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**Master of Social Sciences in
Comparative Social Policy (International)**

Academic Year 2022-23

SOC 605 Comparative Social Policy Research Project

**Comparative Study of Barrier-Free City Construction
in Shenzhen and Hong Kong**

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INTRODUCTION

As age increases, more and more elderly people are rejoining the workforce, which has forced society to re-examine how to allow these physically challenged people to enjoy the social resources they are entitled at their view in society. The term "physical limitation " does not only refer to people with disabilities, but also to the elderly, pregnant women, and the sick who have difficulty getting around. In today's rapidly developing society, it is increasingly convenient for people to travel, go to the cinema, eat, and enjoy every public space seemingly by simply booking tickets on the internet, but this can mean hardship for people with disabilities or physical limitations. For the visually impaired, every crossing of the road is a test of courage, and for those with a disability in both legs, access to the stairs becomes impossible. Both the disabled and those with physical limitations need to have a normal life and need an accessible facility to meet their daily needs.

Assistive technologies (ATs) are designed to improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. Some of them are relatively low-tech and familiar, such as presbyopes, crutches, and hearing aid (Philip, 2018). Besides, barrier-free facilities concern everyone in society, whether it is barrier-free taxis, electronic pedestrian crossing generation devices, or barrier-free toilets, it is common to see them around.

The World Health Organization defines disability as "disability is part of being human. Almost everyone experiences disability at some point in their lives, either temporarily or permanently" (WHO, 2022). And, current international standards define accessible design as "design that focuses on diverse users, thereby maximizing the number of potential users who can easily use a system in different environments" (ISO, 2021). Today, the stages of accessibility are generally divided into three stages according to the rate of aging: 7%-10% of aging, 10%-14% of aging, and more than 14% of aging. (Zhen, 2021) In the US, Japan, and the UK, for example, when the aging rate was 7%-10%, countries were promoting the establishment and improvement of relevant systems, such as the "Welfare City Policy" implemented in Japan in

1973. When the aging rate is between 10% and 14%, countries start to promote the construction of barrier-free facilities, for example, the Rehabilitation Act amended in 1974 in the US explicitly defines the elderly as disabled. When the aging rate exceeds 14%, governments start to focus on accessibility inclusiveness, such as the UK's Universal Design Management Standards (UDM) promulgated in 2005. According to the latest statistics, Hong Kong has an aging rate of 19.7% (Hong Kong Government, 2016) and Shenzhen has an aging rate of 8.7% (Shenzhen Government, 2021) therefore the two cities are at different stages of aging have different responses and solutions when it comes to accessibility.

The purpose of this literature review is to review the history and efforts made by the two cities in the development of accessible cities, including legal provisions, financial assistance, and some existing problems. Since there is little literature comparing the two cities in the academic field, the review focuses more on the policies and philosophical culture of the two cities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barrier-free Environment in Shenzhen

Accessibility in Shenzhen has undergone a long and progressive development. At the beginning of the reform and opening up, Shenzhen developed rapidly as one of the first special economic zones. But at the same time, the city also faced many shortcomings, of which the lack of accessibility was the most obvious. The roads in the city are narrow, with few flat areas and many high platforms, and the old and new urban areas are separated, making it difficult for a large number of people with disabilities to move around. Shenzhen was one of the first cities to promote the construction of a barrier-free environment. As early as 2009, it was the first city in China to introduce the Shenzhen Regulations on the Construction of a Barrier-Free Environment in the form of local legislation, which clearly states that "the physical environment and information exchange environment shall be guaranteed for persons with disabilities and other people in need to participate in social life independently, safely and conveniently. "(Shenzhen Municipal Government, 2009). The regulations cover public transport, public facilities, residential areas, tourist attractions, and other areas, and the

planning mainly includes the study of barrier-free environment regulations, the payment of barrier-free environment improvement costs, and the strengthening of barrier-free environment publicity. It, various laws and regulations have been proposed to regulate the construction of a barrier-free environment in Shenzhen and to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities.

However, as times progress, the contradiction that people with disabilities cannot be better integrated into society is becoming more and more prominent. In 2018, the 10th anniversary of China's accession to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Shenzhen released the Shenzhen Action Plan for Creating a Barrier-free City, which updates new regulations on daily travel and electronic consumption for people with disabilities, and proposes that by 2020, a barrier-free city policy and the standard system will be built. The three-dimensional co-construction from concept, system, and artifacts of By 2020, a barrier-free city policy and the standard system will be established. A barrier-free city pattern will be built from concept, system, and equipment. The action plan has updated the regulations on daily travel and electronic consumption for persons with disabilities (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 2018). In 2020, the Master Plan for the Construction of a Barrier-free City in Shenzhen (2020-2035) was launched, and it is envisaged that by 2035 the city will have built a barrier-free urban ecology of international standard and that the integration of persons with disabilities into society will be barrier-free.

After more than ten years of exploration and practice, some of the original Shenzhen barrier-free fitness regulations have not adapted to the needs of economic and social development, and some of the content still has a small gap between the needs of people with disabilities, against the requirements of the first model, and the international first-class standards. As a result, the latest Regulation on Barrier-free City Construction in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 2021) was introduced in 2021. The regulation specifies a joint meeting system with multiple departments such as development and reform, public security, civil affairs, and finance, which is convened by the head of the municipal

people's government. The scope of application has been broadened from the previous one for persons with disabilities to all those in need, including the elderly, children, pregnant women, and so on. There are provisions in three areas: accessibility of information, accessibility of travel, and accessibility of services. This marks great progress in the development of accessibility in Shenzhen. The government, community organizations, enterprises, and residents are also working together to promote accessibility but still face many challenges.

Even though Shenzhen's barrier-free construction has achieved significant results in the "13th Five-Year Plan of the State", the government report shows that it has exceeded the expected results. However, there are still many criticisms, with media commentator Jiang arguing that the lack of advice from people with disabilities in Shenzhen's barrier-free construction has led to more formalism (Jiang, 2019). At the same time, the accessibility facilities are inefficiently used and are frequently occupied. Therefore, in the future paper, a qualitative analysis will be used to specifically examine the deficiencies of accessibility in Shenzhen.

Barrier-free Environment in Hong Kong

The number of people with disabilities in Hong Kong continues to rise, and according to a government report, there will be around 500,000 people with disabilities in 2020, accounting for 7.1% of the territory (Hong Kong Government, 2020). And it is against this background that the Hong Kong government is leading the way in building a barrier-free environment. The so-called "barrier-free environment" is to eliminate all kinds of physical challenges in the living environment, so that everyone, be it the elderly, children, people with disabilities, or the able-bodied, can access every public space and enjoy all kinds of resources without barriers. (Hong Kong PHAB Association, 2022)

Hong Kong began in 1970 with the idea of "Inclusion" brought by British founder Marry Robinson when she visited Hong Kong. The term "PHAB" refers to both the disabled and the able-bodied, and their philosophy was to achieve the goal of integrating the disabled with the able-bodied (PHAB Association, 1970). Since then, the Hong Kong Government has been introducing policies to improve accessibility, such as the 1984 Design Manual 1984, which

requires private buildings to provide access and facilities for people with mobility impairment, and the Disability Discrimination Ordinance in 1996, which protects the rights of people with disabilities in employment and education. In August 2008, the Central Government extended the application of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to Hong Kong and barrier-free facilities were established. In the same year, the Hong Kong Buildings Department issued the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 2008, which became the first comprehensive barrier-free access ordinance in Hong Kong, extending the scope of the Ordinance to include the elderly, the frail and physically challenged, and all persons in need. For example, in 2014, the Hong Kong Government increased its overall spending on rehabilitation services, including a major improvement project to upgrade barrier-free access facilities in about 3,500 existing government premises and about 240 public housing estate properties or facilities, and in 2012, the Hong Kong Government launched the "Access for All" program, which aims to expand the accessibility of footbridges, pedestrian tunnels, etc. The Hong Kong Government has been working hard to improve accessibility. In addition, the policy intention in Hong Kong is to promote the development of a barrier-free environment in the region in terms of enhancing the awareness of professionals and developers to broaden the channels of barrier-free living, demonstrating the humanistic social values of its unique community spirit of equality (Li et al, 2022). It also emphasizes a greater focus on this group at a spiritual level, promoting equal opportunities between people with disabilities and the general population, which is also known as 'accessibility' to 'accessibility of the mind', and promoting the self-reliance and independence of local people with disabilities (Hong Kong PHAB Association, 2022).

It is worth mentioning that Hong Kong has a unique approach to the funding and management of accessibility(Xiang, 2020). For example, the Hong Kong Government plans to spend HK\$2.5 billion over six years to implement the "Lift Optimisation Funding Scheme". In addition, accessibility in Hong Kong relies on the collaboration of many parties, including the transport sector, the housing sector, associations, and many NGOs responsible for different aspects of construction. However, as most of the buildings in Hong Kong are old, it is difficult

to plan for accessibility and there are many shortcomings, which will be explained in more detail in future papers.

Therefore, although Hong Kong has made some achievements in barrier-free construction, there is still a need for continuous improvement to provide a better living environment and conditions for people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Both Hong Kong and Shenzhen have reached a certain level of barrier-free construction, but the two have different stages of barrier-free environment construction, different legal provisions, different urban development, and different acceptance of the concept as well as the source and use of funds. Hong Kong has a large amount of investment in building a barrier-free environment, such as government funding and public service profit appropriation, which makes it easier to achieve the perfection of facilities; Shenzhen's government funding is relatively restricted, and more market-oriented mechanisms and social capital are used, such as investing in barrier-free public welfare funds and strengthening special subsidies for the implementation of barrier-free facilities. Therefore, the barrier-free construction of the two is very comparable. This has a strong constructive meaning for the future planning of barrier-free construction in the two cities, and the trade-offs between the two cities as the frontier of barrier-free construction in various aspects also has a conceptual guidance role for the overall barrier-free construction in China.

However, not much has been written about the accessibility assessment of the two places, as Shenzhen is a newly developing city and one of the first pilot cities in China to build accessibility relatively early. So, comparing the accessibility of Hong Kong and Shenzhen is a relatively blank area in the literature. Therefore, this article will have a greater significance in the field of accessibility assessment.

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香港傷健協會乃 1972 年成立之非牟利機構，致力推廣「傷健共融」的精神，務使傷殘及健全人士能不分彼此，在無障礙環境下，並肩參與各項活動，藉以增進互相合作和了解。 . 香港傷健協會. (n.d.). Retrieved March 19, 2023, from <https://hkphab.org.hk/>

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