **safe environment for co-creation and experimentation** where citizens and civil servants work very closely together



Roping in citizens, community organisations and civil servants to form new social networks, creating trust in the community and in the system



Prioritising people's stories over dry statistical data to better sense the urgency for action, and reinstate an empathetic dimension to policy-making



Establishing a highly participatory and bottom-up atmosphere to mobilise local knowledge and flip the traditionally expert-driven policy-making process



Human-centred and evidence-based: understanding public issues through the public's eyes; collecting users' feedback to modify service ideas with high agility

Why parks and what kinds of impact do we want to make?

The Park Lab was born from connections made in the LIBoratory Project, our first social lab project. One of the prototypes, “Rack on the Go”, explored extending library services into parks through setting up portable newspaper racks at Po On Road Playground. The library team of the Cultural Service Branch within LCSD connected us to their colleagues at the leisure management team of the Leisure Branch who expressed interest in our design and public engagement methods, thus marking the beginning of the Park Lab.

Public urban parks account for a large portion of public open space in Hong Kong. Over half of Hong Kong’s urban open space, estimated at a total of 1048.8 hectares (54%)¹, is provided by LCSD and a few other government departments. More than being recreational space, parks are also social space where people meet their neighbours and relax from their small homes. At times parks can become political space too where citizens express different views.

With the belief that more participatory public space brings vibrancy to the city, MaD has, since 2011, initiated a series of public space projects where creative citizens actively shared, co-created and explored alternative values and imaginations. Some of these projects include MaD@West Kowloon and Freespace Fest from 2011-2013 at the West Kowloon Waterfront Promenade, Citizens on the Move at the space under the Kwun Tong Bypass managed by the Energising Kowloon East office in 2013, Tin Shui Collaborative at the Tin Sau Bazaar in 2014, and a series of outdoor “free markets” held outside of Kwai Tsing Theatre and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The Park Lab is a continuation of MaD’s vision to create positive changes in public space in Hong Kong.

Like most public facilities in Hong Kong, parks are heavily regulated in consideration of safety, maintenance, and also in fear of complaints. Yet, looking at the trends and discourses about parks and playgrounds worldwide, engaging citizens in managing and maintaining their neighbourhood parks to increase community ownership has become increasingly popular. For example, “Park Scan” in San Francisco is an online platform where citizens can post their observations, requests and compliments about their neighbourhood parks; the “Adopt a Park” programme in New York presents a volunteering programme that encourages citizens to participate in the upkeep of neighbourhood parks. In some other cases, parks can be openly rented for street parties or community gatherings. At the Park Lab, we are interested in seeing how parks in Hong Kong can be more progressively managed with citizen engagement.

1. Unopened Space: Mapping Equitable Availability of Open Space in Hong Kong. Civic Exchange, 2017.



2

Essentials of The Park Lab

The Park and the Lab Question

Upon discussion with LCSD, we decided to set Lai Chi Kok Park in Mei Foo as the testing site for the Lab, investigating these questions:

How does a free and happy park look like?
How can the park be more progressively managed and cultivated?

Situated on reclaimed land, Lai Chi Kok Park is the biggest recreational park in Kowloon. Its development was carried out in 3 phases, covering a total area of 17.65 hectares, divided into stage I, II and III. The 24-hour park and complementary facilities nearby provide a wide range of recreational and sports facilities including a public swimming pool, sports centre and public library. Being surrounded by private housing, particularly Mei Foo Sun Chuen, Lai Chi Kok Park is often considered “the back yard” for many nearby residents. Its sheer size allows for diversity of activities and its close proximity to the nearby residential community has made it an ideal site for experiments.



A Glance at Lai Chi Kok Park

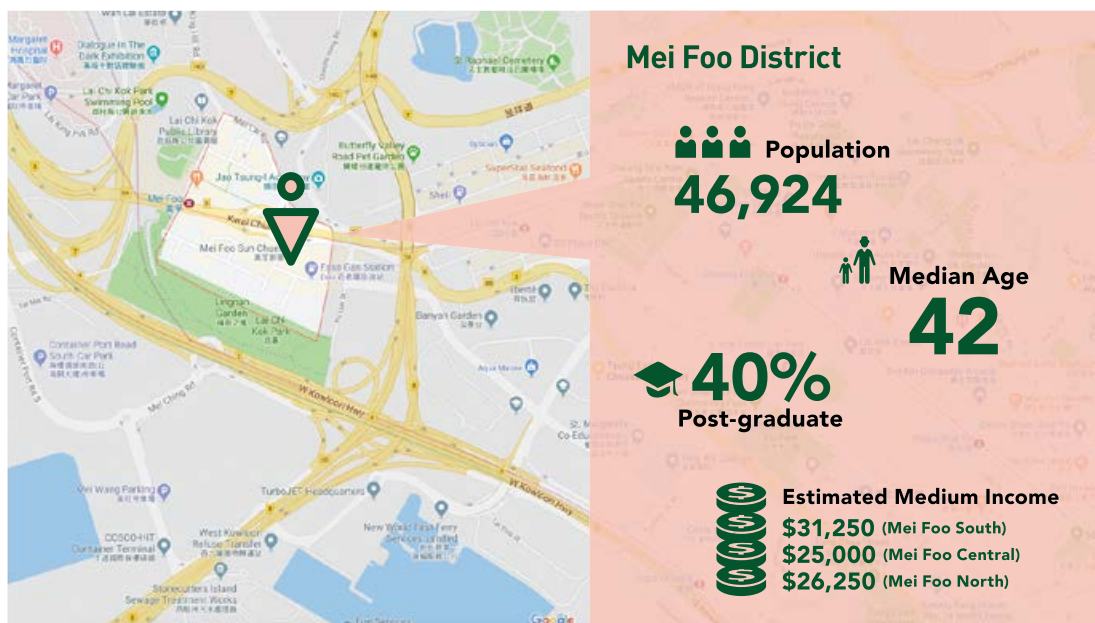
Mei Foo as a Community

Mei Foo is located at the western part of the Sham Shui Po District in Hong Kong. It spans three District Council constituency areas, namely Mei Foo North, Mei Foo Central and Mei Foo South. Developed in the 1970s, Mei Foo Sun Chuen was Hong Kong's first "Comprehensive Modern Community Living" (綜合現代社區生活) built on reclaimed land which used to be a large-scale petroleum-storage facility of Mobil.

Developments in Mei Foo are predominantly private housing and the majority of which are owner-occupied, with a small quantity of government-subsidised housing on the side. According to the 2016 Population By-census, Mei Foo has a population of 46,924 inhabitants living mainly in nuclear families, with a median age of 42. Among the population, over 40% have completed post-graduate education.

Mei Foo is generally considered as a middle-class community with well-educated residents who treasure their leisure time. Over half of its population are working adults with median household income being HKD31,250 (Mei Foo South), HKD25,000 (Mei Foo Central), and HKD26,250 (Mei Foo North), far exceeding the Hong Kong-wide median household income of HKD15,500.

Lai Chi Kok Park is highly accessible thus very popular. It is located right next to the Mei Foo Public Transport Interchange and the Mei Foo MTR station of the Tsuen Wan Line. Part of the park was built in alignment with the development of the West Rail line, and is thus physically connected to station.



User Profile

Thanks to its convenient location, Lai Chi Kok Park has been a popular recreational spot for locals and visitors. In weekdays, users of Lai Chi Kok Park are mainly nearby residents, such as families with children and the elderly. On weekends, the park is crowded with families and foreign domestic helpers.

Basic Numbers

Year of Opening: 1990

Size: 17.65 hectares

Opening Hours: 24 hours (Some facilities close early)

Active Facilities

Tennis Courts	7am–11pm
Gateball Courts	7am–11pm
Basketball cum Volleyball Courts	7am–11pm
Roller Skating Rink	7am–11pm
Skatepark	10am–10pm
Hard-surfaced Soccer Pitch	Stage I: 7am–11pm; Stage III: 7am–11pm
Jogging Trails	24 hrs.
Fitness Stations	24 hrs.
Children’s Playground	Stage I & III: 24 hrs.
Toddler’s Playground	24 hrs.
Qualiwalk Trails	24 hrs.

Passive Facilities

Lingnan Garden	7am–11pm
Pets’ Activity Area	Mon–Fri, 3pm–7am on the next day; Sat, Sun & Public Holidays 24hrs
Chinese Garden	24 hrs.
Podium Garden	24 hrs.
Chess Tables	Both Stage I & II: 24 hrs.
Amphitheatre with spectator stand of 200 seats	24 hrs.



Skatepark



Pets’ Activity Area



Amphitheatre with spectator stand of 200 seats

Lab Formation

We publicly recruited interested citizens to join our team – at the end forming a cross-disciplinary, cross-generational Lab Team of 28 citizens coming from all walks of life, aged between 18 to over 60. LCSD was very supportive that it nominated 4 representatives from different work areas and locations, giving the Lab Team insightful advice on operation and policy. They included Deputy District Leisure Manager (Sham Shui Po), Assistant Leisure Manager I (Land-based Venues), Leisure Manager of Lai Chi Kok Park and Leisure Manager of Tsuen Wan Park. To support us in the use of diverse social design methods, we were further assisted by a team of 6 Design Facilitators affiliated with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design. In this report, the MaD Social Lab team, the publicly recruited lab members and the 6 Design Facilitators are collectively called “the Lab Team”.

28 Lab Members



LCSD
Leisure Manager



Project
Organizer



Community
Organizer



Marketer



Educator



Architect



Student



Video Producer



Maker



Government
Consultant



Horticulturist



Councilor Assistant



Social Worker



Interior Designer



Retiree

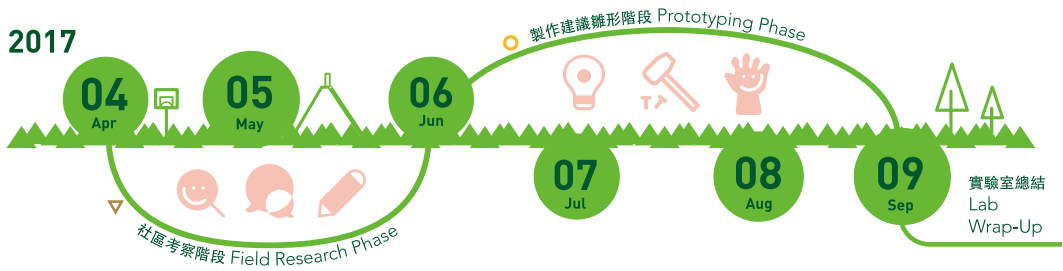


A highly diverse and energetic Lab Team

The Park Lab also has a Directors' Lab consisting of senior LCSD management, the community partner and others to give strategic advice. Directors' Lab members include:

- **Doris FOK**
Assistant Director (Leisure Services), LCSD
- **Cecily MA**
Supervisor (Sham Shui Po District), The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA)
- **Kim SALKELD, JP**
Head, Efficiency Unit (until Dec 2017)
- **SIU King Chung**
Associate Dean and Associate Professor, The School of Design,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- **Freda TONG**
Charities Manager, The Hong Kong Jockey Club
- **Ada WONG, JP**
Chair, Make A Difference Institute




Timeline



Field Research Phase

-  Design observation
-  Photo story collection
-  Interviews
-  Photo analysis
-  Community sharing

Prototyping Phase

-  Prototype making
-  Feedback collection
-  Prototype iteration



Field Research Phase

This phase comprised design thinking workshops, field observation, photo story collection, interviews and data analysis.

Through collecting photo stories at the park, the Lab Team gained insights into what the communities like and dislike, and how people are using the space in their own ways. The Lab Team also conducted a community sharing event at the Mei Foo Community Hall to engage nearby residents. Over 70 people came, including residents, community groups and district councillors. They suggested dozens of new things to do in the park, many of which are usually banned under current park regulations: playing water with friends, enjoying movies, having picnic or even camping on the lawn, walking dogs anywhere in the park, etc.

These ideas sparked off new imaginations of the park: Instead of being a highly regulated recreational space, can residents initiate their own big and small events in the park? Can the park be a creative play space for children in the neighbourhood? Can it be an inclusive space that promotes mutual understanding among people in conflict? The Lab Team started exploring how the park can be a site for placemaking and community development.



Prototyping Phase

Based on the key themes from photo analysis in the field research phase, the Lab Team started creating prototypes and conducted testing. Multiple on-site testings were held in Lai Chi Kok Park to invite local users to understand and comment on the experiments. The Lab Team also invited collaboration from district councillors and community groups to strengthen local connection and enhance sustainability of the experiments. The Lab ended with a Finale in September 2017.

The Lab Team prepared scenario maps and interactive displays to showcase their findings and initial prototype ideas. Residents expressed their views on the Lab Team's initial prototype ideas and discussed possibilities to improve park facilities or management with the Lab Team.



Field Research



Feedback Collection



Multiple tests were held to collect user feedback



Multiple tests were held to collect user feedback



Ideation workshop



Focus group discussions with users



A finale was held to share the lab's findings and challenges to a wider public



“Listening to the views from the neighbourhood can yield insights for social design because those are the things you may never find from other research methodologies.”

Johnson AU
The Lab Team
Civil Servant

3

Exploring Park Issues Through User-Centred Design

Photo Story Collection

In the initial stage, in order to know the park and its users better, lab members took on the role of “observers” and conducted vast scale of observation about the park by geographical locations, functions of facilities and user groups, with reference to methods such as “AEIOU” (making observations about Activity, Environment, Interaction, Object and User). By taking photos and writing field notes, the Lab Team carefully documented how people were using or interacting with park facilities in real life on a day-to-day basis. Accompanied by small chats, detailed observations might validate or challenge assumptions held by the Lab Team on user needs or interests. The Lab Team produced more than 100 photo stories in the field research phase, providing a basic understanding of questions such as Who are using the park? What activities or facilities do they enjoy? What are the dynamics among different users? From these photo stories, the Lab Team identified more specific research topics with potential, such as cross-generational play equipment, usage of park after dark, water play and pet activities in the park.



Stakeholders Mapping and Outreach

The Social Lab process stresses the participation of stakeholders in the development and iteration of prototypes. Upon identifying potential themes for further pursuance, the Lab Team created a stakeholders map around each potential theme to identify parties who may have an interest in the related issues or who might be affected by the prototype ideas, or who might become potential collaborators. For instance, in brainstorming possible creative usage of an idle fountain in Lai Chi Kok Park for water play, the Lab Team mapped out relevant stakeholders – parents and children, community groups working with children, cleaners, LCSD personnel, etc. The Lab Team then actively conducted focus group discussions and interviews with these parties to understand the values they hold, synthesise their concerns and aspirations, and address them in the prototype. For example, the “Inside out Park” prototype was informed by concerns about safety, the desires for free play and worries about issues with hygiene and facility maintenance. The design of the “Park for People and Pets” prototype integrated competing views from dog owners and non-owners, both of whom key stakeholders of the prototype, by setting a clear boundary for the pop-up pet park.



Community Sharing in the Mei Foo Community Hall

To further engage Mei Foo residents, the Lab Team conducted a community sharing event in the Mei Foo Community Hall, situated right next to Lai Chi Kok Park and Mei Foo Sun Chuen. The Lab Team displayed a photo wall of park observations to validate their assumptions about the usage of park facilities with nearby residents, and shared with the residents their initial prototype ideas. Over 70 people attended, including nearby residents across age groups, district councillors, a representative from the Sham Shui Po District Office, community groups and academics. The sharing created a platform for conversation among groups who might seem unrelated at first glance. For instance, through this sharing, a group of parkour lovers shared thoughts with social workers about the possibility of co-managing the park.

To stimulate and facilitate residents' expression of comments and feedback, the Lab Team prepared a series of interactive games and devices that were fun and communicative, e.g. cartoon storyboards that stimulated imagination about water play in the park, a sticker game that allowed people to create their ideal furniture sets in the park, a cardboard cut-out with QR code that drew people's attention to the sounds in the park, and mock-up film posters that invited suggestions for a community theatre on the lawn in the evenings. Specifically designed with an inclusive and relaxing atmosphere in mind, participants did not only comment on the Lab Team's initial ideas at the sharing, but also suggested new things to do in the park beyond current usage.





Doris Fok, Assistant Director (Leisure Services) of LCSD and Kim Salkeld, Head of Efficiency Unit (until Dec 2017), appreciated the observation made by the Lab Team, and encouraged them to further develop their prototype ideas.



Ambrose Cheung, JP, Chairman of Sham Shui Po District Council discussed existing policy gap with the Lab Team.



The Lab Team showed Janet Ng, Sham Shui Po District Councillor, the idea of water play using storyboard.

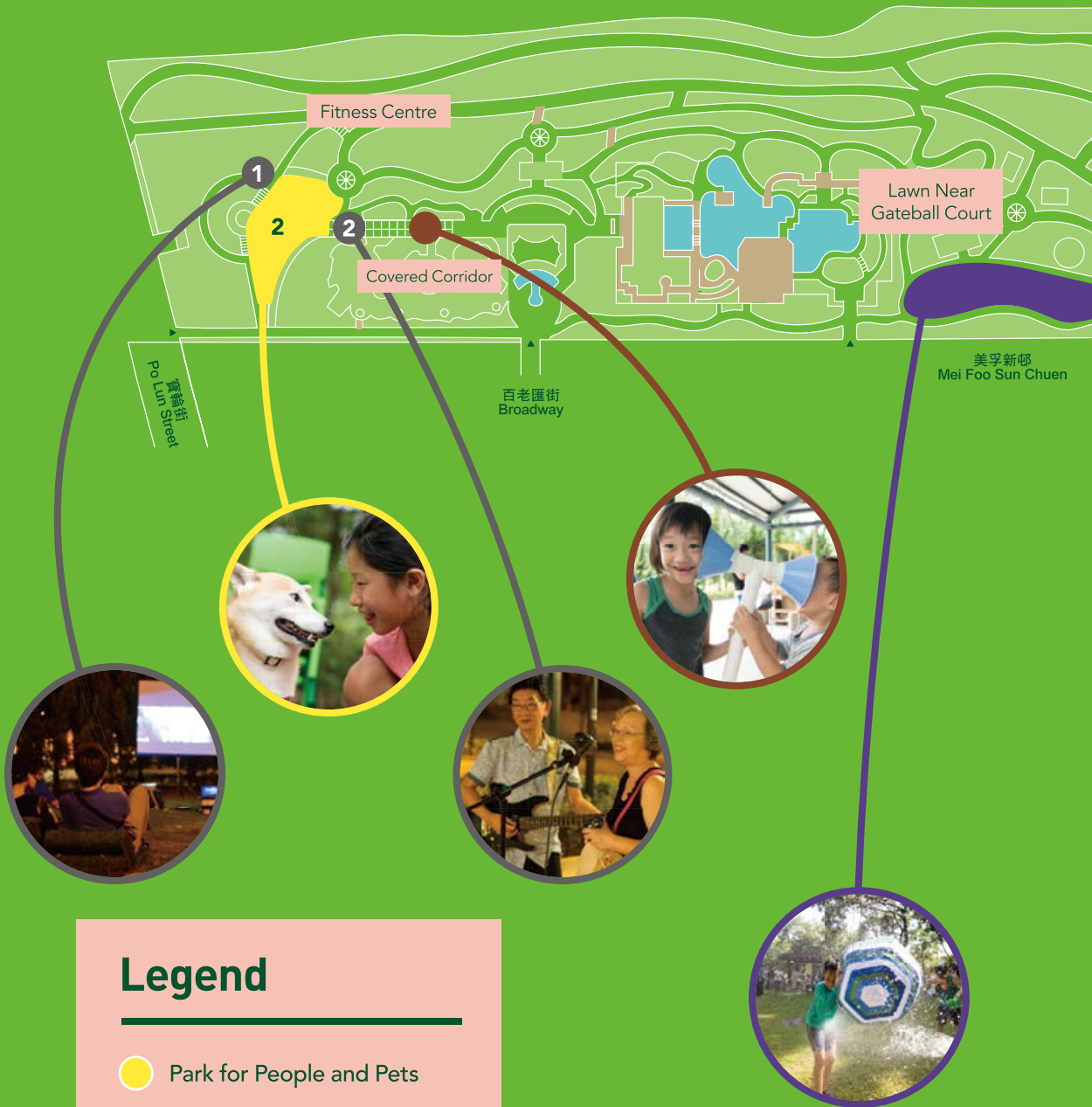


“From LCSD information, there are around 1,000 complaints a year. But our prototypes, innovative and unconventional, have caused zero complaints. There is a lesson learnt: active public participation does not only improve public services, it can also be a solution to the complaints culture in Hong Kong. Can we cultivate a partnership between civil society and the government?”

Johnson AU
The Lab Team
Civil Servant

4 Prototypes

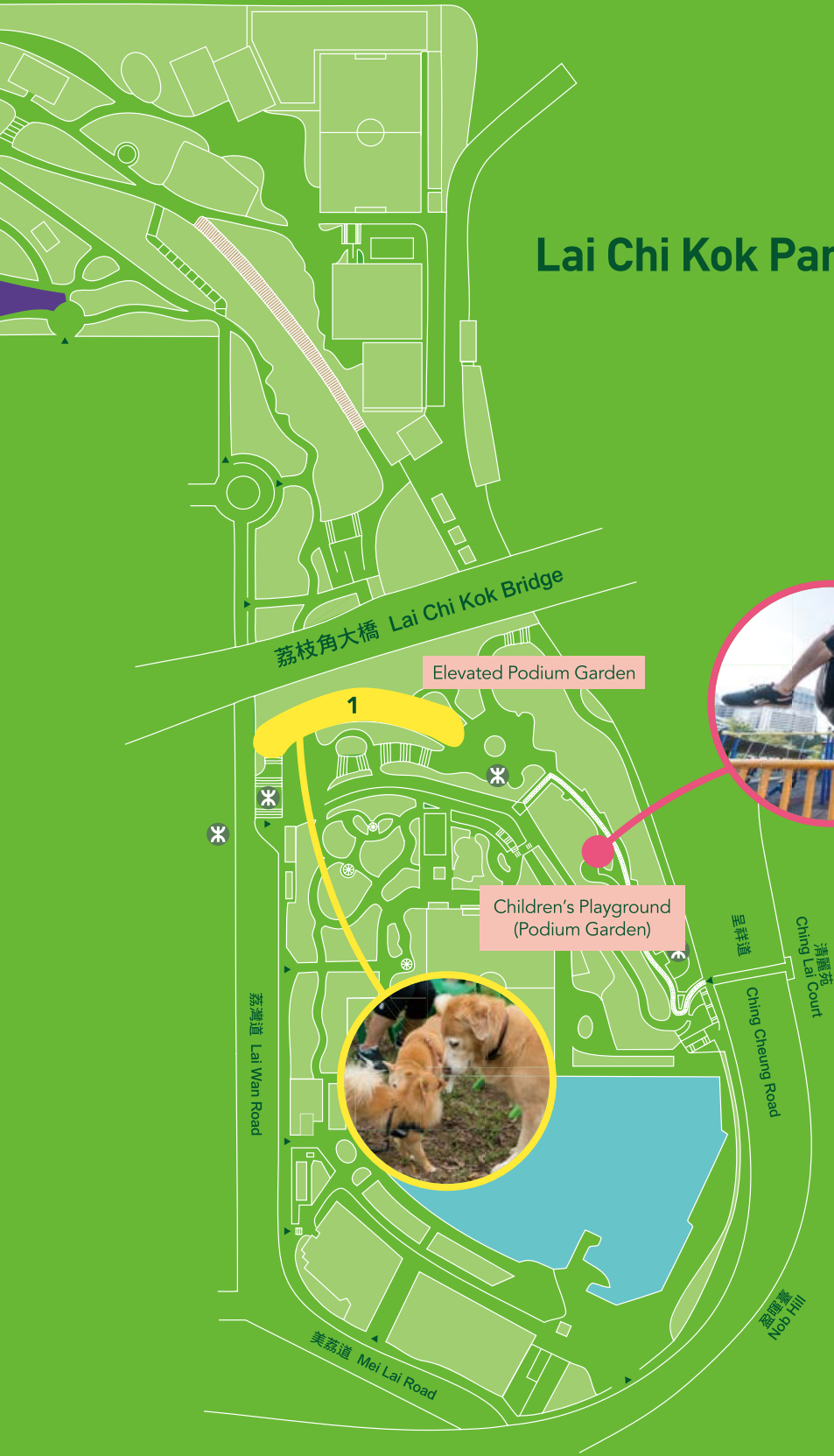
Prototype Testing Sites



Legend

-  Park for People and Pets
-  Wewet Festival
-  Dialogue in the Dark
-  Park in the Dark
-  Parkour Fitness Workshop

Lai Chi Kok Park



荔枝角大橋 Lai Chi Kok Bridge

Elevated Podium Garden

1

Children's Playground (Podium Garden)

荔灣道 Lai Wan Road

呈祥道
清麗苑
Ching Lai Court

Ching Cheung Road

美荔道
Mob Hill

美荔道 Mei Lai Road



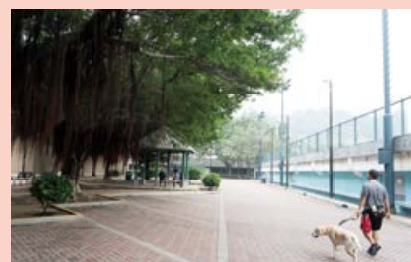
Park for People and Pets



Observation

Many parks in Hong Kong provide nice natural environments for people and their pets. Yet, many of them are designed in such a way that segregates pets from people. In fact, pets are largely banned from parks, except for the dedicated dog or pet gardens specifically designed for animals. At the margin of Lai Chi Kok Park, there is a Pets' Activity Area which shares the same space with the Park's refuse collection point. Dogs are allowed to the Area via a specific entrance, and a passageway that also allows garbage trucks. As such, pet owners have flagged hygiene and safety concerns.

In Mei Foo, there have been long-standing conflicts between pet owners and non-owners in the community since Mei Foo Sun Chuen had allowed dogs in 2008 (with the exception of Block 8 which Deed of Mutual Covenant states that dogs are not allowed). Pet owners are frustrated about the lack of appropriate facilities in the neighbourhood for their pets, while non-owners complain about hygiene issues and unpleasant odour from dog excrement.



Due to the limitation of leaving open access for the Emergency Vehicular Access, the Pets' Activity Area is in fact a narrow pathway. Pet owners often walk their dogs out of the area.

Prototype Idea

This prototype envisioned to create a safe space for people and pets at the heart of Lai Chi Kok Park that could provide education programmes for pet-owners as well as non-owners, and embodied a higher respect for animals. It was tested twice at two respective locations, first at an elevated podium garden atop Mei Foo West Rail Station and then at a relatively remote lawn near Po Lun Street entrance. The Lab Team transformed the two areas, both normally prohibiting pets, into inclusive mingling spaces for all kinds of users, from pets, pet-owners to non-owners.

During the tests, dogs of various breeds, sizes and characters made their way to the park, creating a lively vibe that was proven attractive even to onlookers, as well as making themselves available as fun-loving teaching medium. The area was also well-defined, fenced off and double-gated to ensure the safety of pets and passers-by. Non-owners who normally would not go to pet gardens could now share space and play with dogs, while dog-owners introduced to non-owners including children a range of knowledge and etiquettes required of responsible owners.

Given existing conflicts between dog owners and non-owners in the community, some non-owners worried the prototype might intensify the conflict and invite further complaints. LCSD Park management showed concerns towards possible nuisance created to other park users, particularly at the route along which dogs enter the pet park and related safety precautions. The Lab Team, at the advice of the park management, paid tremendous effort in selecting site and choosing suitable fencing options that could both ensure visibility of the pet park and safety for both pets and other park users.



Findings & Insights

- Pets and people are normally segregated in existing practice: either pets are allowed in designated pet parks or they are not allowed at all in usual parks. The Park for People and Pets proposed a new alternative to break this binary, by introducing a well-defined and fenced-off area that could ensure safety of pets and passers-by while being easily implementable to the main space of most parks. Instead of sitting at a marginal and non-descript area, the relatively central location and clear visibility of our prototype helped to normalise pet inclusion and provided a rare chance for human-animal space-sharing and interaction, which could gradually lead to more compassion for animals.
- The Park for People and Pets, which was tested for two half days, attracted over 200 participants and 100 dogs among which, one-third of them were not pet owners. They were dog-loving people whose buildings have prohibited pets, as well as parents and children who have little idea about pets. What took place organically was that pet owners introduced their dogs to the visitors and invited children to feed their dogs. Parents were happy to see their children exploring something new. Older people also had fun observing these new interactions. The experiment facilitated communication between pet-owners and non-owners, which might be a solution to the long-standing conflict between the two groups in the Mei Foo community. organised parkour workshops in the park to understand how parkour athletes and other park users negotiated the use of play equipment in the same space, and sought to broaden public imagination of the usage of park equipment.
- The Lab Team witnessed the possibility of solving conflict between dog owners and non-owners by good design and communication. During one experiment, an argument broke out between a dog owner who was cleaning up dog poo and an old couple passing by. The old couple repeated angrily that “dogs are not allowed in the park” and threatened to complain to LCSD. Upon intervention, the Lab Team understood the old man was worried that children might unknowingly enter the pet park and cause potential accidents. The old man’s concern was quickly settled by placing the event banner and signage at a more visible location.
- During the two tests, pet owners shared their thoughts on what constitute an ideal pet park:
 - There should be shaded areas as shading does not only protect pet owners and pets from rain and sun, it also gathers people and encourages communication.
 - There should be spacious, flat lawns for pets to walk and exercise. Walking on grassy lawns is considered good for dogs’ joints, but parks with lawns that allow pets are very limited. Pet owners in Mei Foo have to travel far to the Penfold Park² or Sai Kung to enjoy a “lawn time” with their pets.

2. Penfold Park is set to undergo major transformation. In the re-development plan of Penfold Park released in 2018, Penfold Park will be divided into dog zones (on leash and off leash) and zones where pets are not allowed.

- Many pet owners do not prefer walking their dogs on lawns at night-time. Lawns usually do not have good lighting and are also more humid at night, which makes it difficult to clean up dog poo. Concretised paths are preferred for dog walking in the evening. It can also cater to the needs of pet owners who would like to avoid fleas and ticks from lawns.
- The pet park has to be barrier-free to allow easy access for people in need and disabled dogs. According to the test at the elevated podium garden where visitors had to walk upstairs, some users found themselves excluded from trying the prototype, such as elderly owners and their pets, owners who carry their dogs in trolleys and small dogs.

Further Suggestions

This experience showed that other than merely being a physical space with facilities for pets, pet parks can be an interactive educational space for pet owners and non-owners. We suggest that community organisations or animal groups should be invited for public education initiatives such as information on public health and pet keeping topics, including urine odour removal, pet habits and proper etiquette around pets.

User Feedback

“My daughter likes dogs very much, so I take her to the park to meet different breeds of dogs and learn how to get along with them.”



A parent who is not a dog-owner

“The Pets’ Activity Area should have clear instructions and fences distinguishing pet area and non-pet area, so that park users are well informed about it.”



Resident who is afraid of dogs

“The Pet Park is visible in the park, at the same time, other users are not disturbed as pet owners walk their dogs. This is true inclusion.”



Dog owner

Inside out Park



Observation

Many primary school-aged children have lost interest in fixed play equipment made with standardised plastic structures. While children and parents reflected the lack of space for creative play in the neighbourhood and in Hong Kong generally, there are plenty of park resources left unused, such as pools and water fountains that serve only decorative purposes, or big lawns that are not usually stepped on.



Many park users reflected to the Lab Team that they found the pool and the fountains a waste of space as they only serve decorative purpose.

Prototype Idea

This prototype transformed a lawn into space for water play for parents and children. The prototype was tested through a parent-children event called “WeWet Festival” held on a Saturday afternoon. Water toys and equipment were set on the lawn and water was supplied through irrigating pipes. There were no rules to the games other than basic safety instructions, and children were encouraged to get creative and autonomous.

The Lab Team’s initial idea was to experiment with water play at the pool and fountain area shown above. However, since these two facilities were not designed for recreational purpose in the first place, there are various hygiene and safety issues. For example, the bottom of the pool is uneven and the pool water is not sanitised on a daily basis. Hence, the Lab Team explored other suitable facilities and chose a piece of lawn located near Gateball Court (B) at Stage 3 as the testing site.



Findings & Insights

- The experiment was very popular among families nearby. Participating parents commented that there were too many rules in parks in Hong Kong, whereas this experiment allowed children to experience grass and mud, and to interact with other children in a natural setting. Participating children also enjoyed the experiment because they could “play freely”. The Lab Team observed a demand for space that allows creative free play. According to a few participants, parent groups nearby tried initiating similar water play activities in the neighbourhood yet venues were limited to private rooftops or clubhouses which are not as spacious or convenient. Parks, sites mainly associated with structured play, can become good sites for free play as well to unleash children’s creativity, not limited to water play.
- Contrary to initial worries over complaints for water wastage and disturbance to older park users, the experiment was warmly welcomed not only by participants but also passers-by. Moreover, the existing facilities at Lai Chi Kok Park managed to support the operation of water play activities. The irrigation pipes sufficiently provided the water needed, and the two-hour water play experiment did not overload soil drainage at the lawn. In addition, participants were all nearby residents so they could quickly get changed before or after at home. Yet, for similar activities to be held in the future, quickly accessible changing facilities are essential.

User Feedback

“WeWet Festival is a meaningful activity that has opened up the lawn for adults and children to play with water. There are too many regulations in Hong Kong’s parks, and I hope more places can be opened to the public to play more freely. Water play is an important experience for the kids to cooperate with each other and for adults to interact with neighbours. It’s also a parent-child playtime to compensate for the lack of play during school. They can experience nature play too!”



Parent

Dialogue in the Park



Observation

The park is a place for families to have fun together, but most play equipment at the children’s playground is installed at certain locations and is for children only. Their setting does not encourage parent-child or intergenerational interactions. A common scene at the park is that parents and grandparents sitting on the side preoccupied with their mobile phones while children playing. Yet we also saw adults who ignore the “12-year-old age limit” rule, and tried hard to squeeze themselves onto the slide, the swing or see-saw to share moments of joy, particularly for parents of younger children.



Prototype Idea

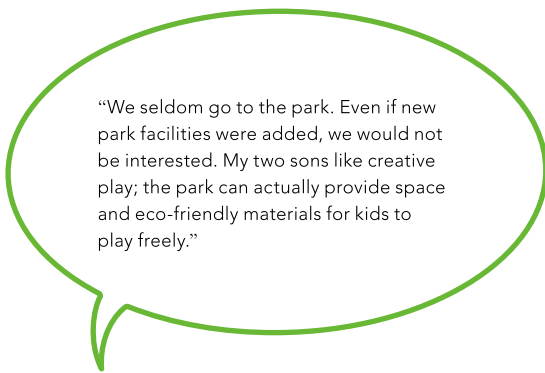
To address the need of intergenerational play between parents and children, this prototype experimented with a megaphone installed in the bushes and on the railings of a staircase for families to play together. The megaphone was designed for parents and children to listen to each other's "secret messages". In the first experiment, the megaphone was installed near the children's playground at Stage III. To explore the possibility of parents and children designing play equipment together for the park, the Lab Team did a second experiment at a covered corridor near the children's playground. A DIY workshop was conducted for families to build their own play equipment with plastic pipes.



Findings & Insights

- In the transition from the first to the second experiment, the prototype shifted direction – from creating physical play equipment that would encourage intergenerational play, to engaging parents and children to co-design play equipment to suit their needs. In the first experiment, although park users were curious about the megaphone installation, only a few of them were attracted to stay and play. Without the engagement of park users in the making process, the megaphone might not be that different from any other existing fixed equipment in the children’s playground. To best suit the interests of park users, the Lab Team repositioned the prototype as an attempt of “hacking the park space by park users” and organised a DIY workshop, attempting to provide an inspiring and adventure-filled play environment.
- Participating children and parents reflected that many older children have lost interest in the traditional play equipment in children’s playgrounds. Instead, they now look for games that are more challenging and creative, like problem-solving puzzles or free play. They enjoyed the DIY workshop a lot. However, younger children aged below nine did not enjoy the DIY set as much. They often found the pipes too heavy and it was difficult to build a play device that can be “playable”. The Lab Team found that as much as parents would like to play together with their children, they also want to have space of their own and so treasured opportunities to unleash their children’s creativity. In the DIY workshop, we observed that half of the parents, mostly with younger children, joined their children in building the pipes while others only watched as their children worked on their creative works and only showed their appreciation and played together with their children afterwards.
- Parents generally embraced the idea of co-designing play equipment to better respond to different interests of park users, but this needs appropriate guidance. More exploration is needed to turn part of children’s playgrounds into “maker corners”, enabling making and co-designing of different play devices.

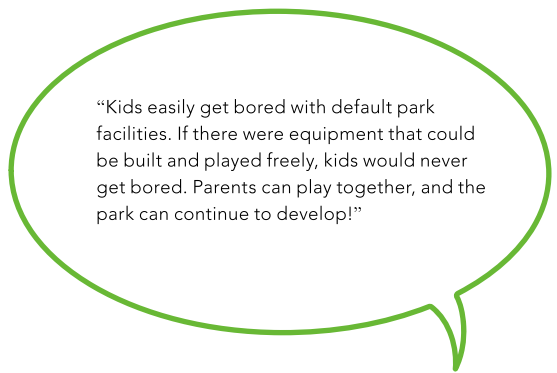
User Feedback



“We seldom go to the park. Even if new park facilities were added, we would not be interested. My two sons like creative play; the park can actually provide space and eco-friendly materials for kids to play freely.”



Participating parent in the DIY workshop



“Kids easily get bored with default park facilities. If there were equipment that could be built and played freely, kids would never get bored. Parents can play together, and the park can continue to develop!”



Participating parent in the DIY workshop

Prototype 04

Park in the Dark



Observation

When we talk about parks, we usually think of parks in the daytime. Lai Chi Kok Park, which is a 24-hour park, has a different face in the evenings: young adults jogging around, middle-aged women and men dancing or practising tai-chi, and toddlers riding their bicycles and scooters. Some use park facilities creatively in their own ways, such as playing music or doing parkour. A park in the evenings is a locale of vibrant public life. It gathers people of different ages and interests, yet interactions seldom happen among them. Can parks in the evenings play a role in community building?



Prototype Idea

This prototype sought to enrich citizens' park experience and encourage community engagement through organising a range of evening activities. The first experiment was a mini film screening at one of the lawns near the children's playground at Stage III, where families enjoyed a local short film and were then invited to share their thoughts about the park in the evenings. The second experiment was a concert of popular songs and acapella which appealed to different age groups, and where participants brought food to share and joined in the singing. The concert was held on a rainy day at the covered corridor near the children's playground, which was easily accessible to residents, yet surrounded by lawns with trees, hence reducing possible noise nuisance to other users and residents. Ultimately, this prototype tested the perception and demand for opening up park spaces for community activities which could be hosted by community organisations regularly in the future.



Findings & Insights

- Nearby residents generally welcomed both experiments and were positive about similar happenings in the future. The movie selected for the first experiment was more children-oriented with audience of mainly parents and children, while the mini-concert attracted more diverse age groups, and the Lab Team noted that some residents dropped by after jogging or tai-chi class. The mini-concert also allowed more interactive moments as audience sang along while performers invited the audience for jamming.
- A major concern from park management was potential complaints about noise nuisance. The two experiments proved the precaution measures as agreed with LCSD effective. They included:
 - selecting a spot that is far away from the apartment blocks which was also surrounded by trees
 - strict monitoring of volume: the Lab Team measured the sound level every hour to make sure the event did not disturb residents
- The survey conducted with local residents also indicated that most residents do not find it a problem if the activity finishes by 10pm. The Lab Team also noted that self-discipline and tolerance among each other is the key to such future co-use.
- The two experiments conducted were considered cases of “non-designated use of venues”, which requires application three months in advance of the proposed event date and only applications from registered organisations (e.g. non-governmental organisations or registered companies) are accepted. Currently, it is not possible for individuals to initiate similar activities in parks.
- Apart from testing the popularity of the park in the dark, the Lab Team also explored possibility of opening up park spaces for community activities to be organised by interested residents. However, in the experiments, as much as participants enjoyed them, they showed no interest in organising one on their own. At the moment, for the park to become a community-building hub, the focus should be to provide an easy mechanism for community organisations and established resident groups to use various park spaces for future programmes and local activities.

Parkour Fitness Workshops



Observation

Park users sometimes engage in activities that fall out of the designated usage or time of use of park facilities as laid out by LCSD. Parkour is one of them. There is no specific area for parkour athletes. According to the Lab Team's interview with young people doing parkour, they found children's playgrounds an excellent site for practice as there are safety mats. They usually practice with the play equipment in the evenings when there are fewer children and parents. Security guards are less likely to expel them as long as they do not cause disturbance or safety concerns to others.

Prototype Idea

This prototype experimented with organising parkour fitness workshops to understand how parkour athletes and other park users, such as elderly and children, negotiated the use of play equipment in the same space, and meanwhile sought to broaden public imagination of parkour and multiple usage of park equipment. The workshops took place at the fitness station and children's playground at the Podium Garden close to Mei Foo MTR station of the West Rail Line. The Lab team invited parkour association representatives to introduce parkour. Participants were publicly recruited to join the workshop and experience parkour. This prototype also emphasised empathy building among park users as an alternative to the current park management culture dominated by regulations and complaints processing.

Findings & Insights

- In the two beginners' parkour workshops, parkour athletes and other park users came up with ways of sharing the children's playground for their own enjoyment. Parkour athletes were self-disciplined and they naturally chose an area in the children's playground that is separated from the slides by plastic fence. Alternatively, they utilised railings and walls at the fringe of the playground, in order to minimise disturbance to other users. Other onlookers did not show concern nor did they interrupt the parkour workshop. Some were even observing the workshops intensely with great curiosity, though most hesitated to try it themselves as they did not have appropriate outfit.
- Contrary to stereotypical understanding of parkour being a dangerous activity, safety is of primary concern to parkour athletes. The first skill workshop participants learnt was movements to protect themselves from injuries. Parkour also emphasises the making of sound judgment about danger, and requires thorough understanding of one's ability. While the actions of parkour may seem dangerous to many, they are in fact acts as a result of dedicated training of the body and mind.
- The prototype called for a rethink of the stereotypical understanding of "extreme sports" (and whether parkour can be considered an extreme sport), and regulations around them. A deeper question to ask is: as park management, to what extent do we believe people are able to take care of themselves, and consequently how many paternalistic regulations and measures are required to maintain balance between fun and park safety? Recently there has been reflection among educators and parents in Hong Kong about parks being too safe, thus taking away children's ability to take calculated risks and experiment organically with the space surroundings. This will be a long debate indeed, and perhaps can start with parkour.



Further Suggestions

Parks are spaces with different users, and conflicting use of park facilities can be a source of dispute or complaint. Instead of handling these incidents as regular complaints, there is an opportunity to better understand usage patterns and everyday dynamics among different users.

These disputes can be resolved through facilitating better mutual understanding among users, which helps to reduce complaints and moreover, create a sense of community and shared usage in the park.

Park management can consider setting up a communication platform for different park users who share the same space to better understand each other's usage needs and patterns, which shall in turn help them to negotiate and coordinate usage. These platforms may take the form of an app or interactive website where users can initiate discussion about the park, self-organise activities or report happenings. An example of an interactive website is Park Scan from Portland (please refer to Innovative Park Practices of this report) where citizens can send observations or compliments, and report problems to park management. There are also plenty of apps designed for public engagement, such as Neighborland, which can facilitate communication among users.



Prototyping as an iterative process

The prototyping phase is not just about making the ideas real, but a time when the Lab Team reaches out further to relevant people and organisations in the community to inspire trusting collaborations, further investigate the issues, test and refine prototype ideas with relevant stakeholders.

In the prototyping phase, we met with these people and organisations who helped us in the iterative process:

(Arranged in alphabetical order)

Public Sector

Leisure and Cultural Services Department
Sham Shui Po District Council

Community Sector

Academy of Movement
CNEX Foundation
The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong Mei Foo Children and Youth Integrated Services Centre
HIKAP ACAPPELLA
Playright Children's Play Association
Registered Clinical Psychologist of The Hong Kong Psychological Society
Mei Foo Animal Concern Group
WONG Hon-fun, Dennis (a.k.a Guitar Granpa)

“My biggest learning is understanding the process of social innovation. I thought social innovation would be abstract. But after joining the Lab, I found that actually everyone can be part of it regardless of one’s background. It can be initiated by tiny thoughts and co-organised by everyone.”

Jeannie KO
The Lab Team
University Student

“It is exactly this adventurous spirit that Hong Kong lacks. This platform creates changes to individuals. We forget our prejudices. We learn to listen, think, observe and communicate in a comfortable manner. This kind of communication can generate a lot of potential in our community.”

Lisa HO
The Lab Team
Project Manager



5

Lab Impact

Follow-up after the Lab

While impact often takes time, we have included here immediate follow-up actions that have taken place inside or with parks that can be traced back to the Park Lab.

Insights of participating LCSD team members

The lab process is one where participating civil servants go through the whole lab cycle – from gathering stories at the front line to brainstorming solutions and making prototypes. For the participating leisure managers from LCSD, the transition from a member of park management to a member of the Lab Team did not only bring to light the importance of user perspectives, but also the possibility of alternative communication approaches. One of the Leisure Managers shared, “LCSD staff, as a law enforcement agent, can only deal with problems in a rigid way and therefore it’s hard to resolve conflicts. In Social Lab, on the contrary, we can communicate with the public and collect their feedback in a soft way as part of a cross-sectoral team. It can also help the public to know more about park regulations and the restrictions of LCSD.”

The lab process also opened up the imagination of participating civil servants, that similar social experiments can be a means to policy change. There is much room to experiment on different policies. Instead of complaints, citizens can offer their diverse views. This may help to strike a balance between citizen needs and management concerns, and identify room for innovating park policies and regulations.

Training Workshops with LCSD

The MaD Social Lab Team presented insights and learnings of Social Labs to more than 400 LCSD civil servants at a Design Thinking Training Programme organised by the LCSD Training School and the Good Lab. The series was conducted in two parts: 1) Lecture – presenting the core values of Social Lab collaboration; and 2) Workshop – demonstrating practical tools of design thinking using Social Lab as a case study. Session details are listed below:

Date	Topic	Venue
21 Sep 2018 24 Oct 2018	Lecture – About Social Lab: Hong Kong’s First Community-initiated Public Services Innovation Lab	History Museum Lecture Hall
3 Oct 2018 23 Oct 2018 25 Oct 2018	Workshop – Design Thinking: an Effective Way to Redesign Workflow and Communication Channels with the Public	LCSD Training School, Lai Chi Kok Government Offices

Parks for People and Pets

Even if the Government lab partner supported further exploration and the implementation of particular prototypes, the support of local councils was required and could prove problematic. For example, after the Pet Park experiment in Lai Chi Kok Park, the LCSD proposed a further trial at the same location and submitted the plan to the Sham Shui Po District Council for consultation with local stakeholders. Unfortunately, this proposal was vetoed, raising the question of how best to introduce new initiatives to community leaders who usually favour the status-quo. After that, however, the LCSD submitted another proposal (which was by and large adopted from the pet park prototype of the Park Lab) to various District Councils to transform 6 parks in Hong Kong into pet-inclusive parks which met with Councillors' approval. It is launched in 2019 and will be implemented in six districts, including Central & Western, Kowloon City, Sham Shui Po, Kwai Tsing, Sha Tin, and Yuen Long.

Water Play in Parks

One of the prototypes, “WeWet Festival”, has demonstrated the popularity and feasibility of water play in public parks. As the Lab Team understands, LCSD is actively developing guidelines on water play in parks and testing more formally the practicality of water play on the lawns of different parks.

Feedback from LCSD

Make A Difference Institute is grateful for LCSD's support in being our Lab Partner for this pioneering co-creative experiment. The following session is provided by LCSD.

The Park Lab was the second social innovation project in which LCSD worked in partnership with Make A Difference Institute. We appreciated the opportunity for four Leisure Services Managers from Leisure and Cultural Services Headquarters and district management to join the lab as Lab Team members. They had gone through the whole lab cycle together with other participants of diversified backgrounds, from gathering stories at the frontline to brainstorming solutions and making prototypes. As Lab Team members, they saw things from the angle of park users which let them have a better understanding of user needs. The Social Lab approach opened up our colleagues' imagination in managing parks. It also brought a new dimension of thinking to LCSD when formulating policies to enhance park services.

The Lab Team co-created five prototypes, including “Park for People and Pets”, “Inside out Park”, “Dialogue in the Park”, “Park in the Dark” and “Parkour Fitness Workshops”. The five experiments touched on a diversity of issues related to park services innovation. On completion of The Park Lab, LCSD has adopted some prototype ideas in enhancing park services and programmes. One example to quote was the launching of a Trial Scheme of “Inclusive Park for Pets” in January 2019, under which six suitable parks were selected from various districts across the territory for opening up the whole venues for members of the public to enter and use the venues with pets, with a view to enabling the use of park facilities by different users in an inclusive environment. LCSD had consulted the District Councils concerned and obtained their support. LCSD will review the effectiveness of the Trial Scheme one year after its implementation with a view to considering whether to provide “Inclusive Park for Pets” in more districts.

The Park Lab and the prototypes are good references and have laid the basis for us in engaging the public and collaborating with different stakeholders to improve park service. The successful experience of cross-sector collaboration in Social Lab has encouraged LCSD in using design thinking to improve the customer experience. For instance, design thinking approach will be used to design the user experience of our new intelligent sports and recreation services booking and information system.

Feedback from Facilitators

Make A Difference Institute is grateful that a group of veteran designers from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University supported as our Lab Facilitators for this pioneering co-creative experiment. The following session is provided by the Facilitators.

The collaborative design workshop was an important mechanism to draw insights from different lens, namely the stakeholder lens, the disciplinary lens, and the anticipatory lens. While the lab members came from diverse backgrounds and professional disciplines (e.g. architect, horticulturist, marketer, park manager, councilor assistant, retiree, etc.), their perspectives towards different technical considerations and social imaginations were key to the dialogic and practical processes of this social lab. With necessary commitment and cross-disciplinary understanding among lab members, we endeavored to envision an alternative “park community” (as opposed to merely “new” services) and reimagine the aforementioned uses of the Lai Chi Kok Park. That aside, we have the following “takeaways” regarding the social and technical implications of the collaborative design processes.

More than just employing design methods such as intensive user observation, interview and service prototyping, etc. to figure out the park issues, the Lab Team, in effect, was a generative platform of dialogues and engagements, not only among the lab members, but also with the relevant stakeholders, ranging from district councilors, community organisers, general visitors, park workers to users of different age groups and/or ethnic predispositions. Building a team with the “right” combination of people under a “right” format is already paving the way for successful collaboration. This ties to essential learning, such as learning to identify and seeing things from different disciplinary and stakeholder’s lens. This was critical to the empathetic understanding of the different levels of concerns, be they related to the park’s governance, its user-friendliness, its noise level, or the logistical considerations and technicality of the park’s services, for example. But what constitutes a “right team” remains to be a question of design.

Furthermore, prototyping is a means to empathic learning and exploratory dialogues for the Lab Team. Lab members need to develop capacities and competences not only in digesting and translating stakeholders’ concerns into implementable ideas, but also in the making and operation of necessary facilities or prototypes in order to induces observable responses from the users, operators or the general residents, and solicit feedbacks thereof. Logistical and technical details in the execution of any prototypes are therefore opportunities for the Lab Team to seeing the complexity of the park operation and the social implications at work. Lab members not only are tasked to observe, listen and envisage with the different groups of park users at projected circumstances, but also with the park workers and managers to understand their roles, practices, responsibilities and difficulties in various operations. In short, the design of the prototyping processes provide concrete anchors for the Lab Team to negotiate opinions and acquire experiences in the making and doing (i.e. the know-hows, as opposed to ideation alone), and thereby develops our listening and empathetic skills towards a diversity of concerned stakeholders.

The Lab Team needs to accumulate experiences not only in user and stakeholder research, but also in building sustainable (and negotiable) relationships with the concerned parties from the park community. If supported and nurtured properly, this Lab Team platform is potent for building a network for future innovation on the park (and other) matters.

Reflections & Thoughts for Improvement

The role of MaD as a non-profit organisation promoting public service innovation has allowed us to reach out to various system players and public stakeholders. We see each lab as a different process and reflections are embedded in the process to enable us to improve. In the following, we would like to share with you our reflections and thoughts for improvements:

On Park Services

The five experiments touched on a diversity of issues related to park services innovation. While they were developed out of the particular case of Lai Chi Kok Park, they also hinted at a paradigm shift needed to gradually transform public parks from mere recreational spaces into sites of placemaking and community development. LCSD ought to focus not just on providing services itself, but on how these services relate and respond to the surrounding communities. Apart from the five prototypes proposed, the Lab Team has observed these potential areas for improvement:

- **Open up park spaces for public and community initiatives:**
Open up park venues and simplify venue rental application procedures for nearby residents and local groups to allow more self-organised initiatives to bring the open spaces alive; facilitate freer use of park space for creative experiments and community events
- **Encourage diversity and inclusion in parks:**
Incorporate principles of inclusion and non-segregation in the spatial design of parks and their management; encourage different types of users (from different races, ages to species) to share park spaces; shape parks as a communal space of new learnings and encounters
- **Transform parks into creative play space:**
Depart from confining sets of pre-fabricated, monotonous plastic play equipment to create space that embraces the spirit of free play and that is not bound by excessive regulations to unleash the true potentials of parks; facilitate young users to improvise and create their own play environment as much as possible, so parks will never become obsolete
- **Develop more user-centred park facilities through public participation:**
Understand deeply user profiles, their needs and usage patterns; involve community users in planning and designing park services and facilities so they would suit users' needs better and foster community ownership

On the Lab Process

■ **The importance of a Community Partner**

The temporary nature of the lab has helped us reach out to various community organisations; however, to be able to reach out effectively to local users, the lab team has benefited from the extensive social networks developed by local NGOs. It was the first time where we had a Community Partner at our social lab projects, with the Mei Foo Branch of BGCA who has worked extensively with children and parents in the community for 45 years. Besides providing a nearby location next to Lai Chi Kok Park as the base for lab workshops, BGCA also helped us connect with children and parents to gain in-depth views towards the park. For BGCA, they treated the lab as a chance to understand more about LCSD and park operations.

■ **Adapting Lab Methodology for Bigger Impact**

Design thinking is the backbone of the Park Lab's methodology, which has helped the team in identifying and analysing the design challenges, and in seeing them from the lenses of the users. However, to be able to create actual impact in the park system, a lot more is needed such as the ability to form and align views among team members and community stakeholders, developing trust with relevant authorities and understanding their concerns and priorities, and getting the prototype designs right so they can operate well. To do all these in five months is challenging; as such, within a limited lab period, where and how to spend the time and resources is a critical success factor, which is a decision depending on the working context of the problems identified. At the Park Lab, a realisation for the organising team was that the design method might not always trump other considerations.

Innovative Park Practices from around the World



Photo credit: South Waterfront blog

ParkScan Portland, U.S. & San Francisco, U.S.

How can we co-create a better park? ParkScan is an interactive website that allows park users to directly communicate with the parks. Users can report problems which are posted immediately for public viewing, and are passed to the responsible city parks maintenance staff directly for further action. The site has also become a wonderful tool to send compliments-positive comments that encourage park staffs and create a more loving and caring community.

<https://www.parkscanpdx.org/>



Photo credit: Austin Park Foundation

Adopt-A-Park Austin, U.S.

Have you ever thought of adopting a park? Adopt-A-Park is a volunteering scheme for citizens to participate in maintaining and improving neighbourhood parks. Citizens can "adopt" a park and work closely with the staff in park management and programmes. Volunteering opportunities range from tree planting to bench painting. Citizens' roles changed from "users" to "protectors". Enthusiasm and sense of ownership were cultivated when citizens started to realise that they too, can have a park of their own.

<https://austinparks.org/impd/>



Photo credit:
Advertiser: Terra México
Agency: DDB Mexico

Poo Wifi Mexico City, Mexico

While pet owners and non-owners were having long-standing conflicts over space usage and hygiene issues in parks, Mexican media portal Terra came up with an innovative resolution – Poo Wifi. When dog owners throw away bags of dog excrement in a special box, the device calculates the weight and gives everyone in the park free minutes of wifi. It is no doubt a win-win – the heavier the weight, the longer the wifi connection. Thus everyone can enjoy a poo-free park.

<https://www.citylab.com/life/2012/05/dog-poop-goes-free-wifi-comes-out/2050/>

Acknowledgments

(arranged in alphabetical order of surname)

Lab Partner



Community Partner



Lab Members

AU Chun Shing, Johnson

CHAN Hall-sion

CHAN Kwun-hung, Daniel

CHAN Wai-lun, Alan

CHAN Wing-chung, Angus

CHAN Yuet-lam, Noël

CHEUNG Ho-ying, Emily

CHEUNG Yuen-yee, Eunice

CHICK Hiu-lai

CHIU Hon-keung, Hahn

CHUNG Denise

CHUNG Ka-yin, Magaret

CHUNG Wai-lun, Adino

FOK Chun-lung, Juno

FUNG Yin-ping, Hermie

HO Kwok-wai, Lisa

HON Tsz-ka, Janna

KO Jeannie

LAM Chi-kin

LEE Kai-ho

LEUNG Wai-shan, Kris

Mei Foo Home & Public Affairs

TAM Wai-yee, Portia

WONG Hoi-yan, Camilla

WONG Oi-ning, Metis

WONG Yeuk-ting, Euphen

YEUNG Wai-yip, William

Directors' Lab

FOK Denise

Assistant Director (Leisure Services), LCSD

MA Cecily

Supervisor (Sham Shui Po District), BGCA

SALKELD Kim, JP

Head, Efficiency Unit (Until Dec 2017)

SIU King-chung

Associate Dean and Associate Professor,
The School of Design,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

WONG Ada, JP

Chair, Make a Difference Institute

MaD Social Lab Team

HO Loretta

KWONG Allie

LAI Sin-wah

LO Ariel

WONG Ada

YAN Rachel

With full support from MaD Team

Interns

KWONG Jeffrey

WONG Susane

ZHONG Flora

Editorial Assistant

AU Hermion

CHOW Garfield

Design Facilitators

CHAN Gwen
CHAN Lap-hang, Denise
CHAU Maggie
LEE Brian
SIU King-chung
TSANG Albert
YU Jonathan
CHAN Suet-wing, Hailee
LEUNG Ka-wai, Eva
WONG Ka-son, Jim

Graphic Design

WONG Ka-son, Jim
LEUNG Ka-wai, Eva
CHAN Suet-wing, Hailee

Videography & Editing

LAU Rocky
LAU Tak-shing

Photography

CHEUNG Wai-lok
FUNG King-chung, John
LAM Andy
LAM Lui-kong, Andy
LI Yam, Michael

Layout Design

Karman@Good Morning Design

Special Thanks

Academy of Movement Hong Kong
CNEX Foundation Limited
Design Trust
HIKAP ACAPPELLA
Mei Foo Home & Public Affairs
Playright Children's Play Association
School of Design, The Polytechnic University of Hong Kong
Sham Shui Po District Office
The Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects

CHAN Chung-shing, Johnson
CHAN Kit-bing, Sumee
CHAN On-ying, Joelle
CHEUNG Ambrose, JP (Chairman of the Sham Shui Po District Council)
LUK Chun-hei, Roscoe
NG Wing-yi
NG Yuet-lan (Sham Shui Po District Councillor)
POON Kwan-yin, Kenny
SI Fung-hoi
WONG Hon-fun, Dennis
YU Wau-chin

For assistance in community events promotion

Bouncy Animal Clinic
Cypress Art
Good Dog
i-Pet
Mei Foo Animal Friends
Mei Foo Dog Come
O Mr. Pet
Spark Foundation Limited
Wolf Den Café

And friends and
organisations who
have supported
our field study



Medium Blog of the Park Lab:
[https://medium.com/
theparklab-laichikokpark](https://medium.com/theparklab-laichikokpark)



Video documentation of
the Park Lab:
<https://goo.gl/Mi7zMi>



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Online version
<https://issuu.com/mad.asia>

ISBN

978-988-78491-6-2

Date of Publication

SEP 2019

Publisher

Make A Difference Institute
Unit B, Unit B, 13/F, Por Mee Industrial Building
500 Castle Peak Road, Hong Kong

Organiser



Funded by



香港賽馬會慈善信託基金
The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust
同心 同步 同進 RIDING HIGH TOGETHER

Make A Difference Institute Limited

Tel: +852 3996 2788

Fax: +852 3020 3396

Email: sociallab@mad.asia

 MaD Asia

 MaD Asia Channel

 JCMaDSocialLab

www.MaD.asia