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Rethinking on community development in the historic Petchaburi city^{*}

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the community development through participatory design process in rural poor housing of historic Petchaburi city. Some principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) were applied to conduct the research. There are 2 pilot communities: the first one is Wat Yaisuvarnaram and Viharn Yai Trailok community the second one is Wat Chang and its community. The 2 case studies give the intense situation of rural poor housing in historical city and its development with problem of land occupancy. In the timeframe of six months, the 2 cases went through similar process together with the architect/designer and came up with plan and solution for community development. Various tools and techniques were used accordingly to each community condition and limitation. Towards the end of the research, Baan Munkong Program joined in to provide more alternative for the community.

The community plan for development came out through such participatory process. Concepts of upgrading, land sharing and relocation were discussed amongst the community. Relocation to other vacant plot of land near the city was the final solution and combines both communities with other Baan Munkong Program members. As a result, there were some implementation being started and is still running on to other stages. The "rights" to the land is the key and still negotiation and participation are important, the input from both side – community and temple should be enhance, also the central and local authority could react more crucial towards the heritage conservation. The community and the city development organization/institution must rethink now and learn from the past carefully as to move towards a better change tomorrow.

Keywords: community development, conservation, participation, policy,

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Petchaburi : the living Ayuthaya

Petchaburi history dated back for about 1,000 years from the archeological evidence found. The ancient settlement formed since the period of Travaravadi, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya era. Also in the past, Petchaburi acted as an important barrier city to the enemy from the western side. Since then there were continuous kings reign over city of Petchaburi through the history.

Until the Rattanakosin era, Petchaburi has changed its position from a geo-political strategic city to a relaxing city for 3 Rattanakosin kings namely King Rama 4, King Rama 5 and King Rama 6. During that period many seasonal palaces were built in and around the city resulted that today Petchaburi has a numerous historical palaces, buildings, temples and also Buddhist traditional art and craftsmanship across the province.

Petchaburi had received the name of 'living Ayuthaya' where past and present merged and still continues its cultural breathes. There are total of 253 temples or Wats in Petchaburi province. The famous ones are Wat Yaisuvannaram built during the Ayuthaya era, and beside its outstanding sala for sermons/ learning, is its valuable wall painting too. Also Wat Mahatat Voravihar , Wat Putthasaiyas, Wat Khao Bundai It, Wat Kampaenglaeng, Wat Koh are amongst the best example of such valuable quality of religious architecture, art and craftsmanship (Figure 1). It is the city of temples and art indeed; this proved that wat/temple was the symbol of the center for the tradition society and community. But nowadays the role of Wat and community has changed and the relationship between the monks and the layman seemed to be weak.



Figure 1 View of the present Petchaburi religious architecture of Wat Putthasaiyas depicting architectural and cultural diversity.

Urbanized rural Petchaburi

Due to the changes of modern development, Petchaburi is gradually coping up and transforming itself into a more densely packed city leaving the agricultural land on the outer fringe uninterrupted. Informal settlements in government land, temples and private land grew slowly. The total 16 communities plus 1 commercial district of Petchaburi Tesaban municipal district mixed together with other old historical heritages and temples. At present there are 13 spots of congested community in the Tesaban district (Figure 2). The main problems are the high crime rate, insufficient infrastructure and teenage misleading behaviors. Other problems concerning the housing issues are the rural poor housing condition, illegal land occupancy and land intrusion, poor living quality and environment. With such diversity of Petchaburi, the city needs to face with the changes especially the new society and social value- but at the same time it should try to keep its precious art and culture to the coming generation as well.

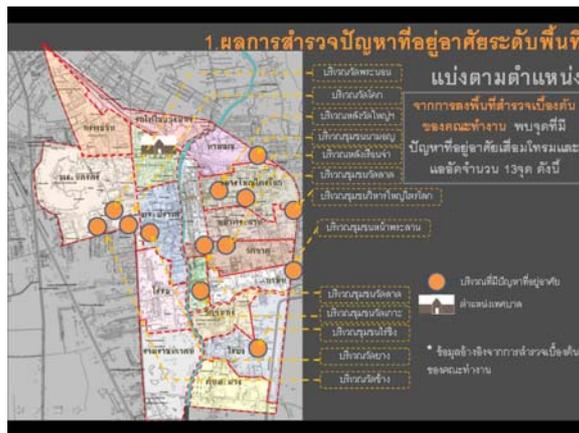


Figure 2 Map of Tesaban District showing the 13 spots of congested community.

Research Timeframe

The total research timeframe is 15 months. At the end of 9 months, the Housing Development Plan for the City of Petchaburi and also the Plan for Improvement and Prevention of congested communities was drafted. At the period of the last 6 months before the research ends, pilot communities were selected to implement the plan and creating the learning experience for other similar community-which could be useful for them in the future application.

Research methodology

This research applied some principles from Participatory Action Research (PAR) ^{*}. The key factor working with the pilot community is participation. The community members must took part in the entire process, whereas the architect/designer had taken the role as facilitator. The process involved series of workshops and group discussions with community, also public hearing sessions for all stakeholders were provided

* Based on the Ministry of Education Rajchabhat Self study Courseware, "Community Research", 2545

in several times. With this mechanism, the community learns to think about their housing and living problems, needs and solution, and adapt some tools and knowledge for their future. The process are as follows:-

1. pilot community selection
2. community orientation/ introduction
3. survey/ observation
4. information gathering
5. problem finding/ forming (workshop with community)
6. interview (semi- structured)
7. interview (structured)
8. data analysis
9. working plan for solution (workshop with community)
10. program presentation to community and stakeholders
11. planning and designing with community
12. discussion/ revision with community and stakeholders
13. final plan and design
14. implementation/ team and network building/ cost estimation and funding
15. evaluation

2 Pilot communities

Case study 1: Viharn Yai Trilok community[†]

This community situated in the land of Wat Yaisuvarnaram (this was announced as the National Heritage since 2527 by the Fine Arts Department.).The main focus was mainly on the 3rd group as the housing condition of the front row house on west side. But also the rental group behind Wat was the 2nd priority and there had been a looser working time frame.



Figure 3 Map of Viharn Yai Trilok community with existing plan of pilot group

Information of pilot community 1 : Rental housing group at the west side of Wat Yaisuvarnaram

[1] Physical character

[†] There are altogether 3 spots of congested area within Viharn Yai Trilok community namely 1) Rai Klue Pattana- this group is in the land of Railway State of Thailand and under the Baan Munkong Program since 2550. 2) Rental housing group behind Wat Yaisuvarnaram, and 3) Rental housing group at the west side entrance of Wat Yaisuvarnaram.

The area is about 2 rai and comprise of 31 households altogether and located on the western side of Wat Yaisuvarnaram which is very near to city center and the existing city Prison. This land belong to Wat or called 'sangha land' (สงฆ์สังฆ์) . Most of the houses are wooden house and they are tightly packed with narrow soi entrance to each of the houses. After the discussion with the community we selected the rental block along the main soi entrance as physical condition is deteriorating. This block consists of 10 rental units and 1 single 2 storey wooden house. The 'rights' of the block belong to Dr.Pantong Khiawsodsri – a retired doctor living at Chonburi.

The 10 unit rental block is 1 storey wooden house, and with area of 28 sq.m./ unit (4x7 meters). The physical condition is quite worse and with low rental rate about 400 Bahts/month (sometimes the owner did not come to collect the rent for a few months), so the tenants accepted such condition as it's like almost for free.(Figure 4)



Figure 4 Existing condition of Wat Yaisuvarnaram and pilot community

[2] Socio-economic

Most of the people work as laborer, vendors and other services in the city, with low income rate about 6,000-7,000 Bahts/ family/ month. They had been living here about 20-30 years at least and even some of their older generation about 40 years. There about 2-4 members in each unit and some of them are relative or extended family living next door.



Figure 5 View of the sub entrance and the living condition

[3] Problems found

Community

1. rights to the land occupancy/ insecure housing
2. deteriorating physical housing condition
3. infrastructure and environmental issue
4. illegal lease hold / passing on to other hands
5. insufficient income

Wat

6. the access to Wat and visual landscape interrupted
7. peoples' misperception of Wat as a place for congested community gathering

Buddhist Organization

8. lack of maintenance/restoration the house by the lease holder

[4] Stakeholder wants

1. the tenants would like to stay at the same area as it's close to their work place
2. Wat would like to develop the area into the religious learning school and also parking for visitors
3. open space and meeting space for the community



Figure 6 PAR Working process with Viharn Yai Trilok community and stakeholder

Proposal and solution for Viharn Yai Trailok community

After working with community and stakeholders (Figure 6), the possible solutions are as follows:-

1. upgrading/reconstruction on site

With this proposal, the community does not need to move to anywhere, but they need to readjust and reorganize their public space and restore their housing block.

2. land sharing

This proposal seem to answer both the community and the Wat as the benefits of the solution return to both side, but it need a high commitment and involvement. (Figure 7)

Wat benefit

- religious school expansion
- recreation area and retails for visitors
- parking space
- better entrance and landscape

Community benefit

- better living place and environment
- possible more income from visitor

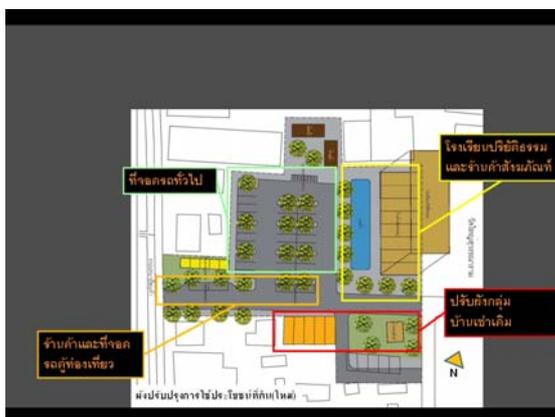


Figure 7 proposal of land sharing and reconstruction of new rental block on the same area

3. relocation

This proposal is to finding other possible vacant plot of land near the city so that they could have better community and finally the tenants could have their own house too.

Case study 2: Wat Chang community

This community is a smaller area within the Pranakornkiri community. It comprise of 32 households In area of 6 rais in the land of Wat Chang. The temple was not very active and almost become a vacant one until 2547 when the new Abbot came in and started to develop and retain the temple significance again. But since then there were continuous conflict between Wat and community as both side got different point of views in developing the area and ‘land’ occupancy.



Figure 8 Existing plan of Wat Chang and community

Information of pilot community 2

[1] Physical

The community lies in the 6 rai land of Watchang temple, this settlement dated back to the olden days of previous 4 Abbots in letting the few people into the temple for 'temporary' living. But as time passed, the area became the prime city center with other services such as Prommanusorn School, market and Hospital, so the settlement became more permanent and crowded.

There are 2 types of housing in Wat Chang:- 1) the front 2 storey row-house of 12 units along Khao Bundai-it Road with the existing moderate physical condition , 2) the single houses (both 1 and 2 storey) in the inner area along the side wall and at the back of Wat are more worsen condition than the front row-house(Figure 10).



Figure 9 Existing condition of Wat Chang and the construction of new Ubosoth (Monastery building).

[2] Socio-economic

Some of the members were here 50 years ago since their parents' time. Due to the location of the houses, for the front row-house the economic status is quite good with the average income of 10,000 Bahts / family/month, whereas the inner group maintain the average income at 5,000-6,000

Bahts. Some of them have extended their living unit within the temple land itself. Also the conflict with the present Abbot is at its peak as he had recently started building the new Ubosoth (monastery building).



Figure 10 Existing living condition and physical character of inner area of Wat Chang community

[3] Problems found

Community

1. rights to the land occupancy/ insecure housing
2. weak relationship/ conflict between Abbot and community

Wat

3. no master plan for the development
4. the resistance by community towards the development

[4] Stakeholder wants

1. the community would like to live at the existing area as it's close to their work place and city center.
2. Wat would like to develop the area for religious activity and also parking for visitors, so the community should move to other place.





Figure 11 PAR working process with Wat Chang community and stakeholder

Proposal and solution for Wat Chang community

1. land sharing

This proposal seem to answer both the community and the Wat as the benefits of the solution return to both side (Figure 12), but it might not meet the minimum land requirement for Religious Regulation Act (minimum land area for any temple is 6 rais).



Figure 12 Proposal plan for the 'land sharing' of Wat and community

2. relocation

Similar to Vihar Yai Trailok community, this proposal is finding other possible plot of land near the city so that they could have better community and their own house too.

Conclusion for the proposals

1. Vihar Yai Trailok community

The community found that the 'land sharing' concept is difficult to implement as the owner of the lease is still holding on to the lease. Also they are afraid of changes and uncertainty, so the community decided to remain at the same place and even though there was a vacant land offered. It turn out not very successful in the end.

2. Wat Chang community

Similar to the earlier case, the implementation of land sharing concept is very hard to push as there were still some conflict between the Abbot and community. But a few of its members who were in need of new home, they show their interest and would like to move to other place if it's not very far from the city.

Outcome

Towards the end of the research, it was very difficult to implement the plan, the conflict and the complexity of the problem could not be reduced in 6 months, but some awareness and better understanding if the existing condition was taken by the community and stakeholder.

The 2 parallel communities went through a lot of participation process, also with all the stakeholders' involvement and Tesaban support, the result of a plot of land of 6 rais and 300 wah of Wat Khog's land was offered at a low rental rate. It is about 3 kilometers from the city with the existing use as rice field (Figure 13). This land is approved by the Wat Khog's Abbot and with the coordination by the Buddhist organization; the

land could be rented for 30 years (with renewal period at every 3 years).



Figure 13 The possible land of Wat Khog with the existing use of rice fields.

At the same time Tesaban is initiating the Baan Munkong Program with Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), so both the pilot communities merged with other small group of Baan Munkong on the planning of the community. This new group led by 3 members of Vihar Yai Trailok community of the 2nd rental group at the back of Wat Yaisuvarnaram and also with other 17 members form other community in the Tesaban district. Also this went through another participatory design process with the 3 groups. The new community plan provides 5 units for Vihar Yai Trailok community, 32 units for Wat Chang community and another 20 units for other Baan Munkong Program, total of 57 housing units and each plot contain area of 25 sq.wah under the Baan Munkong Program. After several discussions with both communities, there seemed to be small interest in the Program, so it was agreed only amongst the 20 members from Baan Munkong Program to go further and the other 2 communities will learn with the project. So for the first phase in the new land, the plan for the 20 housing units was

started and being implement, but the other part was reserved for Wat Chang and Viharn Yai Trailok community (Figure 14).



Figure 14 The draft master plan for the new Baan Munkong Program with first phase of 20 units.

What do we learn from the 2 case study?

Participation is the key success in community development in the pilot community— public hearing/ discussion and involvement from all the party is important. There were some obstacles/ barrier at the beginning and took quite a while to get our objective and intention across to the community members. There were also a lot of different opinions and standpoints, but as the pilot project went through the various stages, some of the points were taken into consideration and a few changes happened slowly.

Community empowerment- motivation and self confidence for the poor are also needed as it could drive them towards a better improvement. Once they believe they can change and improve their own community, then we could step back and things will flow. That attitude is very important for the lower class group, the ones who are in need, they really worked hard, the community members are the change agent themselves.

As a result, this is still a long process towards a goal, yet it might not reach that point of the

ultimate success, but if we are more patience and ‘open-minded’, and also if we could absorb the ‘diversity’ in a proper manner – we might gear to the ‘imagine’ democratic community someday. The pilot community proved that they could do it and will be continuing their implementation towards the ‘collective’ goal. They began to learn some things and set the common rule and the role of living together, this lead to the future democracy itself. It is not just about houses, environment, infrastructure, or knowledge – but it’s about creating the awareness of living together and building a democratic world.

Repositioning the Role

[1] Architect/ designer

The first sector involved in the community development is the architect/designer who shape the ‘spatial’ arrangement. Architect/designer began to change/ shift our role from ‘designing’ to ‘facilitating’. The architect/designer supply/advice with ideas and tools in making the community plan and house design. With such a position, the design outcome is more about the benefit and welfare. Rather the design seemed to be ‘very basic’ and ‘very functional’ and that is the real necessity for the community. The collaborative and participatory design is on the forefront of the community housing and will be more vital towards the design for the tomorrow.

[2] Local Authority

The other important player is the Tesaban staff or local authority, specially the Social Welfare Division.

Local authority need to be more active and take part at the local level development not just the political interests but also the common interest. They should try to connect with local academic institution and thinkers to work out possible solutions case by case. Mediator is vital for this case, negotiation and aesthetic dialogue should be developed between the community and the temple. The Temple also should have a more vivid Master plan for the whole development rather than leaving all the decisions to the Abbot. Local authority must also step in and propose the incentive for these temples and community.

The Thai Scholar Mr.Sompob Phirom, stated that the conservation could work through ‘discipline’ only and all sectors must take part, and must be done with commitmentⁱ. He further elaborated that the local authority should know what to conserve, when, where, why, and how? These are the hearts for the role of local authority in conservation practice. Buddhism and everyday life are amongst the foremost concerns. “We should help those families in the slum as they are our friends and share the same culture”ⁱⁱ. The true ‘discipline’ from all sectors must be developed soon and seriously or we will soon loose our heritage.

Reevaluating the conservative regulation and national housing policy

[1] Conservative regulation

One of the main factors that discourage the proper conservation is the unclear rules, regulations concerning the conservative development in most of our national heritages. The authority need to have a clear policy in conservation and regulation not ambiguous oneⁱⁱⁱ. The Fine Arts Department

plays a very weak role in the existing situation, as there are many historical places to be taken care of. Central and local authority should work together more and with experience and knowledge of the ‘local thinkers’ there could be many alternatives on conservation. Many the times, the tenants or occupants had to restore or repair the ‘valuable’ building by themselves and they had to go through a lot of process for the restoration permission. Also the conflict of related regulations with the old settlements before the building codes passed is still problematic and lack of motivation and incentive in restoration^{iv}. These difficulties discouraged the peoples’ cooperation and goodwill. To achieve a more mutual benefit, the Fine Arts Department or related authority must deliver a more convincible and practical policy and regulations, or else we all will remain in our ‘silent’ atmosphere with no better solutions and neglected just as present. We should reevaluate the rule and policy in the past and adjust them towards the more tangible one.

[2] National housing policy

Also further reevaluation is the National housing policy of community development. National Housing Authority (NHA) with one direction and the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) has another, both trying hard to give the best solution for the poor/lower class. It is hard to point out the most ‘successful’ model for community development. In today world of global crisis, ‘development discourse’ did not leave space for other area of discussion. Debates between ‘conservative’ and ‘economic’ development went for a big while and no conclusion from both side. In the development of any community or society, social and economic dimension were the main

concern. Those are important factors, but also other dimensions concerning cultural and human value should be taken into consideration. Both the NHA and CODI had success and failure story to share and to improve, and also sometimes we might need to reevaluate those principles and adjust them to the appropriate balance and fit well with each community and local context, and that would be most useful for the lower class people. The most challenge task for both the organizations is to set the right foundation and improvement for the people quality of life at their affordable condition, or else the ‘future slum’ is coming back.

Rethinking concept of community development

Another Thai musician Sorn Silpabunleng (หลวงประดิษฐไพเราะ (ศร ศิลปบรรเลง) said “Culture and tradition is not only about spiritual, it is about our body, our daily life. Culture is more important than the everyday living and need as the peoples’ need is a part of the culture itself”. The policymakers, the local authority, the planner/architect, should concern more on such richness and diversity of our Thai heritage, and fuse more with cultural and spiritual value and also the basic necessity of people need. Holistic and dynamism is the key concept too, as we must regain back the wholeness relativity.^v Community-based development would engaged more collaboration from various sectors and stakeholders, we must rethink about the connection of spatial, social and spiritual dimensions (Figure 15). In historic city like Petchaburi, it is not just about making the good houses, community and temples, or good social network- but it is also about creating the spiritual value. Buddhism is still

the main culture and everyday life and will attract tourists from everywhere to see the living Buddhist community. Monks and people are the two mutual group of Buddhist society. This is the individual's role in conservation and development too, not just leaving the 'change' to others or to just tangible objects/materials. There should be the balance between the outside world and the inside, the group/society and the individual, past and future together with dynamism of the culture.

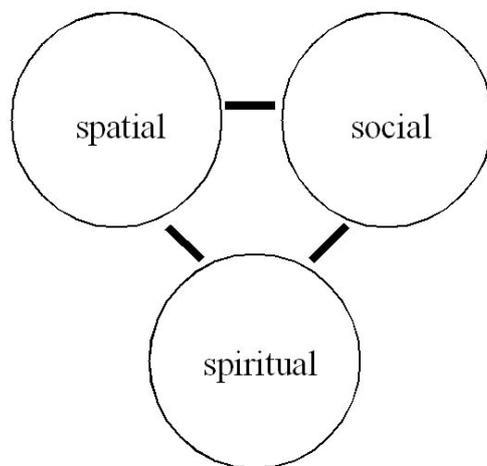


Figure 15 The relationship diagram of spatial, social and spiritual dimension in community development practice.

Conclusion

It would be helpful for architect/designer, policymaker, local authority, as well as local community to try to collaborate together concerning the more integrated concept with more holistic dimensions. Participation, negotiation, mediation, debates are the mechanism to fulfill the missing link and the community themselves could think, and solve their own problems and work together for their own need. In the long run, education is still the key mechanism, better understanding and awareness would be raised, and

a society of knowledge and wisdom would be retained. Historic Petchaburi will continue her breathe as for long if such spiritual dimension are enhanced.

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