

Participatory Place-Making through Action Planning in Klong Bangluang Community, Thailand*

Supitcha Tovivich

Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University

Abstract

Klong Bangluang community is an old canal-sided community located in the inner Bangkok. Due to rapid urbanization, the area has been changing extensively. Recently, the neighborhood has been promoted as a touristic destination and became more popular, although lack of sense of community is evident. The paper is a reflection on the action planning workshops implemented in the community during 2014 to early 2016. The workshops were mainly conducted by students from two courses at the Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University. The first one is a B.Arch. selective module titled 'Community Architecture'. The second one is a selective module titled 'Conservation of Vernacular Architecture and Community Development', which is a part of the M.A. & Ph.D. in Vernacular Architecture program. The author is the core lecturer of both modules working in collaboration with other active lecturers. For the former, it focuses on designing and building small-scale furniture or design objects in the community in order to catalyze social interaction amongst community members. For the latter, the approach is to emphasize on a longer-term participatory process in order to strengthen local capacity building and sense of community. At present, the M.A. & Ph.D. students established themselves as a team working closely with the locals. They have received a seed fund of 180,000 Baht from the "City and Community Rehabilitation Program (CCRP)" from *Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA)*, *Community Act Network* and the *Crown Property Bureau Foundation* to continue their place-making work with the community members and other local partners. Their work includes action planning and participatory design on community mapping, community guidebooks, community photography workshops and community-heritage archives. Community empowerment through small design intervention is argued as a key element for participatory place-making and community conservation and development. The paper focuses on process and output of the action planning studios, which emphasizes participation amongst the locals, students, lecturers and other community development partners. In conclusion, reflection on practice in relation to opportunities and challenges of action planning are discussed.

Keywords: action planning | participatory design | place making | participatory community development | Klong Bangluang

*The paper was adapted from the author's paper for the Third Asia Future Conference, which was held at Kitakyushu, Japan from September 29 – October 3, 2016

การสร้างสำนึกความเป็นถิ่นที่อยู่อย่างมีส่วนร่วม ชุมชนย่านคลองบางหลวง

สุวิษา โทวิเศษ

คณะสถาปัตยกรรมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

บทคัดย่อ

ชุมชนคลองบางหลวงเป็นชุมชนริมคลองที่มีความเก่าแก่ การพัฒนาสู่ความเป็นเมืองอย่างรวดเร็วทำให้ชุมชนและบริเวณโดยรอบมีการเปลี่ยนแปลงเป็นอย่างมาก ไม่นานมานี้กลุ่มชุมชนได้รับการประชาสัมพันธ์ให้เป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวอีกแห่งหนึ่ง ทำให้ชุมชนเป็นที่รู้จักต่อคนภายนอกมากยิ่งขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม “ความเป็นชุมชน” ในชุมชนนั้นยังไม่มีชัดเจนมากนัก บทความนี้เป็นการสะท้อนผลของการจัดเวิร์กช็อปการวางแผนเชิงปฏิบัติการ (action planning) ที่ถูกจัดขึ้นในชุมชน ตั้งแต่ปี 2557 ถึงต้นปี 2559 โดยคณาจารย์และนักศึกษาจากคณะสถาปัตยกรรมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร จากการบูรณาการการเรียนการสอนเข้ากับการบริการวิชาการสู่ชุมชน ในสองรายวิชา ได้แก่ รายวิชาสถาปัตยกรรมชุมชน ในระดับปริญญาตรี และรายวิชาการอนุรักษ์สถาปัตยกรรมพื้นถิ่นและการพัฒนาชุมชน ในระดับปริญญาโท-เอก หลักสูตรสถาปัตยกรรมพื้นถิ่น โดยผู้เขียนเป็นอาจารย์ผู้รับผิดชอบทั้งสองรายวิชา สำหรับรายวิชาสถาปัตยกรรมชุมชนนั้นเน้นที่การออกแบบและก่อสร้างผลงานการออกแบบหรือเฟอร์นิเจอร์ขนาดเล็ก เพื่อกระตุ้นปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมของคนในชุมชน ส่วนรายวิชาการอนุรักษ์สถาปัตยกรรมพื้นถิ่น และการพัฒนาชุมชนนั้นเน้นที่การสร้างกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วมเพื่อเสริมสร้างศักยภาพชุมชนและหนุนเสริมความเข้มแข็งของความเป็นชุมชน ในปัจจุบันกลุ่มนักศึกษาในระดับปริญญาโท-เอกได้รวมตัวกันเป็นคณะทำงานที่ทำงานร่วมกับชุมชนและภาคีในท้องถิ่นที่เกี่ยวข้องอย่างใกล้ชิด โดยได้รับทุนสนับสนุนเพื่อทำกิจกรรมเสริมสร้างความเข้มแข็งของชุมชนและความเป็นถิ่นที่ จำนวน 180,000 บาทจากโครงการฟื้นฟูเมืองและย่านชุมชนเก่า จากกรมการสถาปนิกชุมชน สมาคมสถาปนิกสยามฯ และมูลนิธิทรัพย์สินส่วนพระมหากษัตริย์ กิจกรรมที่นักศึกษาร่วมกันจัดเน้นที่กระบวนการมีส่วนร่วมเป็นสำคัญ เช่น การวางแผน การออกแบบหนังสือแนะนำเที่ยวชุมชน การทำบันทึกของเก่าในชุมชน เป็นต้น การหนุนเสริมอำนาจชุมชนโดยการแทรกแซงด้วยการออกแบบขนาดเล็กถูกใช้เป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญของการสร้างความเป็นถิ่นที่ การอนุรักษ์ และการพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างมีส่วนร่วม บทความนี้เน้นที่กระบวนการและผลลัพธ์ของการเรียนการสอนแบบเน้นการลงมือปฏิบัติจริงในชุมชน โดยให้ความสำคัญกับการมีส่วนร่วมของชาวชุมชน นักศึกษา คณาจารย์ และภาคีร่วมพัฒนาอื่นๆ ท้ายที่สุดบทความนี้สะท้อนถึงโอกาสและความท้าทายของการวางแผนเชิงปฏิบัติการและการวางแผนอย่างมีส่วนร่วมในภาคปฏิบัติ

คำสำคัญ: การวางแผนเชิงปฏิบัติการ | การออกแบบอย่างมีส่วนร่วม | การสร้างความเป็นถิ่นที่ | การพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างมีส่วนร่วม | คลองบางหลวง

1. Introduction

In the previous article (Tovivich 2015), the author argued that action research can be employed as a useful tool in vernacular study and conservation and despite many ambiguous definitions and various levels of participation (Moser, 1989; Arnstein, 1969; Pretty et al., 1994; Hamdi and Majale, 2005; Chambers, 1995), ‘participation’ could be employed as a means (efficiency, effectiveness and local capacity building) and an end (political change and empowerment). By collaborating with the active student team working with the locals at *Klong Bangluang* community in the past three years, the author together with the team has explored action planning in practice. It is evident for our working team that action planning helps facilitate the team to gain better understanding and more insightful information of the studied communities in limited time. Moreover the team hopes that action planning should support the locals to gradually understand potentials and problems of their community better. Additionally, skill training and other learning activities should help the locals to gain appropriate knowledge and skills in order to improve their own communities. Finally, action planning should catalyze local awareness and enable the locals to make decision, take action and reflect on their action (Freire and Ramos 1972). Reflection on these attempts is discussed below.

2. The Context

As mentioned in the author’s previous article (Tovivich 2015), *Klong Bangluang* is an old canal-sided settlement established for more than a hundred year ago. The neighborhood has been promoted as a touristic destination and became more popular amongst foreign and Thai tourists. Lack of a sense of community is observed. Most residents are the middle-class and some of them are relatively wealthy. Most of them know their neighbors, yet they live individually in peaceful environment. There is no formally registered community in the touristic area. The word ‘*Klong Bangluang* community’ is a broad term named by the tourists and media. However, there are, at least, two formally registered communities surrounded by the touristic area of *Klong Bangluang* community named ‘*Wat Kampang*’ community and ‘*Wat Khuha Sawan*’ community. Both are less visited by the tourists, yet they encompass various heritage resources and they share a history with *Klong Bangluang* community.

For the first year (ibid.), in 2014, the M.A. and Ph.D. students of the module titled ‘*Conservation of Vernacular Architecture and Community Development*’, which the author was the core lecturer, were divided into small working groups researching and

developing a small-scale design proposal with an attempt to nurture social interaction amongst community members and ultimately to catalyze a sense of community. The outputs of the students' works included participatory community mapping, participatory community walking-guidebooks, interviewing and documenting memories and traces of historic stories, community portraits, and making a short video about the community. The exhibition of the students' work was held at an abandoned space in the community. The outcome was that the greater number of the local community members started to be interested in our participatory projects. At first, we as a newcomer to the community, got limited interest and support from the locals. The *'tangibility'* of our action plans which led to various catalyst projects is a key that helps the locals to understand our objectives better and feel more interested to contribute. The final exhibition of our students' event was used as a tool to get attention from the locals in order to catalyze conversations amongst them. Many residents came to see the event and seemed to be interested by the stories of their own community, which were presented by the outsiders in the unfamiliar formats of media such as maps, guidebooks, video, and photo exhibition. All projects aim to illustrate potentials and local resources of the community. They are mere starting points of community empowerment. The roles which the students chose are a supporter and a catalyst.

After the M.A. & Ph.D. module was finished, the author continued working with the B.Arch. students on another module titled 'Community Architecture' (ibid.). The author co-conducted a design-built workshop in 2014 with other colleagues at *Klong Bangluang* community. The students were set to design and build community furniture under the theme *"Adjust – Expand – Retract - Remove"*. The furniture was set up in an area, which was abandoned during weekdays, in the community. The outputs of their works included adaptable and foldable chairs, table, exhibition partition, and a community map. The design brief intentionally came from the lecturers. It emphasized the nature of adjustability because the owner of the abandoned space was afraid that local problematic teenagers will use the furniture for partying at night. Local school teachers, students and residents were invited to give their comments on the designs. The strategic aim was to enable the community members to see the potential of their abandoned space as a social area. Referring to Freire's *'true education'*, the students' projects from both modules were mere a starting step. They were set to encourage the local community members to be more enthusiastic and aware of the sense of community and their local capacity. The outcome was that the local shops and people were happy to use the given furniture. Even after three years, they still use and take good care of them.



Figure 1: Action planning mapping by the M.A. & Ph.D. students in 2014

(Source: The M.A. & Ph.D. Vernacular Architecture students)



Figure 2: Action planning mapping by the M.A. & Ph.D. students in 2014

(Source: The M.A. & Ph.D. Vernacular Architecture students)



Figure 3: The B.Arch. students' expandable table project in 2014



Figure 4: The B.Arch. students' final presentation day in 2014

3. The Continuous Catalytic Activities

In the second year, in 2015, the author continued similar process as in 2014 – firstly collaborating with her M.A. & Ph.D. students in the module titled '*Conservation of Vernacular Architecture and Community Development*' and secondly the B.Arch. students in the module titled '*Community Architecture*'. For the M.A. & Ph.D. module, the team chose to work in the other side of the community and started working with the locals from *Wat Kampang* community. The students were divided into three small groups. The first project was the '*heritage mapping*', which the students knocked at the locals' doors and conducted an interview in order to search for and archive historical

everyday objects in each home. The result was surprising, it turned out that many houses possess historic objects aged from a few decades to more than a hundred years old. The second project was a participatory photo workshop with the locals. The students gave disposal cameras to different groups of community members such as a monk from a nearby temple, a local restaurant owner, a teenager group, a teacher from a local school and a café owner. The aim was to reflect the local view on their own community, and use these photos to start discussions and conversations on different issues with other local community members.

The last project was to form *Klong Bangluang* young artist club. The M.A. & Ph.D students got a partnership with local schools. They conducted workshops by teaching local students to draw and then gave them a task to draw old / historic everyday objects in their home. The result was surprisingly amusing. As the local students are young, for them five-year-old electric fan or ten-year-old television are considered an old / historic objects. When exhibiting their drawings to the public, the community members found them interesting and “lovely”. Another task given to the local students was to imagine narratives or storytelling about a real life of a ‘red-uncle sculpture’ installed in front of *Baan Silapin* (meaning the artist’s house), which is the most famous tourist attraction in *Klong Bangluang* community.

The outputs were heritage map and stories, photo exhibition and kids’ paintings. The M.A. & Ph.D students’ final presentation was held at a common space in front of a local temple in *Wat Kampang* community area. The exhibition was supported the Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Canon and Vernadoc team. The aims were to regenerate a lively atmosphere and organize social events in *Wat Kampang* community area, which is less visited by tourists and outsiders and to mix the local people from different areas, as they hardly cross the bridge in their everyday life. The outcome was that the people from the other side of the bridge paid a visit to our exhibition. The atmosphere was festive. Heritage map and local photos catalyzed interests from the locals to discuss and share their own stories. However, the *Klong Bangluang* young artist club was not continued by the locals. During 2014-2015, all activities were initiated by us, the outsiders, with consultation with the locals, who seemed to be interested and satisfied. All projects acted as a catalyst for creating a sense of community. They did not reach the capacity building or empowerment level yet.



Figure 5: 'Heritage mapping' outcome by the M.A. & Ph.D. students in 2015
(Source: Sudjit Sananwai and Team)



Fig. 6: 'Participatory photo workshop' outcome by the M.A. & Ph.D. students in 2015



Figure 7: 'Red-Uncle Sculpture Story' outcome by the M.A. & Ph.D. students in 2015



Figure 8: M.A. & Ph.D. students' final presentation day in 2015

Similarly, after the M.A. & Ph.D. module was finished, the author continued working with the B.Arch. students on another module titled '*Community Architecture*'. The aim was to design and build small objects which can be useful to the *Wat Kampang* community or can help revitalize the area to be more lively for the locals and attractive to tourists. The students consulted with the community leader. He suggested that a renovation of an old community museum and a new tourist photo-shoot spot would be useful, as the community would like to have more visits from tourists, who hardly cross the bridge from the main attraction, *Baan Silapin*. As the existing community museum is relatively unorganized, the community leader hoped that the new renovation could help persuade other community members to donate their heritage objects to the museum, so the museum could become a collective act of the whole community, not only exhibiting historic objects from the community leader.

Nineteen students, with the help of the faculty alumni from Arsomsilp Institute and Tor Kai Chon who are specialized in bamboo structure, spent 12 days learning about bamboo structure, designing and building two projects. The outputs were two small design objects. The first project was a '*community entrance*' or a photo-shoot bamboo panel for tourists. The second was a small renovation of the community museum, rearranging interior space and building new bamboo '*display system*'. The final presentation was held on the site. The head monk, community leaders, community members and the head of the local authority and his team joined the event to give comments. The feedbacks were positive. The local authority mentioned that they would like to see further collaboration with the local community and Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University.

It is important to note that the community leader was very satisfied with our design objects. He seemed to be much more welcomed and open to us when he saw the outputs. First, it was because the changes of before and after renovation were obvious. Second, what we gave to the community was something tangible. In other words, in order to gain trusts from the locals in practice, actions and tangible outputs are important.

In the third year, in 2016, some of the M.A. and Ph.D. students from the first year formed a team with the local members from *Wat Kampang* community and received a seed fund of 180,000 Baht from the "*City and Community Rehabilitation Program (CCRP)*" from *Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage (ASA)*, *Community Act Network* and the *Crown Property Bureau Foundation* to continue their place-making work with the community members and other local partners. Their work included action planning and participatory design on community mapping, community guidebooks, community photography workshops

and community-heritage archives. They extended their network by collaborating with multidisciplinary fields such as the undergraduates from Faculty of Archeology and Faculty of Music, Silpakorn University. Additionally, they also collaborated with undergraduate architectural students from King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. The KMITL students continued working on the cultural mapping. They extended the boundary of the map to the neighborhood level. The aim was to highlight other potentials and local resources apart from the well-known *Baan Silapin*, which is a relatively new tourist attraction when considering that it has been in the community for less than a decade. The students of the Faculty of Archeology and the Faculty of Music have worked on documenting sounds of each sub-neighborhood – the market, the express boats, the local dances and the local music instruments. They organized a final presentation on the common area in front of *Kampang* Temple. Many locals came to help add more information to the cultural maps. The soundscape project was also popular amongst kids. The head of the temple came to the opening and asked the locals to support future activities of the team. Moreover the new assistant director of the local authority and his team came to the opening and stated a commitment to collaborate with the team in the future in relation to community conservation and development activities. Since 2014, this was the first time the local authority seemed to perceive the team's works relevant to theirs. Future collaborations needed to be strategically planned, implemented and reflected on.



Figure 9: The making of bamboo structure in Community Architecture module in 2015



Figure 10: “Before” & “After” renovation of the community museum by the B.Arch. students in 2015

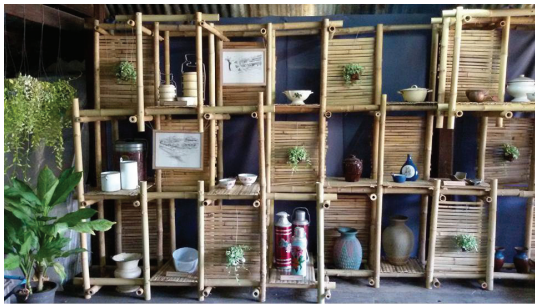


Figure 11: The Display System by the B.Arch. students in 2015



Figure 12: The Community Entrance by the B.Arch. students in 2015



Figure 13: The B.Arch. students’ final presentation day in 2015



Figure 14: The locals helped add information on the cultural maps in 2016



Fig.15: The soundscape project installation in 2016

4. Lesson Learned and Reflections

First, it is important to have continuous projects in a community in order to keep the momentum of catalysts going. Second, actions and tangible outputs are crucial to gain trusts from the locals. Third, consultation with the local helps make a project more effective and efficient. Fourth, partnerships and expanding networks are important in order to scale up catalyst projects into longer term program. Finally, community empowerment through small design intervention is argued as one of the key elements for participatory place-making and community conservation and development. Since 2014, it seems the team has gained more trust from the locals, as it is evident to the locals that they gain no other profits from their activities. The team got more support from the local leaders – the monks and the community leaders.

Small design interventions have been continuously conducted by outsiders in collaboration with the locals with an aim to raise awareness on different issues in relation to place-making and to help strengthen local identity and sense of place. Nevertheless, the work is in progress. Since 2014, the team has involved more local people in the process, and also has expanded the participatory studied area to cover not only the well-known tourist attraction areas, but also other parts of *Klong Bangluang* community which share historic background. The ultimate aim which is yet to be fulfilled is to enable the local to be the main actors. More strategic activities from the outsiders are needed to be more explored and tested in practice. At present, it seems there is a clearer and closer link between the team, community

members, local authority, local temples and local schools. Again, by playing a role as a catalyst enabling design intervention which was set to reveal potentials and local resources of *Klong Bangluang* community, additionally to raise questions and facilitate dialogues amongst the locals, the team has helped materialize the sense of place and local identity of the community.

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