



## Social capital - Cultural capital: Roles and relationship to conservation of Songkhla Old Town, Thailand

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### Abstract

Songkhla Old Town is located on the Malay Peninsula, which was suitable for commerce as well as being on the maritime route that connected the town to the world's centers of civilization. Songkhla, therefore, became an international port town from Ayutthaya until early Rattanakosin periods. The inter-relationship between people of various cultures has resulted in the development of Songkhla as a multicultural town based on connection of the Muslims, Thais, and Chinese who lived within the same town wall. Among these groups of people, knowledge, skills, and wisdom have evolved and have been shared interdependently. The study shows that Songkhla had two remarkable strengths, the Micro capital and Meso capital. However, governmental subsidy (Macro capital) is limited in certain aspects. One of the obstacles is that local government has to comply with the policy from central government, therefore, the problem-solving cannot be carried out pertinently for the local requirements. From the study, social capital is one of the factors leading to the growth of other capitals. Furthermore, social capital can be perceived as a driving mechanism for cultural conservation. Therefore, this paper aims to recommend that projects on architectural conservation and cultural heritage management should provide a participatory activity for all stakeholders. Furthermore, the participatory process should be carried out on actual collaboration level for building sense of mutual ownership and creating the relationship in all 3 social capitals. In the future, mutual benefit and partnership should also be created so that all people may cooperate and receive the results together.

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## Introduction

Songkhla was founded by people of different religions and ethnicities who have settled and lived together harmoniously since the long past. The old town is the center of cultural identity, which is in the process of World Heritage Nomination initiated by local people themselves. This article is part of the dissertation “Cultural heritage conservation and management in historic districts by participatory process in Thai context: A case study of Songkhla Old Town”, because the historic town is a space that supports people’s lives, not only a place for heritage buildings. Focusing only on cultural values might not be successful for stakeholder participation. Thus, studying social capital will help finding issues that can connect all stakeholder to the project. The objective of this article is, therefore, to study the roles and relationship between social capital and cultural capital in order to answer the research question: “How does social capital play a role in cultural heritage conservation of Songkhla Old Town?”, which is expected to build a better understanding on the roles of stakeholders.

## Literature Review

The article aims to understand the role and relationship between cultural capital and social capital which affect Songkhla Old Town conservation. Therefore, literature review of these four concepts: (1) cultural capital, (2) social capital, (3) relationship between social capital and cultural capital, and (4) Songkhla settlement history and factors that affect social capital, was carried out.

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital refers to cultural products, both tangible and intangible. Tangible ones are, for instance, monuments, cultural heritage sites, art objects e.g. paintings, crafts, musical instruments, cinematography, literature. Intangible ones are seen in forms of cultural norms, traditions, way of life, beliefs, and social practice, etc. These are classified as “Capital” because culture is involved in production and services providing (Throsby, 2001). Therefore, towns with remarkable cultural identity and tradition have to conserve their cultural capital so that the old towns can exist with well-conserved identity and be developed creatively.

Cultural capital is a component of social capital which plays a vital role in the development of Thai society since Thailand has unique and diverse culture which is spread throughout the country. If these cultural capitals are developed and used wisely and efficiently, creation and increase of economic and social values are highly expectable (Munkong, 2017).

### *Social Capital*

‘Social capital’ is a term which has been used over the last four decades. It refers to all matters which are encountered in everyday life, for instance, good image building, relationship building, empathy and social interaction between people and groups leading to the forming of social units. (Buddaduang, 2011, p. 14). Putnam (1993) proposed the idea of applied social capital from his thesis that trust, norms and networks can help improve efficiency and effectiveness of the society by collaboration and supports. Therefore, the purpose of social capital is to build relationships among both personal and organizational levels (Linn, 2001). In other words, the uniqueness of community’s identities depends on the amount of social capital since less social capital means that the society lacks familiarity and interrelationship (Morrison, 2003). Obviously, social capital is related to people’s participation, as Claridge (2004) said, the more people’s participation, the more social capital level increases. In cases of old town conservation which concerns the area where cultural values and memory of people are concentrated, social capital is an essential and vital factor.

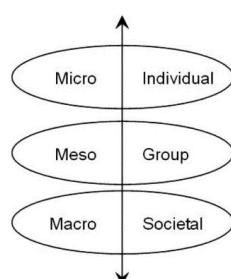
#### *Levels of social capital*

Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002) said that social capital is the system of relationship and values which results from the interaction between people, groups, and the authority who cooperate in supporting their own social and economic development. Claridge (2004) studied and suggested that there are three levels of social capital, which is clarified by Sukitpaneenit (2010, pp. 9–11) as follow:

1. Micro Level or individual level is individual awareness capacity or cognitive social capital, which includes value, trust, solidarity, reciprocity, norms and attitudes. These attributes are factors for network building, and vice versa; networking is the mechanism for distribution of intrinsic factors of an individual or a leader to members of the network or group to create a learning hub which leads to a common value within the community.

2. Meso Level is structural social capital that emphasizes creating individual interaction between individuals of diverse characteristics to form a network, group, or other forms of organizations, especially the horizontal grouping which results in the horizontal organization structure of distinguished identity. Such grouping makes the group or network benefit by associated values and norms of the social network that lead to cooperation and collaboration, as well as collective/transparent decision-making process and mutual examination within the network.

3. Macro Level is the networking system embedded within the economic, political, cultural and normative system in macro level, including the inter-networking linkage that forms a national system of social capital. The system covers both internal and external factors of change of the structure of the network, for instance, the dynamism and move of the network structure.



**Figure 1** Level of social capital

Source: Claridge (2004, p. 10)

#### *Relationship between Social Capital and Cultural Capital of Old Town Conservation*

The efficiency of social capital depends on the quality of relationship among the three levels of social capital. If the relationship occurs in 3 levels, the society is powerful, but on the contrary, if the relationship occurs in only 1 level, the society lacks linkage for development. However, social relationships are built through time, that is, the longer the society exists, the stronger the relationship and transfer of knowledge can be made from generation to generation until the “cultural capital” is established. Therefore, old towns around the world are centers of culture which have their unique charms resulting from relationships of people. These old towns are conserved for their cultural values which are the pride

of local people as well as being tourist attractions.

The analysis of social capital in this article, therefore, considers all 3 levels of social capital, beginning by studying the history of settlement to identify the factors of social capital of Songkhla Old Town before proceeding to the analysis of Songkhla's social capital.

#### *Songkhla Settlement History and Factors that Affect Social Capital of Songkhla Old Town<sup>1</sup>*

The history of Songkhla began from 1st – 2nd centuries CE verified by evidence of maritime route, the forming of port town, and archaeological remains of human settlements. During 12th – 13th centuries CE., Songkhla was mentioned in historical documents and maps made by Western merchants by the name “Singora” or “Singor”. This period is regarded as the first period of the founding of Songkhla (Komobut, 2007).

From academic papers, the history of Songkhla is divided into three periods of settlement, which has been developed to become Songkhla of the present day.



**Figure 2** Songkhla settlement map of three periods

Source: Triwanachai (2015)

#### *The first period: Songkhla Khao Daeng, the founding of a town*

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, Dutch merchants were the first group of Westerners who came to Songkhla for trade. During that time, Java was colonized by the Dutch. “Dato Mogol” a Persian Muslim with his family and followers travelled from Java to Songkhla and settled in the Hua Khao Daeng area (Sukontapirom Na Pattalung, 1988, p. 30) At that time, the area was already inhabited

<sup>1</sup> The literature review of Songkhla history is based on documents and interviews of two experts, Mr. Vitichai Phetsuwan (the local historian and representative of Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization and Professor Saruj Phetsakulvong of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Songkhla Rajabhat University in the event of Songkhla Knowledge Management Seminar which was summarized by Triwannachai (2015, pp. 47–50). Future Songkhla City Symposium: Sociology and Anthropology on Thursday 5 March 2013, Rong Sri Daeng Hub Ho Hin meeting room, Songkhla.

by local people. Dato Mogol became the community leader. After he passed away, Sultan Suleiman, his son, continued to rule. That period is recognized as the most prosperous time of trade when Songkhla was highly active as a port town and commercial center, especially with the Dutch and British merchants.

At first, the Dutch merchants conducted a monopoly trade in Songkhla but later the town launched free trade policy in order to attract more international merchants to Songkhla (Songmuang, 1986, pp. 2-4). Due to the prosperity of Songkhla, Mr. John Jordan (a British officer) proposed to British East India Company (located in Calcutta, India) to build a large warehouse in Songkhla so that goods from the vicinity could be stored before delivering to the British East India Company in Siam, Cochin-China, Borneo, and Japan (Fine Arts Department, 1969, p. 176)

After the reign of Sultan Suleiman, Mustafa (a son of Suleiman) ruled. Due to the conflicts within the Ayutthaya kingdom, Songkhla declared independence from Ayutthaya and rebelled with support from the Dutch, however, the rebel was not successful and Songkhla was defeated by King Narai's troop. This is considered the end of the first period of Songkhla.

### *The second period: Songkhla Laem Son, the period of commerce, prosperity, and stability*

Songkhla was recovered after the war in Thonburi period. The central government assigned Phraya Wichai khiri to govern Songkhla. Later, a Chinese named "Hao Yiang" from Amoy (or Xiamen, Fujian, China) was a prominent person in developing the town and conducting several beneficial deeds, so King Taksin made him the Governor of Songkhla. Consequently, a great number of Chinese came to settle in the town, which was called "Mueang Bo Keng". The town featured several Chinese architectural elements such as gateway, pavilions, houses, etc. Descendants of Hao Yiang, whose family name is "Na Songkhla", continued to rule Songkhla. Later in the time of Phraya Wichian khiri (Tianseng), due to the limited area and density of population, the town was moved to be located on the opposite side of Songkhla Lake in "Bo Yang" area, which was later developed and expanded rapidly.

### *The third period: Songkhla Bo Yang, the 8-fort and 10-entrance Town*

Because of the advantageous location, suitable for both trade and living, Bo Yang became prosperous and has continued to thrive from its founding days in early Rattanakosin period to the present. In the reign of King Rama 6, Songkhla was highly developed as seen from the establishment of rice mills, railways. At that time, goods

from Switzerland were directly imported to Songkhla without passing Bangkok.

The long period of time in trade and relationship of people has resulted in a continuous growth of Songkhla. The business expanded to Hat Yai until it became the most important business center, thus, Songkhla old town declined. Nevertheless, during the last 20 years, Songkhla old town has been revitalized by conservation trends and developed as a tourist attraction.

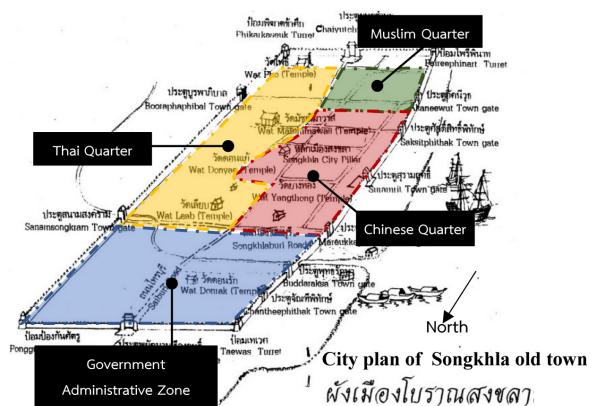


**Figure 3** Songkhla Bo Yang

Source: Songkhla Heritage Society (2018)

Factors affecting Songkhla old town's social capital

Songkhla Bo Yang, as seen inside the town wall, has an interesting town plan, which had land allocated for people of all social levels, thus the Governor's house, government offices, and dwelling areas of all ethnicities have coexisted. This has become the root of social and cultural integration created through living, helping, and cooperation between people that have brought about senses of family, friendship, and other forms of social relationship in Songkhla.



**Figure 4** Residential area of Songkhla citizen

**Source:** Hatyaifocus (2017, adapted by Srisakulchairak, 2023)

## Methodology

The author has had the opportunity to work on the conservation of Songkhla with civil society, local peoples, and the local government for more than 8 years. This has resulted in an interest in the relationship of social capital and cultural capital that affects the conservation of Songkhla. This study was qualitative research. Data were collected by studying from documents, interviews with local experts, and surveys in the study area over a period of 1 year (2021– 2022). After data collection, a descriptive analysis was carried out based on the levels of social capital framework according to the theory obtained from the literature review.

## Result and Discussion

### *Songkhla Social Capital Analysis*

After surveying the area and reviewing the documents, 3 levels of social capitals and their linkage have been identified based on Claridge's theory (2004) as follows:

#### *Micro level or individual level*

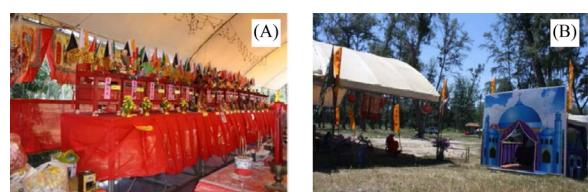
From the study, it has been found that all people including the Muslims, Chinese, and Thais have good attitude towards cultural conservation and good feeling towards one another. These people are neighbors, schoolmates, as well as being related by marriage, which has occurred between different religions and ethnicities. The relationship, therefore, covers all aspects of life including occupation, trade, and business.



**Figure 5** Wedding ceremony and Muslim costume in Songkhla

**Source:** Tojay (2023)

**Figure 5**, is a photograph of a Muslim wedding ceremony held in combination with Thai tradition as seen in the, Khan Mak parade (parade of presents from the groom to the bride's family), and Thai style dress. This image implies the acceptance and adaptation between these 2 cultures. Furthermore, even though the present Songkhla Old Town is physically dominated with overseas Chinese culture, traditional activities of all religions and beliefs still clearly reflect the coexistence and multiculturality. A good example is a traditional event simultaneously held by the Chinese-Thais and Muslims, which is the "Somphot Pu Thuat Hua Khao Daeng" (Celebration of the Great Grandfather of Hua Khao Daeng) event. In the event, apart from paying homage to the deities in Chinese tradition, there is a worshipping ceremony for "Thuat Hum" or Sultan Suleiman, the Muslim leader of ancient times. People worship the same person regardless of different religions, and the ceremony is held in the Muslim community at Hua Khao Daeng without any conflicts (Triwanachai, 2015, p. 16).



**Figure 6** Ceremony held at Hua Khao Daeng to worship:

(A) Somphot Pu Thuat, and (B) Thuat Hum Greatfather

**Source:** Phetsuwan (2023)

Other evidence of the relationship of Songkhla people is recorded in the Samrong Inscription, which comprises 3 stone inscriptions, each of which is inscribed in one language: 1 in Thai, 1 in Chinese, and 1 in Malay (in Yavi script). The inscriptions were built in 1845 to record the public cooperation in road building. The townspeople, including the Buddhist Thais, Chinese, and Muslims, contributed to the project which totaled 2,312 coins 3 Tamlueng (Phetsuwan, personal communication, October 24, 2018). These stone inscriptions are tangible evidence to verify that Songkhla townspeople were of various ethnicities and religions yet they willingly cooperated for public benefits.



**Figure 7** Samrong stone inscription.

Furthermore, individual social capital also highly benefits the conservation of architectural heritage, which is carried out by individual budget. This is because people are proud to be the natives of Songkhla and see the values of old buildings as part of historical evidence. These buildings, on the other hand, also benefit the people in both social and economic aspects as shown [below](#).

It can be said that this level of social capital is important in the aspect of long-term relationships between individuals. It is a means for accessing the conservation of other capitals such as cultural capital, physical capital, and economic capital. Individual social capital is a significant linkage to the other 2 levels of social capital since it is the foundation of organizations and groups, to be mentioned later.

#### *Meso level or civil society*

Social capital on individual level, as mentioned, apart from influencing cultural heritage conservation, both tangible and intangible, also brings about the forming of groups, thus creating the Meso level of social capital. Therefore, this article presents only the structural social groups of Songkhla which conduct cultural heritage conservation activities. From study and observation, there are two groups, “Songkhla Forum” and “Songkhla Heritage Society”.

#### 1. Songkhla Forum

Songkhla Forum is a group of volunteers from various occupations. In the beginning, (1993–1997) the group

focused on organizing forums on “Livable Songkhla” and founded the Rak Ban Koet Fund.

In the second stage (1997–2007), they focused on media reformation, local radio stations, radio for youths, creative activities for children and youths, children community, media comprehension, media process, study of Life Skill of Southern Youths of Thailand, in collaboration with the National Council for Child and Youth Development under the Royal Patronage of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (NCYD). In 2010–2012, they founded Hat Songkhla SOS for Beach Watch Network: BWN. From June 2012 until the present, they mainly work on youth and environmental improvement, for instance, the launching of Young Citizen by Songkhla Forum project; Study and Monitoring on Adding Sand to Samila Beach project supported by Songkhla City Municipality, Songkhla Forum and Kasetart University.

“Suan Baeng Pan - Shared Garden” project is another example of projects conducted by Songkhla Forum. The project was carried out in Ban Bon Muslim community in Songkhla Old Town in 2019 by the Forum with four entrepreneurs and Ban Bon local people to transform vacant public space into shared garden for the well-being of community life. This community garden has brought people of all ages to join gardening activities such as watering, soil turning, and to enjoy this recreational space together.



**Figure 9** Gathering of local people in forum activity.  
**Source:** Sotthi (2021)



**Figure 8** Examples of old buildings, renovated and conserved by owners: (A) Ban Kian Charoen by Kian Charoen family, (B) The Apothecary by Pakorn Rujiravilai, and (C) Nine-blocks shophouse by tenant

## 2. Songkhla Heritage Trust

Songkhla Heritage Trust is a social group or civil society founded in 2010. The main objective is to act as center for the people of Songkhla Old Town to share their ideas and experiences to build awareness and pride in the values of their heritage town, creating a livable urban environment, and working toward the nomination of Songkhla to World Heritage List. In 2013, the association was officially registered as “Songkhla Heritage Trust” with 2 main objectives: (1) to work toward the nomination and inscription of Songkhla on World Heritage List and (2) to raise awareness on the values of Songkhla Old Town among the towns people.



**Figure 10** Songkhla Heritage Trust and Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization

**Source:** Samilatimes (2017)

Songkhla Heritage Trust and partners, including Songkhla Municipality, Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization and academic institutions from inside and outside the historic district have collaborated in organizing academic seminars, talks, and cultural activities as part of their mission on World Heritage nomination of Songkhla.

However, it should be observed that, although these 2 groups have different interests and missions, their works commonly benefit cultural heritage conservation. It is also interesting to see that the social groups work in cooperation with local government, which is the Macro level of social capital. Songkhla's Meso Level (associated groups) of social capital is, therefore, significant as linkage between the individuals (Micro level social capital) and local government (Macro level social capital).

### *Macro level or government level*

Macro social capital refers to both central government and local government, namely, Songkhla Municipality, and Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization.

These organizations play important roles on interacting with local individuals and associations because they are responsible for the welfare of people and the development of the town in several dimensions. For the last fifteen years, former Mayor, Mr. Phira Tantisreni was a leading figure in revitalizing Songkhla from its inactive state by raising awareness of townspeople on the values of cultural and natural heritage by cooperation with social groups. Consequently, Songkhla has become a more lively and attractive town. In the last decade, Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization led by the President, perceived the significance of World Heritage inscription, therefore, he initiated the mission on “Songkhla toward World Heritage List”. The mission has been carried out by collaboration with administrative and local associations such as Songkhla Municipality, and Songkhla Heritage Trust, which has supported the mission by funding for study, research, and organizing academic activities on national and international levels. (Phetsuwan, V. personal communication, June 12, 2022).

In addition, Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization has become the main supporter for Songkhla toward World Heritage mission by contribution for researches and hosting academic activities based on UNESCO's guidelines, for instance, the “International Symposium on Asian Port Towns & Maritime Trade Route 2019” and providing funds ICOMOS for Upstream Process in 2022.



**Figure 11** International Symposium on Asian Port Town and Maritime Trade Route 2019, funded by Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization

As mentioned, it is clearly noted that the local government of Songkhla has given high significance on conserving cultural heritage and worked in cooperation with social groups and local people; however, the governmental system allows the governor to be in the position only for four years per each term, which can

be regarded as a time frame limitation. Consequently, change of Governor could lead to discontinuity of work and weakened linkage between the government level, social level, and individual level of social capital, especially if the new Governor does not pay attention to the cultural heritage conservation.

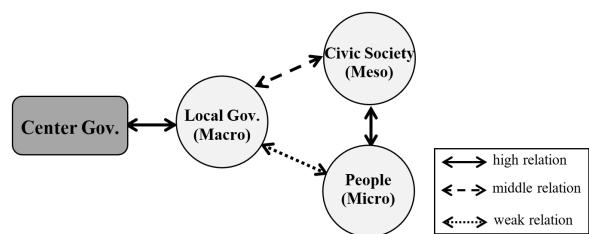
Triwanachai (2015) indicates the weak points or issues which people should be aware of concerning governmental level social capital, which affect the quality and relationship of the social group and individual levels, and concluded that “although local government has relationship with social groups and people, it still has to adopt the policy from the central government, therefore problems could occur due to conflicts between central policy and requirements of local people in conservation. In the case of Songkhla, people want to conserve cultural and natural heritage and have requested to have a long-term policy on revitalization and conservation of local culture. On the contrary, the central government emphasizes building of large-scale infrastructure, which, in many cases, did not work in accordance with the town’s resources and, moreover, had damaging effects on the resources which were the foundation of tourism. For example, the building of a concrete dam at Chalathat beach instead of using the budget for conserving and improving the historic district, which should better benefit tourism, by making the place a cultural tourist attraction.

Therefore, it can be summarized that: (1) discontinuity of local leader due to limited term of post; and (2) the incompatible policy between central government and local requirements are the main 2 factors which can be regarded as weaknesses or problematic issues which affect the quality and efficiency of Songkhla cultural heritage conservation.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

### Conclusion

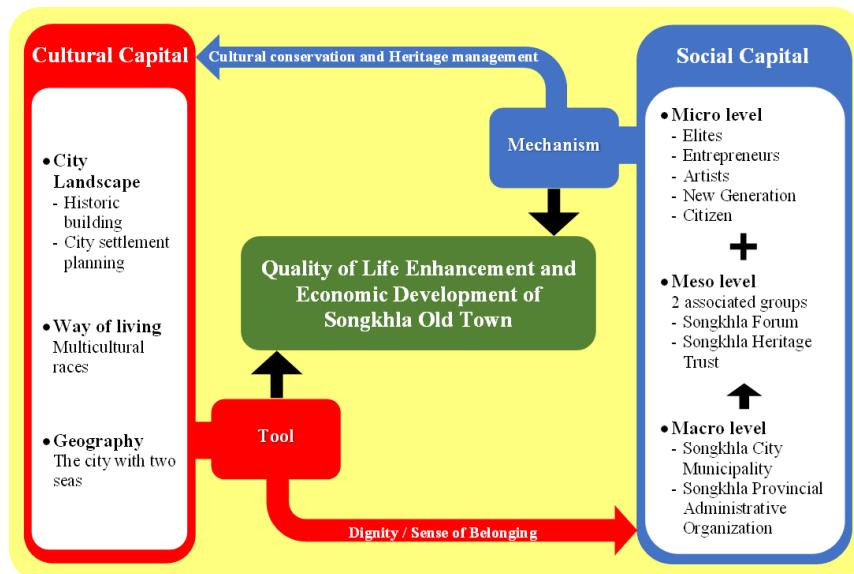
From the study, the relationship between the level of social capital in Songkhla can be concluded. At the micro level, it shows an awareness of the value of Songkhla by repairing and maintaining the historical buildings it owns, and link to meso-level social capital that is important in academic role and driven by activities based, as a group that can connect and request support and subsidies from local government (macro level).



**Figure 12** The relationship of three levels of social capital in Songkhla Old Town

However, discontinuity of leader (Governor) and central government policy which might not be harmonized with local people’s requirements has become an obstacle to effectiveness in cultural heritage conservation. This is a weakness that people should be aware of and improved in order to work more efficiently and pertinently to people’s needs and opinions, as well as enhance the quality of social capital. The study points out the gap between the local government and the people. In the past, people had good relations with the local government since the city was founded. Even now, people are still willing to let the local government take the lead in conserving Songkhla. The government sector has power and resource while the civil society has the intention, but does not have the power to act.

It is noticeable that social and cultural capitals of Songkhla are closely related. The two social groups which have worked for more than 15 years in collaboration with local people, supported by local administrative organizations, are the main driving force on the maintenance of cultural capital of Songkhla. On the other hand, old buildings and vacant areas which are parts of the cultural capital can be seen as tools for local people to perceive their values and actively work on conserving their cultural heritage, which is the pride of Songkhla Old Town. Cultural and social capitals, therefore, are related and can lead to economic development, as well as enhance social stability based on relationships between social groups in the locality.



**Figure 13** Relationship between social capital and cultural capital of Songkhla

On the contrary, if social capital is neglected, people lack relationships, and conflicts and discrimination are expected, which has negative effects on cultural heritage conservation. Therefore, to conserve cultural heritage, we should not only concern the buildings or physical elements, but also the process to build understanding with public participation by all stakeholders being crucial as a means for expanding the social capital. Opportunities should be made for bringing all stakeholders to interact with each other, exchange ideas, and share feelings, which would lead to a collective memory that can be transferred to people of future generations.

The study found that the role of social and cultural capitals of Songkhla are related to each other. From living together and interacting with each other on individual level, Micro level has developed into Meso level (larger groups of people) - two main formal social groups which cooperate with local government in a sustainable way. Nonetheless, from social capital analysis, the Micro and Meso levels are classified as 'Good' quality, but Macro level has two main weaknesses, firstly, the change of Governor every four years, and secondly, the incompatibility between central government policy and local requirements in terms of cultural heritage conservation.

#### *Recommendation*

This article demonstrates how to find success in participatory conservation by studying for relationships among three levels of social capital to see the success in participation. This is different from preserving a historic town that most often starts with studying its physical importance, then inviting people to participate. To conserve cultural heritage of Songkhla Old Town effectively along with expanding social capital, the author would like to propose 2 recommendations:

Firstly, historic buildings and cultural heritage conservation management projects should include public participation activities to enhance relationship of people in all levels, thus creating social capital continuously.

Secondly, the public participation activities in cultural conservation process should be organized on actual implementation level, not only public hearing. Hands-on collaboration will create a sense of belonging and mutual concern and linkage of all 3 levels of social capital, that is, between people and people, people and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the project should promote the creation of business partners on cultural heritage to allow all stakeholders to have opportunities to collaborate in thinking, implementing, and benefiting from the project in social, cultural, and economical aspects.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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