The Vernacular City as Ordinary Cultural Heritage[1]

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Abstract

The concept of urban conservation has primarily emphasized elegant art and architecture related to the monarchy and the elite, while ignoring ordinary cultural heritage based in local communities. This article examines the concept of the vernacular city based on ordinary people's ownership. The four objectives of this study are the following: 1) to review the paradigm shift in cultural heritage relating to the vernacular city concept, 2) to categorize the old community district based on ordinary cultural heritage concepts, 3) to explore the meaning of ordinary cultural heritage through Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), and 4) to propose the management and protection of ordinary cultural heritage. The outcome of the study is twofold: 1) understanding the importance of spirit beliefs and folklore relating to ordinary cultural heritage, and 2) integrating such folklore into urban conservation planning.

Keywords: vernacular city, cultural heritage, urban planning, ordinary heritage, cultural landscape

บทคัดย่อ

แนวคิดในกระแสหลักของการวางแผนด้านการอนุรักษ์เมืองมักให้ความสำคัญกับมรดก
ที่ถูกจัดให้อยู่ในสกุลช่างชั้นสูง งานศิลปะที่วิจิตรงดงามและมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับผู้มีฐานะ
และสถานภาพสูงในสังคม ในขณะที่มรดกวัฒนธรรมของคนธรรมดา เช่น ชาวบ้านหรือ
ชุมชนต่างๆ กลับถูกเพิกเฉยและไม่ถูกตีกรอบลงไปในการด้านการอนุรักษ์เมือง บทความนี้
ต้องการเปิดเผยให้เห็นถึงความเข้าใจในมิติของเมืองพื้นถิ่นในฐานะที่เป็นมรดกที่คน
ธรรมดาเป็นผู้ครอบครองและเป็นเจ้าของได้ วัตถุประสงค์ของบทความนี้มี 4 ประการ คือ
1) ทบทวนกระบวนทัศน์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับมรดกของคนธรรมดาที่เชื่อมโยงไปสู่แนวคิดเมือง
พื้นถิ่น 2) จำแนกประเภทของย่านชุมชนเก่าบนฐานคิดมรดกของคนธรรมดา 3) ค้นหา
การให้ความหมายของมรดกวัฒนธรรมของผู้คนธรรมดาผ่านวิธีการ ABCD (Asset-Based
Community Development) และ 4) นำเสนอแนวทางการจัดการกับพื้นที่มรดกเหล่านั้น
บทความนี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงข้อค้นพบที่สำคัญสองประการ ได้แก่ ประการแรกคือมิติของ
ความเข้าใจถึงความสำคัญของความความเชื่อและความรู้ของชาวบ้านหรือคติชนใน
ความหมายของมรดกวัฒนธรรมของคนธรรมดา และประการที่สองคือการบูรณาการความ
รู้ของชาวบ้านหรือคติชนไปสู่การวางแผนอนุรักษ์เมือง

คำสำคัญ: เมืองพื้นถิ่น มรดกวัฒนธรรม การวางผังเมือง มรดกวัฒนธรรมของคนธรรมดา
ภูมิทัศน์วัฒนธรรม

Introduction

The First and Second World Wars resulted in the destruction and damage
of many historic sites, particularly in Europe, which gave rise to a
massive movement in historic conservation. One of the first significant
meetings, held in 1935, was the first International Congress of Architects
and Technicians of Historic Monuments, organized in Athens, Greece
(Pimonsathean, 2013). It focused on historic conservation and restoration
based on concepts of authenticity and outstanding universal value
(Pendlebury et al., 2009).These concepts have influenced the main
approach of historic conservation in countries around the world,
including Thailand. Nevertheless, in the early 2000s, constitutional
reform encouraged decentralization in Thailand; as a consequence,

massive participation movements have been triggered in local administrative organizations. Subsequently, a paradigm shift in urban conservation dramatically changed the approach from national historic monuments to local diversity and daily-life activities (Sirisrisak 2009), or, as this researcher calls it, 'ordinary heritage' or 'the vernacular city.' Pimonsathean (2013) suggests that the reason behind this shift is that communities see local heritage as belonging to them.

'Vernacular city' is not a new word. Many studies have explained the validity of vernacular architecture relating to the urban environment, nature, social systems, lifestyle and daily-life activities (González et al., 2008). Savarro (2014) demonstrates the complexity of space within the city through formal and ideological places, as the vernacular city concept represents the relationships among land and economic, social and natural resources. In a similar vein, Padawangi (2015) views architectural heritage and urban environment as related in terms of production, transformation, and construction of identity for the city. She argues that the vernacular in the urban environment is the process of the power structure dominating the reproduction of urban space. Padawangi (2015) examines case studies in Singapore and Jakarta, where urban identity is leading to a possible vernacularization of the colonial. Urban heritage and urban identity are inseparable from the vernacular city.

This article consists of four major sections. The first elaborates the evolution of conservation concepts in Thailand, which consist of paradigm shifts in urban conservation from the approach of Buddhist merit making to local and community-driven conservation. The second section considers the vernacular city in terms of a power relationship and the complexity of the community. It reveals vernacular space production affected by the power structure as well as by community assets. The third section describes the vernacular city as ordinary heritage, focusing on the definition of old communities and districts, which can be ambiguous in terms of heritage management in Thailand. This section also describes interactive methods of encouraging local participatory processes, such as Asset-Based Community Development

or ABCD (Alison, 2003). These processes could bridge the gap between governor, planner and local residents. The final section proposes management through local wisdom sources, whereby local knowledge is derived from observing and learning across several generations.

The Evolution of Urban Conservation Concepts in Thailand: The Merit Approach

Conservation concepts in Thailand are based on Buddhist ideals of maintaining temples, Buddha images and relics**.** Conservation is a way to obtain merit. Everyone can gain merit, from monarchs to the local populace. Many documents show examples of the merit approach in the terminology of urban and heritage conservation from the past until the early Rattanakosin period or approximately the 1800s (Pimonsathean, 2013). To preserve Buddhism in Bangkok during the Rattanakosin era, temples were built using numerous bricks from the cities of Ayutthaya and Thonburi, which were two empires that existed in previous eras (Tipakorn, 2002; Pimonsathean, 2013). This example highlights a case of reconstruction without conservation. Thus, the first cultural conservation regulation was enacted to protect Buddha images and monastic places in the Rattanakosin period (Suteeratanapirom, 2003; Pimonsathean, 2013). The power to decide in the conservation processes depended on the upper levels of society, such as monarchs and elites, instead of locals and villagers. Meanwhile, local residents were mere laborers in the preservation process who participated as a way of making merit in the Buddhist sense.

Modern Conservation

In the early 1900s, Thailand was faced with western colonialism. To reduce the pressure, King Rama IV allowed many western experts, including conservationists, to work for the Thai government (Pimonsathean, 2013). As a result, western conservation knowledge influenced the practice on the ground. One important expert was George

Coedes (1886-1969) who laid the foundation of archaeological pedagogy in Thailand by surveying numerous archaeological sites in both Thailand and Cambodia. Thus, early modern conservation focused on historic sites, their settings and authenticity, as outlined in the 1931 Athens Charter (Sirisrisak, 2009).

As far as authority over conservation was concerned, the Thai Archaeology Association and the Fine Arts Department were established in 1907 and 1908, respectively, in order to support archaeological studies so that the conservation process in Thailand would be dominated by western knowledge. This study and analysis framework, designed by western specialists, appears to have been biased and may have shown advantage towards colonial countries, rather than Thailand. These frameworks were conceptualized in an approach that included ancient states classified as Khmer, Siam, and Lan Chang. This way of thinking categorized urban heritage by ethnicity, which was based on nationality rather than cultural identity. The concept of nationality tends to segregate groups of people and attempts to scrutinize the unity of each culture. Such segregation of history and culture lays behind the drawing of borders between Indo-Chinese countries.

Local and Community-driven Conservation

In the last decade, decentralization and human rights have become major issues, spreading across the field of urban and conservation planning (Sirisrisak, 2009). As Grekova (2001) points out, when a conservation process focuses only on national historical monuments and their propagation, local and minority cultures are ignored. In Thailand, when the Decentralization Act of 1999 was enacted, local bodies and communities began to play a more important role in cultural management. A paradigm shift changed the focus from national historic identity to local distinctiveness (see Table 1). Consequently, cultural heritage practices since the year 2000 have tended to focus on ordinary heritage and daily-life activities rather than on monarchic and national monuments such as palaces and royal temples (Kasparaviciene, 2001).

Table 1 Paradigm shift from the conventional concept of conservation to local and community-driven conservation

	From	To
Definition of heritage	Monuments	Landscapes
	Buildings	Urban areas
	Sites	Historic environmental/cultural heritage
Role of heritage society	National unity	Respect for cultural diversity
	Generate revenue from visitors	Wider economic benefits Social benefits
Decisions	State	Region/locality
	Authoritarian	Democratization Participation
Professionals	Experts	Facilitators
	Single discipline (e.g. buildings, archaeology)	Multi-skilled professionals
	Historical knowledge	Management skills
Significance	Old	Industrial heritage Post-war buildings
	Aesthetic	Commemorative value
	National importance	Local distinctiveness
	Mono-cultural	Values of different cultures
	Narrow range of values	Wide range of values
Interpretation	Expert led	Community led
	State led	Communities The market/private sector
	Heritage sector	Environmental sector
Management practices	Designation	Characterization
	Separate conservation	Integrated conservation
	Site based	More strategic
	Technical research	Philosophical research

Source: Clark (2001) cited in Sirisrisak (2009)

In summary, this section concludes with the evaluation of urban conservation concepts in Thailand in six aspects (See Table 2). First, the table shows that the initiating mechanism in conservation shifted from royalty and the elite class to local bodies and networks. The second issue, 'approaches of concept' focuses on a different point. In the merit approach, it would pay attention merely to physical aspects, particularly in the sense of Buddhist places. Meanwhile, modern conservation might be concerned only with nationalism. Alternatively, eco-cultural diversity is at the core of local and community-driven conservation. The third aspect is the role of decision making that has changed from monarchic to expert, and currently to local residents. Fourth, the role of local residents as partners while having played the role as only listeners and laborers in the past. The third and fourth issues show that the power to decide has been transferred from upper social structures, such as monarchical and monastic, to lower structures, especially local people. With regard to conservation, palaces, temples and archaeological sites were the first priority of conservation until the late 1900s. After that, ordinary heritage entities – such as houses, environments, myths, stories, daily-life activities, traditions, and beliefs – were prioritized. Finally, the impetus for conservation is ultimately different in each period of time. In the past, preservation was motivated by the opportunity to gain merit. Then, between the 1960s and 1990s, the reason behind conservation work was nationalism. In the early 2000s, one of the benefits of conservation became that of enabling a local and diverse sense of cultural belonging, which can create pride among local people and the community.

This study found that conservation can maintain many historic and archaeological remains. Its mechanism attempts to protect tangible heritage, especially monarchical and monastic heritage. These are mainly related to upper social classes in both the present and the past. On the other hand, cultural management, based on the approach of merit and modern conservation, has been affected by minorities and marginal cultures, such as small ethnic groups, poor and squatter communities, and even ordinary people's groups. Local and community-driven conservation reveals many issues ignored by prior

concepts; for example, myths, local spirits, local heroes, folk stories, environments, and even family history. These issues are conceptualized in the idea of the vernacular city, as per Oliver (1997: 23; cited in Bronner, 2005: 29),

> Vernacular architecture comprises the dwellings and other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources, they are customarily owner - or community-built, utilizing traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of living of the cultures that produce them.

Table 2 Evaluation of conservation concepts in Thailand

	Merit approach	Modern conservation	Local and community-driven conservation
Initiating mechanism	Royalty	Central government	Local bodies and networks
	Elite		Local administrations
Approach of concept	Physical aspects	Mono-culture	Eco-cultural diversity
Decision-making	Monarchy	Expert	Local residents
		Governor	Interest groups
Role of local residents	Local residents as laborers	Local people as listeners	Local residents as partners
Range of conservation	Temples	Archaeological sites	Houses
	Palaces	Palaces	Environments
		Temples	Myths and stories
			Daily-life activities
			Traditions and beliefs
Significance	Merit	Nationalism	Local and diverse sense of cultural belonging
			Pride in local area and community

Source: Author

Vernacular as Power Relationship

Compared to globalization and rapid technological development, the vernacular city concept can be seen as a marginal approach. Oliver (1999) claims that vernacular architecture draws attention to the past, underdevelopment and poverty – subjects that are not interesting to architects, planners and politicians. Nevertheless, there exists a myriad of local and community efforts to explore their own identities according to the vernacular city approach. One reason is that a vernacular study can create pride in people and a sense of local belonging through local knowledge and skills familiar to local residents. Lindsay (2005: 1) writes,

> Analyzing the value of vernacular traditions to such diverse fields as housing, conservation, sustainable development, disaster management and architectural design, …there are valuable lessons to be learned from the traditional knowledge, skills and expertise of the vernacular builders of the world.

Since the early 2000s, the field of vernacular studies has been increasingly focused on architecture and urban studies. Almost all of the vernacular approaches try to search for a specific sense of space and form, depending on ethics, beliefs, trusts, traditions and environment. The dilemma of identity should be discussed in terms of vernacular. Vernacular studies can be divided into two main approaches. First, Kymlicka (2001) criticized liberal political theory, which concerns national-building, but ignored minority rights in vernacular studies. Thus, this theory focuses on a culture of the majority. As a result, tension between the state and the community has been more problematic. Second, liberal culturalism disputes notions that the diversity of groups can reduce political domination, thus intervening in conservation processes. It tends to protect the purity or authenticity of cultures and traditions. In a positive sense, the liberal concept of multiculturalism encourages minority and various group rights, thereby balancing the larger society.

As for minority rights, Kymlicka (2001) divided them into two kinds. The first consists of the rights of the group in relation to its own members. Following the notion of Bab Jessop (2003), he views the relationship between structure and agency in terms of the 'strategic-relational' approach. This concept has encouraged many studies which focus on the interaction between actors, networks and institutions. Gradually, this notion became consolidated into both relational understanding and an institutionalist approach for analysis of actors-in-contexts (Hillier, 2008). The second kind of minority rights involves the rights of a group in relation to the larger society. In a vernacular city study, the area being studied cannot be separated from the environment and other communities. In general, the more powerful or dominant culture would put pressure on the less powerful culture. Kymlicka called the first 'internal restrictions' and the second 'external protections.'

Vernacular city concepts are rooted in marginal cultures in society that are disappearing during the modern period. In general, the terms imply poor environments, informal settlements, and deterioration, which are not attractive to mainstream urban planners and architects. Subsequently, localization has become a massive global movement to the extent that local residents are now concerned about their own cultural heritage and vernacular city. Vernacular studies, nevertheless, are questioned because of tensions between external and internal communities as in the Kymlicka concept. One possible reason behind such tension is that the unity of identity is summarized in complex and dynamic contexts. It is true that one community, in which everyone lives in the same place, has variety and diversity in terms of groups, ethics, culture, traditions, languages, customs, and myths. Therefore, it appears that cultural uniqueness is impossible in the real world because culture is diverse. In general, the facade of unity appears because a powerful social group can dominate the others, particularly minority and marginal groups. As Kymlicka (2001) points out, whenever minority groups are faced with cultural domination by both the state and the community, they have only three options:

a) They can accept integration into the majority culture, although there may, perhaps, be an attempt to renegotiate the terms of integration;
b) They can seek the rights and powers of self-government needed to maintain their own societal culture, i.e. to create their own economic, political and educational institutions in their own language. That is, they can engage in their own competing form of nation-building;
c) They can accept permanent marginalization.

As Kymlicka (2001) shows, the tension between minority rights and state-building normally appears in the wide picture of analysis. This is how local communities protect their own identities from political interventions. In the small picture of analysis, internal tension between the main group of people and marginal groups can occur. In fact, the complexity of a community cannot be defined by a unique culture and character because it is dynamic and adaptable. This means that a marginal community also contains smaller marginal groups inside it. Thus, vernacular studies explore identity and character, categorizing types of ethnic groups and static cultures without power. It is possible that such studies misread context and end up ignoring minority groups in the community. This is discrimination against a sense of cultural belonging.

This section discusses marginal groups as opposed to both state-building and cultural domination in the field of the vernacular. Prior studies paid more attention to the outstanding character of the physical aspects relating to the main groups of communities and cities. As Benhabib (2002) argues, the approach of the cultural community is narrow and it ignores the diversity in that community. The cultural identity unity approach is one of restriction for the minority and marginal culture in that community. Consequently, power relationships in both internal and external communities should be conceptualized in the vernacular concept.

Complexity of Community

The understanding of social clusters and communities is encapsulated in the vernacular city analysis framework. Urban and public spaces are understood through social structures, instead of only the physical setting and environment. Community concepts in Thailand can be divided into two paradigms based on vernacular studies (Pitidon 2013) as follows.

The first is 'cultural community,' which involves appreciating the common tradition and culture of such a community. It is believed that a common culture can link people together. Moreover, the historic approach is a foundation for vernacular community studies. Taemeyaphan (2014) examined the traditional vernacular landscape in rural contexts in Thailand. His studies embed local wisdom in the cultural landscape as a community asset. In short, the cultural community approach involves aesthetic evaluation and historic study.

The second paradigm describes community rights (Ganjanapan, 2002). Natural resources are not merely functional spaces; they are also places for social, cultural, spiritual, and, more importantly, market and state mechanisms. To organize resources, he advocates the complexity of rights, for example, private, common, community and state rights (Sapu, 2003), which he feels should have a common ground. For the city, this point relates to two issues. First, the functional rights of the community regarding natural resources represent one of the conflicts over local space. Second, the right of minority cultures, depending on power relationships in such a community, should be one of the assumptions in vernacular studies.

Vernacular patterns of ethnic houses in Southeast Asia exhibit four common characteristics (Oranratmanee, 2014) (see Figure 1). First, the environment is an important factor for human settlement. In Southeast Asia, ecological diversity is abundant, ranging from oceans to mountains. The second is daily-life economics, particularly in the rice culture landscape. Patterns of rice production activities define space, which consists not only of different types of paddy fields, but also irrigation systems, spiritual places and traditions. Third, social structure is one of the factors creating vernacular space. Family units and kinship create

both common space and hierarchy. Some social space is not available for everyone to use. The fourth is spiritual space in which local residents believe in supernatural stories relating to soul, holiness and environment.

In summary, the mainstream vernacular concept in Thailand, based on the idea of cultural community, is an approach that encompasses ethnicity, language, tradition and local wisdom as community capital. Power analysis and conflict of interest in both internal and external communities seem to be ignored by the cultural community. By contrast, community rights reveal power analysis factors through power ideology, resource management, networks and organization. Moreover, such concepts draw attention to cross-analysis between cultural community vernacular factors (including ethnicity, language, tradition and local wisdom) and community rights issues (such as power ideology, resource management, networks and organization). A dynamic picture of the vernacular city in terms of both community capital and conflict of interest can be seen below (Figure 1).
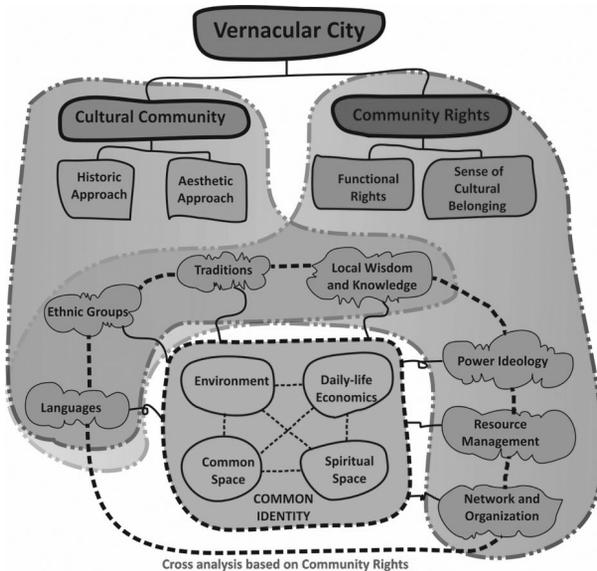

Figure 1 Two pillars of the vernacular city in Thailand: Cultural community and community rights

The Vernacular City as Ordinary Heritage: Defining Old Community Districts

World Heritage criteria affect the field of conservation around the world. Approaches that focus on grand and magnificent structures tend to disregard vernacular town heritage, especially in Thailand. Meanwhile, the old community district is one of the elements of the vernacular city. Therefore, the Office of National Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) defined the term "old community district" in Northeastern Thailand as one of the patterns of cultural environment and landscape (Sapu, 2014: 7).

> Space is expressed in human settlement in a diversity of conditions of ecology in both urban and rural areas. It is both continuous and changing in different dimensions from ancient times to nowadays. Also, it refers to groups of people, daily life, culture, wisdom, tradition, belief, myth, history, and memory. In both built and natural environments, physical identity, such as community structure, architectural character, and landscape, is one of the aspects of the old community district.

As a consequence of the variety and diversity in old community districts, the standard for value assessment of such districts should be more precise than flexible. To be concerned with integrity, it concentrates on topics such as the way of life, holistic relationships, change and adaptation with dynamic contexts, instead of authenticity. ONEP proposed three standards for the old community district. The first is significant physical features with seven indicators, including the significance of the old community district, the pattern of community structure, noticeable architecture, the landscape, landmarks, perspectives and views, and material and constructional techniques. Secondly, the standard of adaptation in dynamic contexts should be applied. These indicators involve culture and beliefs, activities and places, spiritual leaders, interpretation and memories, daily-life activities, public accessibility, and most importantly, environmental and eco-cultural

relationships. The last standard is cultural management, such as local planning, organization and authority, networks, control and incentive mechanisms, and, especially, the participatory process.

Moreover, ONEP categorized types of old community districts in Northeastern Thailand according to three factors: setting and environment, function, and culture and memory (see Table 3). As for the setting and environmental factors, riversides, ports, and train stations are a result of geography appropriate for the community settlement. Meanwhile, ancient and historic communities were overlaid on archaeological relic sites possibly because they were located in appropriate living spaces. This is also the reason why new groups of people who migrate later set up their own communities overlaying such ancient cities. With regard to the function of the city, the old community district is divided in terms of the old market and commercial places, craft skills and agricultural community.

In each functional neighborhood the grouping of power is different. In the past, the elite group was in the market place. The merchants accumulated assets from transactions and became powerful. In Northeastern Thailand, the merchants were usually immigrant groups such as ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese. One of the methods of bridging the gap between local elite and new incoming merchants was cross-ethnic marriage, especially Thai-Chinese. Another actor in the market place of the Northeastern region was the *NaiHoi*, or the leader of a merchant caravan, who provided a strong link for commercial activity between towns and hinterland communities. Goods such as cattle, tobacco, and salt were exchanged through merchant caravans, as organized by the *NaiHoi* (see Figure 3). Thus, places wherever the *NaiHoi* were, have cultural, economic and social value.

Table 3 Types of old community districts in Northeastern Thailand

Setting and environment	Function	Culture and memory
Riverside and port	**Old market and commerce**	**Ethnicity**
Train stations	**Crafts and skills**	
Ancient and historic	**Agricultural and rural**	**Common memorials and myths**

With regard to the complexity of the community, an analytical framework of the vernacular city should be focused on the interaction between the roles of community, on definitions of power, key persons, myths and beliefs. To understand space productivity, such interactions will reveal many supporting reasons; not only in a positive approach, but also in competitive, negative, deliberative, and collaborative approaches (see Figure 2). Following the socio-spatial theory, Mark Gottdiener (1994) presented a socio-spatial paradigm, pointing to a symbolic process within the context of political, economic, and human ecology. The role of location in social interaction is interpreted by human ecology. Nevertheless, social processes are theoretically only one dimension of a static explanation. By contrast, political economy shows better understanding in terms of social processes, but it limits space for economic activities and disregards spatial relationships (Madanipour, 1996).

In short, a vernacular town consists of a myriad of dynamic and diversified old community districts. Spatial interactions under conditions of key power structures, social and cultural domination, and importantly, political-economic competitiveness, are possible reasons behind the production and reproduction of urban space, human settlement, myth and belief. The attempt to describe the vernacular city as social capital is not adequate in post-modern society. On the one hand, vernacular space and form is created by the traditional approach, based on the cultural community concept. On the other hand, it is produced from external pressures, following community rights.
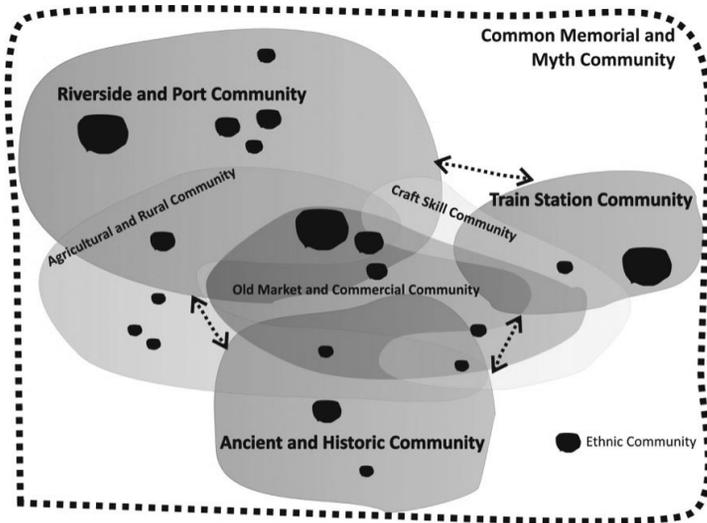

Figure 2 Complexity of communities based on the old community district model

Figure 3 Merchant caravans in Northeastern Thailand were led by *NaiHoi* who played an important role in linking political and economic activities between rural and urban communities.
(Source: accessed 5 June 2018: http://www.ubonpra.com/board/index.
php?topic=1736.0)

Asset-Based Community Development

An analysis framework grounded in the community rights approach tends to reveal more conflict than community cohesion among groups of people. Regarding conflicts of interest, it might be reasonable to initiate social processes from positive assets, instead of having a problem-based approach (Sapu, 2009) (see Figure 5). Thus, research methodology should be based on positive approaches. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) encourages indigenous community development, incorporating identities and existing assets (Alison, 2003). ABCD underlines social assets in both individual talents and common assets. In the field of vernacular conservation, personal skills and talents exist in family history, particularly in craftsmanship, artistry and business activities. Meanwhile, common assets are interpreted by resource management. For example, forest management in Northeastern Thailand can be divided into three zones: sacred places, functional forests and traditional spaces (Sapu, 2003). In each type of forest, the community creates different norms and beliefs such as those regarding spirits, ancestors and community rules.

The case of ThaUthen city, which is alongside the Mekong River in NakornPhanom province opposite the Laotian province of Khammouan, is a prime example. Geographically, ThaUthen is a human settlement developed through political and economic factors. Numerous people, including Tai, Chinese, Vietnamese, and even French colonists, migrated into ThaUthen over different periods of time. To avoid conflict of interest, cultural mapping processes such as ABCD should be directed by local residents. Social learning methods, such as focus groups, group and in-depth interviews, and walk-through surveys, are facilitated by a partnership between local authorities, Mahasarakham University and ONEP (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 ABCD methods encourage participatory processes such as focus group interviews and walk-through surveys. (Source: Wapeesilp, 2014)
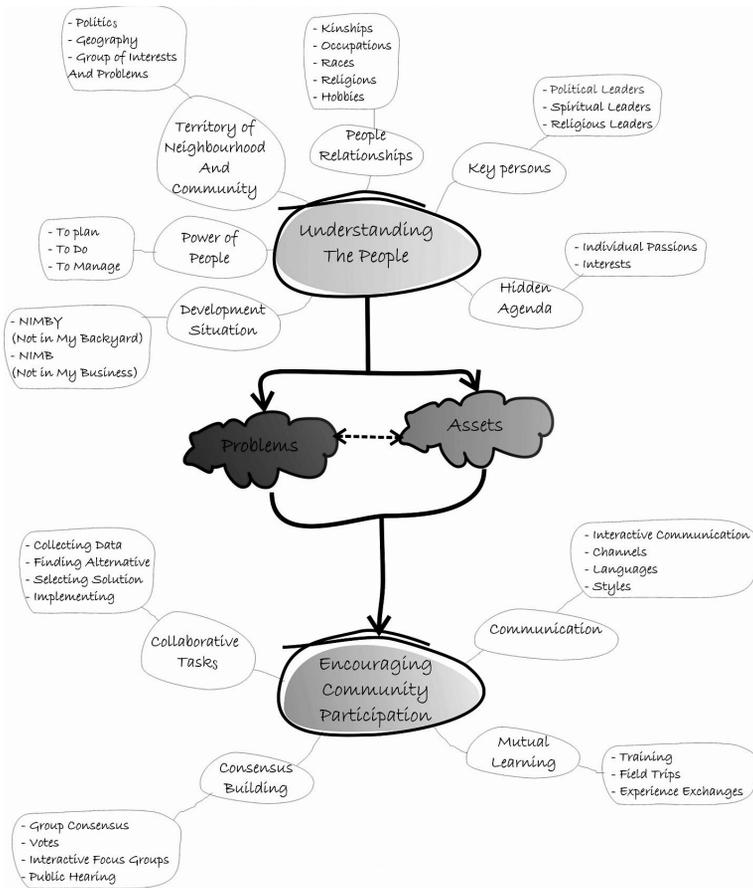
Diagram: From understanding the people to encouraging community participation

Figure 5 Diagram of understanding the people to encourage community participation

(Source: Sapu, 2009)

As Table 4 shows, common identities in the case of the ThaUthen old community district are analyzed into seven indicators of the vernacular framework. One of the significant points is ethnic power. Focusing on the environment and daily-life economics, it seems many ethnic groups feel overwhelmed because the community's identity is expressed only by the majority group. However, ethnic minorities are

allowed a common and spiritual space. The common space, particularly spiritual house, separates the majority from the minority; nevertheless, there is cooperation by both groups in spiritual spaces such as with Buddhist relics. Moreover, Table 4 illustrates the transition from the past to the present as to each issue. These are derived using the ABCD process approach by positive community assets, and then analyzing the concept of community rights in order to understand the relationships of vernacular city space. Many reasons behind such spaces involve dynamic interactions between ethnic groups, communities, networks, states, and eventually, cross-border countries.
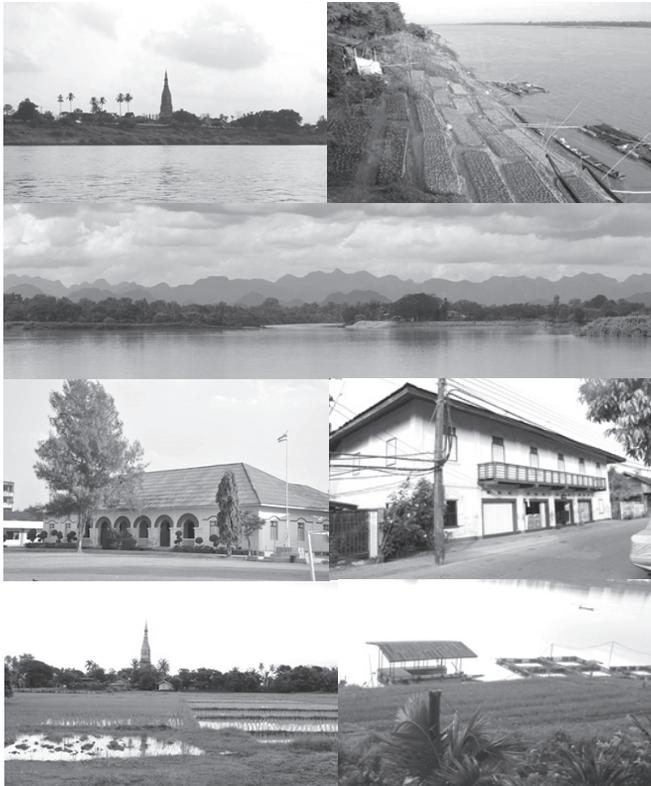

Figure 6 Cultural environments in ThaUthen, NakornPhanom, Thailand
(Source: Wapeesilp, 2014)

Table 4 Common identity in the case of ThaUthen old district community

	Common Identity			
	Environment	**Daily-life Economics**	**Common Space**	**Spiritual Space**
Language and place names	▪ Natural landmark for travelers and local residents.	▪ Ecological landscape relating to daily-life economics	▪ Spiritual house depending on ethnic groups	▪ ThaUthen Buddha relic as a symbol of sunrise
Ethnic groups	▪ Overwhelmed by the majority ethnic group	▪ Overwhelmed by the majority ethnic group	▪ Separate space between majority and minority ethnic groups	▪ Ethnic groups cooperating through ThaUthen Buddha relic
Traditions	▪ Spiritual protection	▪ Spiritual protection	▪ Spirit house transformed into a festival and celebration, such as speed boat competition	▪ Buddha relic celebration
Local wisdom and knowledge	▪ Ecological understanding	▪ Local food heritage	▪ Folklore	▪ Buddhist discipline
Power ideology	▪ Spirit-to-state	▪ Common-to-private	▪ Common-to-state	▪ Spirit ▪ Buddha
Resource management	▪ Folklore-to-modern law	▪ Private versus state	▪ Dominated by upper policy, such as Mekong river is controlled by dams in China	▪ Common-to-Department of Religious Affairs
Network and organization	▪ Spiritual belief network to state authority	▪ Common ecological network to state authority, such as Royal Irrigation Department	▪ Spiritual network depending on ethnic group	▪ Merit network to community identity

Source: Author

Management Through Folklore

As far as Northeastern eco-cultural aspects are concerned (see Figure 7), the first priority for community settlement is generally a flat plain where a powerful group of people is normally situated. They observe natural phenomena and then understand the ecological system, particularly in water management. The Mekong River is a pivotal water resource for the ThaUthen community. Almost all community irrigation derives from the

Mekong River when it overflows into the land and storage ponds, creeks and oxbow lakes. While the flooding season can be a problem, it is also a natural way to store water on the land, mainly in paddy fields. Furthermore, alluvial soil is very fertile because sediment comes with flooding. The river basin in the Northeast is a water drain; therefore, communities should not be located there. That is the reason why most Northeastern community settlements are not located close to rivers. In the past, a local community could not control rivers by law so they created spirits to protect such spaces.

The scarcity of appropriate areas in which to settle is one of the reasons behind power relationships. As Table 4 demonstrates, it is obvious that common identity, relating to environment and daily-life economics, is dependent on natural resources. Meanwhile, common and spiritual spaces are normally located in places of belief. It is possible that a community's natural resources would be controlled by powerful groups, such as major ethnic groups and state authority. In the past, the majority created their spirits in flourishing natural resource sites such as ponds, hills and fields. The resulting social capital is the control of a spiritual space, but newcomers have limited accessibility to such spaces because of different beliefs about spirits. Nevertheless, spirit beliefs are encapsulated in folklore in terms of traditional law or community norms. Tensions can sometimes occur between a community and the state in relation to natural resources. In 1891, Siam enacted a law prohibiting the practice of spirit mediumship. Although it aimed to control Chinese spirit mediums whose behavior was deemed inappropriate, it affected all spirit beliefs. This is one way in which power over natural resources was transferred from folklore to state domination.

In fact, local residents understand that an ecological system protects itself from disaster. A flood-resistant forest is the first flood filter; and next, a farmstead is the second buffer for the community. Moreover, in the past there were sacred forests filled with trees to absorb floods. As Table 4 shows, local resource management was transferred from the power of local spirits to state domination. As a consequence, the common sense of resource ownership also changed to private ownership against government authority. Limitations of land-use planning in Thailand cannot direct urban sprawl into a flood buffer zone because the old community was settled before the planning system existed. As a result, flooding is becoming more problematic.
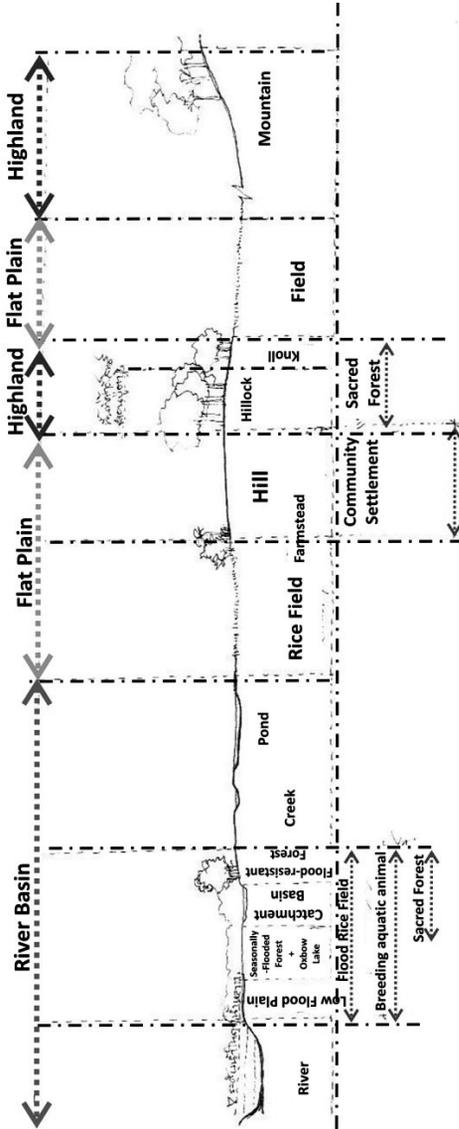
Figure 7 Eco-cultural cross-sections in some river basins in Northeastern Thailand

(Source: Muadthong, 2014)

Integrating Urban Planning

In modern state mechanisms, the law is only one tool for preventing urban sprawl through urban planning. In Thailand, land-use control appears to be ineffective. Before the use of modern mechanisms, social norms and folklore and spiritual beliefs, such as spirits of sacred forests, served as traditional land-use controls. Since 1906, Siamese culture attempted to overwhelm Northeastern culture as administration was assigned to a governor from the central state, instead of someone from the local community. Furthermore, in the 1900s, modern society emphasized technology rather than local wisdom. That is the reason why spiritual space control became obsolete. Several vernacular cities are located in rural contexts without land-use planning. Urban sprawl into river basins and catchment areas and clusters of housing obstruct water drainage systems as understood by the knowledge of local predecessors.

This article proposes urban planning in vernacular cities by integrating local wisdom with technocratic systems in five areas (see Table 5). First, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) should be initiated by diverse groups of people through interactive social activities; examples are walk-through surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, public exhibitions and seminars. As an approach to positive issues such as the assets of community, these are common ownerships of people, encouraging local residents to be collaborative during planning with technocratic tools. The second is land-use planning based on spiritual space control, a kind of social capital. Understanding community beliefs should be the foundation for spatial planning. Third, conservation planning for vernacular towns should be steered by community involvement with conservation materials rooted in social norms and customs, folk ways and social rule. Fourth, the resilience of vernacular cities is based on an eco-cultural approach. This concept focuses on the relationship between culture and ecology. In the past, community elders understood ecological factors and they created culture, traditions and practices including preservation of flood-resistant forests and low flood plain forests. This is passive protection for the city. Nevertheless, modern technology is still appropriate in solving certain problems. Water treatment and drainage in the community would be adopted as concrete systems that provide active protection. The

macro-scale of flood protection in the vernacular city uses an eco-cultural approach, while the micro-scale uses a technological approach. Finally, the decision making of vernacular heritage planning should be a deliberative process among different interest groups to reach consensus building.

Table 5 Urban planning of vernacular cities integrates local wisdom and technocracy

	Urban Planning	
	Local Wisdom	**Technocrat**
Planning process	▪ Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)	▪ Collaborative planning
Land-use planning	▪ Spiritual spatial control	▪ Functional planning
Conservation planning	▪ Social norms	▪ Community-based planning
Resilience of vernacular city	▪ Eco-cultural approach	▪ Technological approach
Decision-making	▪ Deliberative process	▪ Consensus building

Source: Author

Conclusion

This article describes the idea of the vernacular city in terms of urban conservation, cultural landscapes and ordinary heritage. This approach challenges the urban conservation concept of the early 1900s, which emphasized the historical and national environment. The case study of ThaUthen community in NakornPhanom, Thailand is an appropriate case showing the relationship among a historic place, eco-cultural space, and the rights and power of the community. Ordinary heritage, representing daily activities, myths and stories, traditions and beliefs, is linked not to royal and elite social classes, but to ordinary local people, who were ignored in the urban conservation concept of the early 1900s.

In summary, cultural heritage belongs to a wide range of people from the poorest to the wealthiest class of people. As Table 4 shows, common identities including language and place names, ethnicity, traditions, local wisdom and knowledge, power ideology, resource management, networks and organization are related to four dimensions of space – environment, daily-life economics, common space and spiritual space. Finally, this article argues that ordinary heritage can be the base for urban planning.

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