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Mn'M Workbook 1

Intensities in Ten Cities

Mn'M Workbook 1:10の都市における都市の強度

introduced by Darko Radović

編：ダルコ・ラドヴィッチ

||||| Measuring the Non-Measurable 03

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Mn'M Workbook 1

Intensities in Ten Cities

Mn'M Workbook1

Intensities in Ten Cities

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INTENSITY

01

in BANGKOK

THE PROPERTY BILLBOARDS: RE-ENVISIONING THE BANGKOK URBAN EDGE

不動産広告板：都市バンコクの最先端を再考する

Apiradee Kasemsook and Nuttinee Karnchanaporn
アピラディ・カセンスーク、ナッティニ・カルンチャボン

好むと好まざるとにかかわらず、現在のバンコクは都市も郊外も、高速道路と沿道に商業広告があふれている。バンコク住民の多くは、高速道路や沿道のこれらの広告をどうにかして規制してほしいと願っているかもしれない。あるいは、流れるランドスケープの一部として、新製品や新サービスの広告を横目で眺める機会を楽しんでいる人たちもいるだろう。バンコクの広告板も、他の都市の広告板と同じようなものである。移動中の消費者に訴求するという点で優れたものであり、設置場所は主要幹線道路や二次幹線道路、高速道路、そして何より重要なのは、交通渋滞で密集している消費者の目に触れるということである。『ラスベガス(原題: Learning from Las Vegas)』にも「広告板はおおむね正当である」とあるように、こうしたバンコクの広告板は高速道路のスケールで商業的

な誘いかけを行なう商業建築の一部なのである。

広告の分布、強度、内容は、どの程度まで都市強化の鍵を握る測定可能かつ文化的な要因となり得るのだろうか。

ここではバンコク西部環状線の数カ所を取り上げ、道路沿いにある広告板の分布、強度、内容に焦点をあてる。その目的は、都市がどのように発達するのか、すなわち、その都市部にはどのような独自性や特質があるのかということを理解するための、新たな手段を構築することである。さらに、不動産広告板を都市住宅の研究手段として使用するという取り組みによって、広告、住宅建築、公的空間の相互関係を通して、地域的な空間利用形態を新たにつくり出し取り入れていけるような、ある種のメカニズムを発展させていくことになればと考えている。

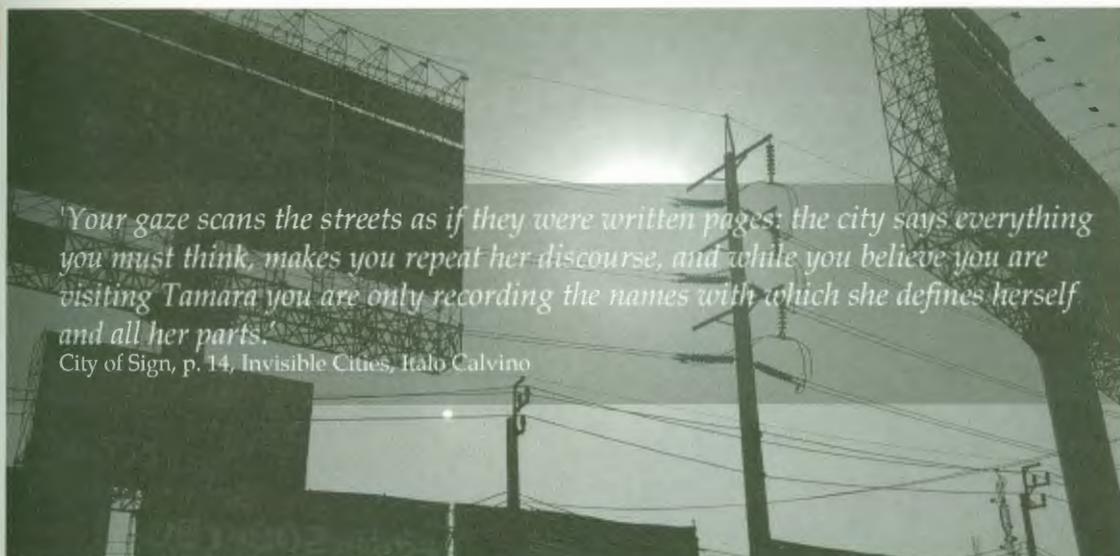


Fig.1 | Property billboards at a junction on Ratchapruerk Road with a phrase from City of Sign, Invisible City by Italo Calvino. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

Cities and Billboards

Bangkok

Urban transformation of Bangkok has markedly intensified in the past five years. This is due to the extension of the mass transit construction, coupled with a series of ring roads completions. High-rise residential buildings have sprung up along the mass transit lines in the city centre, while the gated communities have been distributed along the ring roads and around the mass transits end stations. Of all the ring roads, the outer ring road is where the urban intensification is the highest; and the western section is a unique one. (Fig. 1)

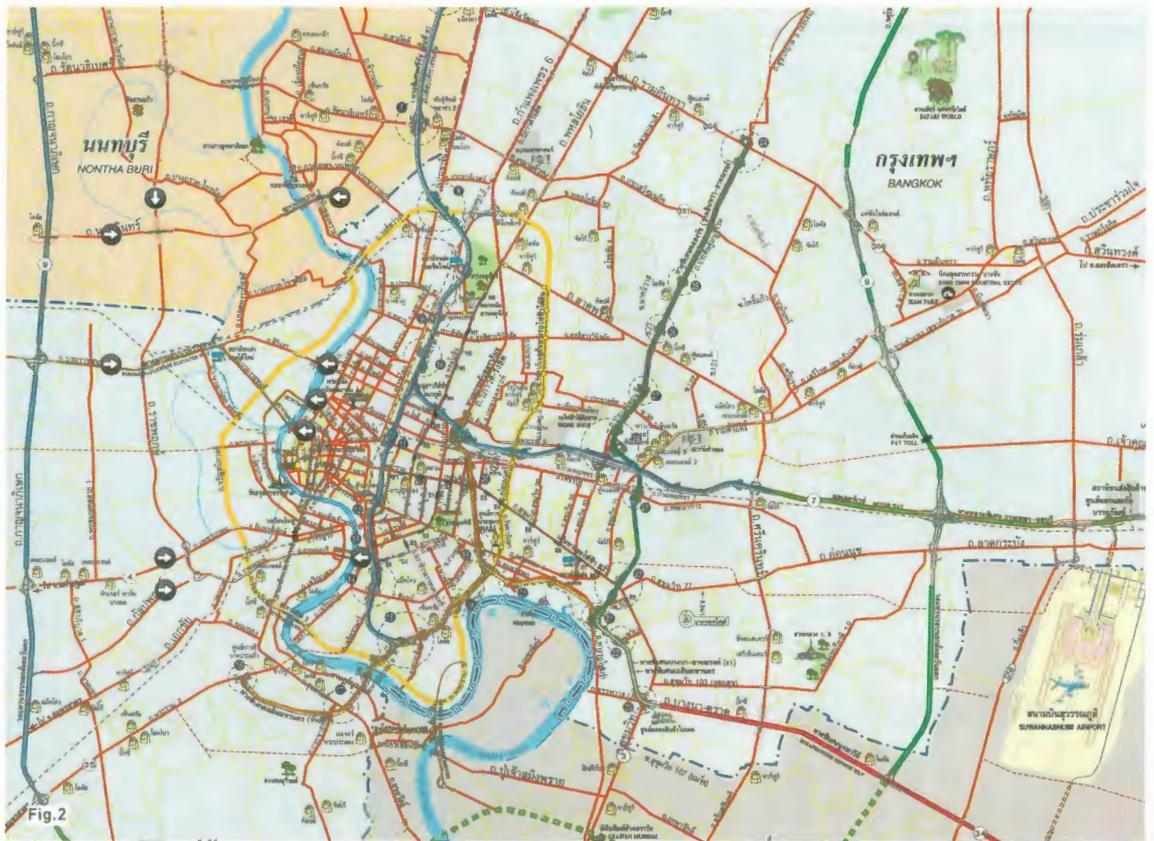
Fig. 2 displays the Bangkok greater area, and the locations of the historical area (Krung Rattanakosin), the central business district (CBD; Silom-Sathorn) and the expatriate-preferred residential area (Sukhumwit). We can see from Figure 2 that the western section of the outer ring road (the western ring road) directly links the CBD with the recently available, less developed and low density land to the west of Bangkok. The western ring road also sequentially links to the historical area, a must visiting place for the local and the tourists. Due to the proximity of the CBD and Sukhumwit, the western ring road's residents can easily reach most of foreign products and services, provided in the Sukhumwit. Recently, there has been a commission to build an underground mass transit line going to the northwest of the city where the western ring road ends. Similarly, the extension of the elevated light rail (BTS) to cross the river to the southwest end of the western ring road was just operated in the middle of 2011 by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority.

The western ring road can be separated into three segments. The one closest to the CBD (the southern segment) is more likely to be occupied by the high to middle-rise residential buildings. The middle one, which is closed to the historical area, is mostly occupied with the expensive gated-community housing estates. Houses in these gated communities can fetch to more than 1 millions USD, while the average income of the Thai people per year is at 9,727 USD. The northern segment is occupied with a number of housing estates, some of which are also the gated communities, and neighbourhood shopping malls.

Due to the size of the gated communities and the car speed within the ring road, it is difficult for visitors or passer-by to recognise their destinations. Big billboards and the huge entrances to the gated communities have been seen as the tool to catch the attention of the visitors and passer-bys. In many cases, they are highly elaborated for the advertising content being displayed (Karnchanaporn and Kasemsook, 2008). Recently, the number and the distribution of the billboards and small signposts have been more intensely placed. A line of billboards was built to catch the eyes of the drivers in a land with some distances from the road, while along the roadside area another line of signposts was also constructed.

The Sign

In the past 30 years, there are many attempts to try to understand the city, urban areas and domestic architecture. Majority of them have developed a vast number of techniques and tools based on three main approaches: observation, questionnaire and measuring. With the complex of everyday life and the advance of technology available nowadays, there seems to be a drive



as well as a reflection on how the city, urban areas and domestic architecture should be studied and understood, particularly the changing lives within them. Can a conventional everyday object, i.e., housing estate billboards be a measuring tool of the urban study, particularly the urban intensification?

Sign is something that implies a connection between itself and its object. Sign is commonly perceived as a signification of something, a meaning of something and/or an importance of the thing. We read signs on the everyday basis and we pass through many of them during our days and nights while dwelling in the city. As for many Asian cities, there is one element that can be widespread-ably found: the sign. In the city centres in Hong Kong, Japan, China or Thailand, there is plenty of signage. Originally, the signage displays the names and titles of the companies, shops, restaurants and etc. Nowadays, they are more elaborated. Bangkok, as a capital, has a role in shaping the material culture of the city. In Bangkok, icons and signs can be as revealing of the economy and material culture that structure urban life. In a sense that some urban areas in Bangkok can be viewed as sign-scapes that signify the spaces these signs represented, for example, Khao San road (the famous foreign backpacker's destination) in Fig. 3, Patpong area (internationally known as Bangkok's red

light district), and Yaowarat road (the Bangkok's Chinatown area). In other areas, sign as advertisement billboard performs previews of urban cinema scenes days and nights on the streets, highways, expressways, and major ring roads.

The sign in this research is observed as an advertisement billboard with special interest on the content of condominiums and housing estates commonly seen along the ring roads of Bangkok. The advertisement billboards or property billboards, as they are placed, invite us to interpret and perceive signs through the practices of seeing and being seen: the anticipation for the new luxury living community and the sense of apprehending the real that continues through reading these billboards and their locations (Fig.4). These billboards encourage attention to the surface of domestic culture that is not yet to come to life.

Property Billboards on The Bangkok Western Suburban Areas

Our investigation and observation moves on, observed by driving to work and to home everyday, there are plenty of big billboards and signs along the western ring road. The elevated road links the historical area of Bangkok and the central segment of the western ring road are also filled

Fig.2 | A map of Bangkok: the focus area on the western ring road, Ratchapruk Road, is indicated by arrows. (source: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2008)

Fig.3 | Khao San road, the famous foreign backpacker's destination. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

Fig.4 | A property billboard in the front of a luxury housing estate. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

Fig.5 | A property billboard for an elevated highway above Baromratchachonanee Road. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

Fig.6 | Roadside food shops along Ratchapruk Road. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)



Fig.3



Fig.6





Fig.7 | Property billboards on ring roads and elevated roads. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

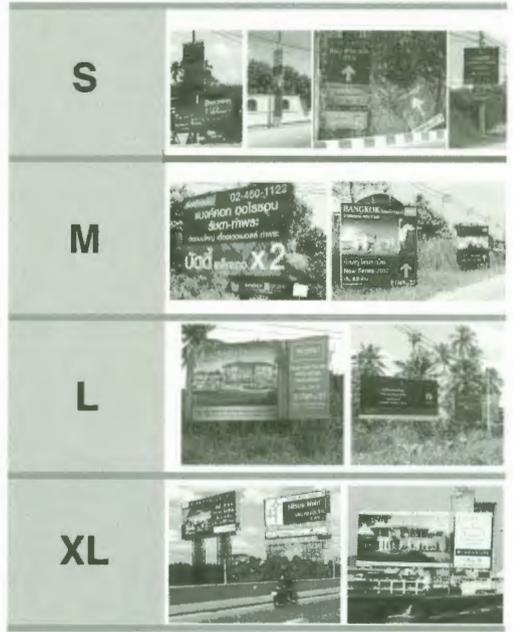


Fig.8 | Property billboards on ring roads. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

with a number of billboards (Fig.5). Bangkok is a road-oriented city enabling these billboards to command high-density consumer exposure mostly to vehicular traffic. There are both a series of ten big billboards of the similar or different gated communities, two of which are of six to eight meters apart, and a series of small sign posts with two or three meters apart between one and another. The billboards on the ring road commonly present a larger advertisement of luxurious living to passing drivers with distinct visuals and highly visible against the rural landscape along the ring roads. Interestingly, some of these billboards of the luxury housing estate are even breaching the Bangkok’s city regulation of sign posting, resulted in the destruction of the billboards.

The power beneath these advertisement billboards is the exposure to the will to pursue new mode of living in the luxury (secured and enclosed) housing estate in contrast to the local activities established before the extension of the ring road. Nonetheless, the consequence of this distribution is that the location where the billboards are clustered attracts the local residents to develop some kind of local public space and small retail and food outlet. The owners of these retail and food shops mostly use the back of their pick-up car as a shop. They would park their cars by the roadside and unfold their umbrellas, which are the extension of the pick-up cars to create some shading areas and also to display their goods

During the weekdays, cheap and inexpensive food outlets along the roadside are popular to drivers including taxi

drivers (Fig.6). Weekends are more crowded as variety of retail goods are sold on the roadside, for example, fresh seafood, fruits (watermelon and sugarcane), used t-shirts and jeans, toys and car accessories. These local residents are often of middle to low-income earners, being contrast to the ring road gated communities’ residents. This can be seen as an adjustment of the suburban local residents in response to the urbanisation of the city re-locating residents. In the case of Bangkok, this local development is unique and cultural, particularly in the suburban area along the western ring road. The billboards, the roadside retail and food shops and the luxury housing estates located along the section of this western ring road produce both symbolic and realistic differentiation of urban space. The visibility of class and social inequality is inevitable.

Billboard Observations and Being the Measuring Tools

How can billboards become the tool for measuring urban intensification of the suburban areas? As mentioned earlier, the billboards themselves are the signs that advertise property developments, for example, private housing estates consisting of detached houses or semi-detached houses, home-office compounds, series of terrace houses, stand-alone or collective condominium buildings, etc (Fig.7). The billboards observation is an attempt to illustrate their distribution, in order to investigate their clustering and densities, pointing to the urban intensification of the suburban areas. Will higher the density of the billboards be the more urbanised the suburban areas, or otherwise? The observation was carried out only for the property



Fig.9



Fig.10

Fig.9 | A billboard's website offers a variety of billboard type, size, location and rental price. (source: www.aquacorp.co.th, 2012)

Fig.10 | A billboard van with small size billboards. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

with a dimension up to 4.00–6.00 x 8.00–12.00 m. Extra-Large size (XL) is for a billboard with a dimension up to 15.00–20.00 x 30.00 m. Fig.8 shows examples of billboards in relation to the four sizes.

The rental costs could be obtained only for the billboards of the large and extra-large sizes (L and XL). This is because the billboards of these sizes are usually advertised through websites of the media companies, making it more convenient for property developers to choose what and where to advertise. The billboards' locations were also listed within the websites. The listed rental costs and locations are an indication to the association between them. Fig.9 shows some examples of the media companies' websites that display the available billboards in terms of types, sizes, rental prices per month and locations.

The billboards of medium and small sizes are usually rented as a mass where a fixed number and the spread locations will be accounted for the advertisement cost. Figure 10 displays the billboard van within which a number of billboards and posts are organized and packed for distribution and construction. Nevertheless, the locations of the billboards of medium and small sizes are usually illegitimated. Often, they were found to be dissolved by the local authorities and abandoned on the roadside in a few hours after their construction. Roadside billboards have been pulled down due to the owner did not have appropriate permission (Fig.11).

Fig.12 shows the distribution of the billboards: A is a section from Nakorn-in Road to Baromratchachonanee Road; B is a section from Baromratchachonanee Road to Petchkasem Road; C is a section from west to east of Baromratchachonanee Road; and D is a section from Petchkasem Road to Taksin-Sathorn Road. Table 1 illustrates the classification of billboards according to the number, the sizes and the locating sides. Rental prices are also shown in USD if obtainable. Table 2 displays the density of the billboards, i.e., the average number of billboards per kilometer where one will see while traveling along the roads.

There are 214 billboards found along the two sections of the western ring road, and 32 billboards along Baromratchachonanee (Table 1 and Figures 12). Majority of them are of large size (84), then small (68), extra large (31) and medium (31). Most of the billboards were clustering within the central section of the western ring road (198), then on Baromratchachonanee Road (32) and the southern section (16). For the central section itself, the top part of the section (142) was occupied with more billboards than the bottom one (56). As for the two sides of the road, the billboards tended to occupy the western side of the road (126) rather than the eastern one (88).

development billboards and signposts; the other billboards were excluded from the study.

The billboards were surveyed and observed for three features: the number, the size and the location. The roads being observed for the billboards were Ratchapruke Road, i.e., the central and south sections of the western ring road, and Baromratchachonanee Road, an arterial road linking the city centre with the western ring road. The locations of the billboards marked within the road are of precise location and direction relating, for instance, the eastern, the western, the northern or the southern side. The noted direction-relating locations were for identifying the inbound or the outbound roadside, which may associate with the clustering. As for the billboard sizes, they can be classified into four categories: Small, Medium, Large and Extra-Large. Small size (S) is for a billboard with a dimension of 2.40 m. x 1.20 m. (height x width), or smaller. Medium size (M) is for a billboard with a dimension up to 2.00 m. x 4.0 m. Large (L) is for a billboard



Fig.11 | The destruction of the illegal billboards along Ratchapruek Road. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)



Fig.12 | The Distribution of property billboards and rental costs along the selected western ring road sections: Ratchapruek Road from Nakorn-in end (north) to Taksin-Sathorn end (south-west). (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

Billboard densities reflect this distribution (Table 2). Of the two roads studied, the western ring road has the density of billboards three times higher than Baromratchachonanee Road has. Along the western ring road itself, the top part has the higher density of billboards than the bottom parts, overall and for every category of the billboard sizes. As for the roadsides, the billboard density of the western side tends to be higher than that of the eastern side, for the same section, except those of the bottom part of the central section (B). For a clearer picture, one will see an average of 11 billboards per kilometer while traveling along the western ring road. When traveling within the top part of the central section of the western ring road, one will see more than 28 billboards of all sizes per traveling kilometre. Please keep in mind that these densities are of the property billboards only, which implies that one can see a

higher number of billboards and signs while traveling. The bottom part of southern section of the western ring road and Baromratchachonanee Road are less clustered with billboards. Their densities were made up of the large and extra large billboards.

To some extent, the rental prices seem to associate with the densities. The higher density the area is, the more expensive the rental price will be. The billboards locating along Baromratchachonanee Road has the most expensive rental price per month. The bottom part of the southern section of the western ring road has the cheapest (Table 1). If we take the rental prices as an index and exploring them together with the billboards' distribution, densities, roadside locations and the characteristics of the property development, we can give a logical explanation to the

Road section	Billboards classification											
	Size (number found)						Rental price (USD/month)					
	S		M		L		XL		L		XL	
Baromratchak Road (18.49 km.)	east	west	east	west	east	west	east	west	east	west	east	west
Baromratchachonane	11	44	8	19	10	26	9	15	n/a	n/a	3,228	n/a
Baromratchak	55	0	27	1	36	1	24	0	805.45	645	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	10	1	0	1	27	18	1	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	11	0	0	0	43	0	0	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	n/a	1,290	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Baromratchak	21	47	11	20	42	42	14	17				
Baromratchak	S	M	L	XL								
Baromratchak	56	31	84	31								
Baromratchak	east	west	east	west								
Baromratchak	88	126										
Baromratchak			214									
Baromratchak	north	south	north	south	north	south	north	south	n/a	n/a	5,129	6,451
Baromratchak	0	0	0	10	1	0	3	18				
Baromratchak	0	0	10	1	1	0	21					
Baromratchak	north	south	north	south	north	south	north	south				
Baromratchak	10	32	22									

Table 1 | A classification of billboards according to the number, the size and the locating side. Rental costs are also shown in USD if obtainable. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

existing pattern. Let us begin with the characteristics of the property development. The property developments along the southern section and the bottom part of the central section of the western ring road are made up of those expensive high-rise condominiums and highly expensive housing estates. They often associate with large plots and a few numbers of units of houses within an estate. The property developments along Baromratchachonamee Road and the top part of the central section of the western ring road are made up of those less expensive condominiums and housing estates. The estates themselves may occupy large plots but a single property estate usually has a larger number of units whether in terms of rooms or detached houses. In the case of Bangkok where mass transit has not yet fully served all city areas, the studied area is therefore car-dependent. During the rush hours, the traffic in the top part and along Baromratchachonamee Road usually jams. With slow speed and more cars, the billboards locating within the top part and along Baromratchachonamee Road get more exposure. As a result, the high rental costs per month reflect this exposure.

Conclusion

To summarise, in the case of Bangkok, this first stage of the research shows that the density of the billboards can be an indicative to the density of the individual houses. The aggregation of the houses can, in turn, be an indicative to urban intensification. This means that the density of the billboards can be the indication of the urban intensification process. This correlation is eventually reflected through

Road section	Billboards Density												
	Density/Km.	Total		Sides		Size							
		east	west	east	west	S	M	L	XL	east	west	east	west
Baromratchak Road (18.49 km.)	11.26	4.63	6.63		3.58	1.83	4.42	1.63					
Baromratchak					1.11	2.47	0.98	1.05	2.21	2.21	0.74	0.99	
A. Nilom-In - Baromratchachonane (0.05 km.)	28.11	7.32	20.59		10.89	5.35	7.13	4.75					
142/38/104					2.16	8.71	1.58	3.76	1.98	5.15	1.78	2.97	
B. Baromratchachonane - Patthakarn (7.20 km.)	7.78	5.28	2.5		1.53	0.14	5.97	0.14					
567/38/18					1.39	0.14	0	0.14	3.75	2.22	0.14	0	
C1. Patthakarn - Kasetnakhon (0.75 km.)	0	0	0		0	0	0	0					
C2. Kasetnakhon - Jaransriwong (2.50 km.)	2.4	0.8	1.8		0.8	0.4	0	1.2					
6/27/4					0	0.8	0.4	0	0	0	0.4	0.8	
C3. Jaransriwong - Takat (1.50 km.)	3.33	1.33	0		0	0	1.33	2					
6/5/0					0	0	0	1	1.33	0	2	0	
C4. Takat - Sathorn (2.00 km.)	2.5	2.5	0		0	0	1	1.5					
5/5/0					0	0	1	0	1.5	0	0	0	
D. Baromratchachonane (6.50 km.)	4.92	0.82	4.31		0	1.54	0.15	3.23					
32/4/28					north	south	north	south	north	south	north	south	
					0	0	0	1.54	0.15	0	0.46	2.77	

Table 2 | The density of the billboards, i.e., the average number of billboards per kilometer where one will see while traveling along the roads. (source: Kasemsook and Karnchanaporn, 2012)

the billboards rental prices per month. At this stage, we are now discussing about the figures. There are a number of issues needed to be investigated and explored in the future. For example, the billboard density may indicate the urban intensification but the landscape they make may deprive the local for a quality public space. The repetition of the billboards and their contents may further segregate the lives of residents within the contemporary built property estate from those of the already existed local communities. Or, giving that we are capable to adapt to environment, there could emerge another type of public/private spatial arrangement resulting from the landscape of the property billboards.

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