Participatory Planning in Urban Conservation and Regeneration: A Case Study of Amphawa Community

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to examine participatory planning approach to urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community, Thailand which comprises a series of interrelated projects. Action research procedure is adopted and various techniques for public participation are applied intensively throughout the planning process. “Amphawa Model,” the community conservation and regeneration model, is developed to help direct all strategies and policies. Urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community is very successful, making it an excellent case study for urban conservation and regeneration planning at the local level.

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1. Introduction

In the past, urban conservation planning usually dealt with the protection and restoration of historic monuments, significant buildings and their physical settings. Little attention was paid to social and economic development of the host community. Conservation policies and measures were too rigid and did not integrate with other local development plans, making them difficult to implement. The situation is

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much better today. This is due largely to the change in the principles of urban conservation. For example, a principle of the Washington Charter (ICOMOS, 2003) states that the conservation of historic towns and other historic urban areas should be an integral part of coherent policies of economic and social development and of urban and regional planning at every level. The charter also addresses that public participation and rigidity-avoidance are essential for the success of conservation programs. Today, the term “urban conservation and regeneration” are widely used to express the inclusion of economic and social dimensions in urban conservation planning and to reflect the significance of integrative planning.

Before the turn of the century, the urban conservation movement in Thailand was very slow, especially at the local level. This was due largely to the lack of public interest and the difficulty of planning implementation. As a result, many traditional communities and settlements faded out while many others became deteriorated. Urban conservation and regeneration planning in Amphawa Community, Samut Songkhram Province, which started in 2000, has changed the situation dramatically. By exercising a new conservation direction and employing participatory planning approach, the community has been recovered from architectural deterioration as well as economic and social declines.

Amphawa Community is located in Samut Songkhram Province, about 18 kilometers from the estuary, and 80 kilometers west of Bangkok. It is a small municipality with approximately 5,000 residents. The community has a long history as a water-based settlement dating back to Ayutthaya Period in the mid 17th century. It was once the residence of King Rama I and was the birthplace of King Rama II. In the past, Amphawa was the biggest water-based commercial center in Samut Songkhram Province. The old water-based settlement of the community consists of more than 300 units of wooden and masonry shop-houses and individual dwellings lining along Amphawa Canal. By the end of the 20th century, with the advent of land transportation system, the community’s original economic importance began to fade out. Amphawa Community became a small community with its housing mostly in a state of dilapidation, some of which was uninhabited. Little attention was paid to building maintenance and rehabilitation, causing the overall heritage values of the community to decline. Most of the community residents were the elderly and children. Young and active people had migrated out of the area. Nonetheless, Amphawa still retained its identity as a water-based community with beautiful temples, traditional wooden houses, row-houses and tropical fruit farms.

Urban conservation and regeneration planning in Amphawa Community was initiated as part of a research project on environmental conservation planning of rivers and canals in the western water basin of Thailand in 2000. The actual conservation and regeneration planning in Amphawa Community began in 2002 with “Pilot Project for Environmental Conservation and Development of Amphawa Community,” following by “Thailand Cultural Environment Project (TCEP)” from 2003 to 2005. As a result, several buildings were renovated and Amphawa floating market was regenerated. Tourism in Amphawa Community grew rapidly during 2005 and 2006 when the Department of Industrial Promotion, Ministry of Industry launched a national exhibition on Amphawa cultural heritage and products. From 2006 to the present, a number of row-houses have been restored by Chaipattana Foundation and local residents. In addition, several activities have been undertaken by public and private agencies to promote local heritage and tourism. Today, Amphawa Community becomes a famous tourist destination and a favorite destination for study trips of delegates from many local communities.

The successful story of Amphawa has propelled a new movement in urban conservation and regeneration in the nation. Several communities have begun to start their own conservation and regeneration projects. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine the participatory planning approach to urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community, especially the tools and techniques for public participation and “Amphawa Model” which has been continuously refined. This should allow us to draw some useful findings for urban conservation and regeneration at the local level.
2. Literature Review

Urban conservation and regeneration planning in Amphawa Community employs participatory planning approach and action research process. According to ODPM (2003), participatory planning is a set of processes through which diverse groups and interests engage together in reaching for a consensus on a plan and its implementation. Participatory planning can be initiated by any of the parties and the forms it will take and the timetables are likely to be negotiated and agreed amongst participants. Since participation of relevant stakeholders are crucial to participatory planning, it is essential for the planner to analyze various groups of stakeholders and types of participation. A classic typology of eight levels of participation is developed by Arnstein (1969). In this model, eight types of participation are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product. The bottom two rungs of the ladder – manipulation and therapy – describe levels of non-participation. The next three rungs – informing, consultation and placation – are levels of tokenism. Only the topmost three rungs – partnership, delegated power and citizen control – reflect citizen power. A more complete explanation of public participation is the “Public Participation Spectrum” developed by the International Association of Public Participation (2004). In this case, public participation is classified into five levels in association with goal, promise and techniques to consider. The levels of participation, ranging from the lowest to the highest, are as follows: informing, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment (Table 1). The planner can go further by matching suitable stakeholders with each level of participation. In this case, he can make use of a stakeholder analysis grid (WWF, 2005).

Action research is another tool that can be employed in participatory planning. Generally speaking, action research means “learning by doing.” According to O’Brien (2001), action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Accomplishing a dual commitment – to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in a desirable direction – requires an active collaboration of the researcher and the client. This requirement stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process. Susman (1983) distinguishes five phases of an action research cycle. A problem is identified and relevant data are collected and analyzed. Several possible solutions are generated and the most appropriate one is selected and implemented. At the end of the cycle, the results of the intervention are analyzed and general findings are identified. The problem is re-assessed and the process of the next cycle begins.

Sustainable development is the ultimate goal for integrative urban conservation and regeneration planning. It was first mentioned in a report called “Our Common Future” and was defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The concept of sustainable development is widely accepted and expanded to include various dimensions of development. An interesting model developed by UNESCO (2005) comprises three stacked circles. The middle circle indicates the four dimensions of development – natural, economic, social, and political aspects. The inner circle indicates four major issues associated with the four aspects. The outer layer indicates four means of development – conservation, appropriate development, peace in combination with equity and human rights, and democracy (Figure 1).
Table 1  Public Participation Spectrum, Source: International Association for Public Participation, 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing level of Public Participation</th>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, opportunities, alternatives, and/or solutions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise</strong></td>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Techniques to Consider</strong></td>
<td>● Fact sheets ● Web Sites ● Open houses</td>
<td>● Public comment ● Focus group ● Public meetings</td>
<td>● Workshops ● Deliberate polling</td>
<td>● Citizen advisory committees ● Consensus building ● Participatory decision-making</td>
<td>● Citizen juries ● Ballots ● Delegated decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. Four Dimensions of Sustainable Development (Source: UNESCO, 2005).
A complementary concept of sustainable development is “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” initiated by H.M. King Bhumibol. According to Mongsawad (2007), it is a philosophy of “the middle path” that stresses three principles in all modes of conduct – moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity. Knowledge and morality are two necessary conditions to achieve the three principles. Knowledge requires a thorough study of all available information and experience in order to make prudent decisions while morality stresses integrity, trustworthiness, honesty and diligence of individuals. Sufficiency Economy Philosophy guides people to live harmoniously and securely with a sustainable society and environment, allowing them to cope with all kinds of impacts of globalization.

3. Methodology

Urban conservation and regeneration of Amphawa Community comprises a series of interrelated projects undertaken by the planning team from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University from 2000 to the present. In the first project, Amphawa Community is selected as a case study for exercising strategic policies on environmental conservation planning of rivers and canals in the western water basin of Thailand. The second project, dealing directly with urban conservation and regeneration planning of Amphawa Community, is “Pilot Project for Environmental Conservation and Development of Amphawa Community” funded by the Office of Natural and Environmental Policy Planning (ONEP). The third project is “Thailand Cultural Environment Project (TCEP)” funded by the Danish International Development Assistant (DANIDA) under the supervision of the ONEP. Another significant projects are the “Raks Amphawa Project” undertaken by the Department of Industrial Promotion, Ministry of Industry in order to promote tourism and local products of Amphawa and the “Chaipattana Amphawanurak Project” undertaken by Chaipattana Foundation to restore a number of row-houses and develop a cultural courtyard in its own property.

Urban conservation and regeneration planning of Amphawa Community is unique in terms of planning methodology. To integrate several projects introduced into the community by different agencies in various periods of time, action research, a “learning by doing” approach, is adopted and applied. This approach allows the planner to add new issues into the new planning cycles quickly and easily. Five phases of Amphawa’s action research cycle, modified from the one created by Susman, begins with problem identification and data analysis, or diagnosing, and ends with the identification of general findings, or reflection (Figure 2). A stakeholder analysis grid which incorporates five levels of public participation introduced by the International Association of Public Participation is applied to identify and classify stakeholders into groups according to the level of participation. The analysis is verified regularly, especially at the beginning of a new project. A sample of the analysis grid created in 2007 is shown in Figure 3. Accordingly, a list of corresponding participation techniques is produced and verified. A sample of the list created in 2007 is shown in Table 2.

Data requirements for urban conservation and regeneration of Amphawa Community are classified into 4 sustainable development dimensions which were identified during the initial workshop – natural and built environment, economic aspects, social and cultural aspects, and political aspects. Secondary data for all dimensions are collected from public statistical records, reports, official maps, websites and publications. Primary data relating to natural and built environment are collected mostly from field surveys. Additional information relating to this dimension is collected from in-depth interviews with local scholars and monks. Primary data relating to the other three aspects are collected mostly from in-depth interviews with community and sub-community leaders, local scholars and delegates from local occupational groups. Questionnaires are also used to collect social and economic data at household level. At the first stage of the new action research cycle (the diagnosing stage), the databases from the earlier
cycle are revised and updated. New available data are also added to the databases to make them more complete and useful for the new research cycle.

Fig. 2. Amphawa’s Action Research Cycle (Source: Adapted from Susman, 1983).

Fig. 3. Amphawa’s Stakeholder Analysis Grid Created in 2007 (Source: Adapted from WWF, 2005).
4. Results and Discussions

Participatory planning approach to urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community is unique in terms of methodology which is characterized by action research and integrative planning. Since the projects, funded by different agencies, may come at different periods of time and with some specific objectives that may not integrate with each other, an effective model is required to cope with the problem. “Amphawa Model,” an integrative urban conservation and regeneration model has been gradually developed. The original and simple model, based on sustainable development concept and comprised four dimensions similar to those of the UNESCO Model, was developed in 2002. The model was revised in 2005 to incorporate the community’s core value of “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” into the model. The inclusion of the philosophy into the model is very significant to the success of Amphawa’s urban conservation and regeneration planning since it serves as the community’s code of conduct in all stages of planning, especially when dealing with dispute and consensus building. The present model, revised in 2011, is shown in Figure 4. In this version, “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” which comprises three principles in all modes of conduct – moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity – is placed at the center to express the community’s core value. The four dimensions of sustainable development, adapted from the four dimensions of the UNESCO Model to reflect the essence of sustainable urban conservation and regeneration, are placed around the core value. They include the aspects of natural and built environment, economic aspects, social and cultural aspects, and political aspects. Relevance issues are then placed next to each dimension, allowing for adding new issues to the group easily. A circle, incorporating two important principles of urban conservation and regeneration addressed in the Washington Charter – integration and participation – is placed between the core value and the four dimensions to complete the model. This model is expected to be generalized across the nation. All local communities similar to Amphawa can make great use of it in the future.
In terms of planning process, action research approach is found to be very effective, especially when dealing with non-legal issues and policies. It is less effective when dealing with legal issues and policies which usually require a formal and more rigid procedure. In terms of participation techniques, publications are found to be the most important tools in the stage of informing while workshops are found to be very effective and multipurpose tool in the stages of consultation, involvement and collaboration. Delegated decision is the only effective way in the stage of empowerment because the community already has its own neighborhood delegations. In terms of data requirements for urban conservation and regeneration, it is found that secondary data relating to the 4 dimensions of sustainable development were initially scarce but have increased gradually due to the availability of more reports and publications produced by relevant public agencies and educational institutes. Thus, fewer primary data are required to be collected today than in the past. However, revising and updating the databases and adding new data to them at the first stage of a new action research cycle are still essential because the community has changed rapidly since tourism development in 2004.

Awareness-raising is found to be the most significant issue in the case of Amphawa’s conservation and regeneration planning. At the beginning, most residents believed that the old water-based settlement was
the symbol of poverty and community-based tourism on behalf of local cultural heritages was an impossible task. The planner had to put a lot of efforts and times to change negative attitudes towards cultural heritage values and tourism development. It is found that intensive awareness raising activities, exhibitions, and publications are effective participation techniques to cope with the problem. Determination and patience of the planner are also required for solving the problem.

The achievement of urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community is remarkable. In terms of cultural heritage conservation, a number of buildings along Amphawa Canal have been restored and utilized since the implementation of demonstration projects in 2004. In 2001, there were 351 units of buildings on Amphawa Canal. About sixteen percents of them were uninhabited. In 2009, the number of the building units increased to 369 and none of them were uninhabited. Many of them were repaired and converted into tourist accommodations, restaurants and souvenir shops (Peerapun, 2009: 31-35).

In terms of tourism development, the numbers of tourists and accommodations in Samut Songkhram Province have increased rapidly since the regeneration of Amphawa Floating Market in 2004. During the period from 2004 to 2007, the number of tourists coming to the province increased from an insignificant number to 558,326 while the number of tourist accommodations increased from 218 to 1,620 rooms (Peerapun, and Silapacharanan, 2011: 175-176). The success of urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community was acknowledge internationally when the “Thailand Cultural Environment Project (TCEP)” and Amphawa Community won an honorable mention prize from UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Heritage Conservation in 2008. So far, the consequence of Amphawa conservation and regeneration has been impressive. The success story of Amphawa Community has paved way to a new movement in urban conservation and regeneration at the local level in Thailand. It has also encourages many conservation planners to put more efforts in their conservation and regeneration projects. Amphawa Community has become a famous destination for study trips of delegates from many local communities. Some of them have started their own conservation and regeneration projects. Several floating markets have been regenerated and created in many places.

5. Conclusion

Participatory planning approach to urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa Community is a unique and interesting case study, especially in terms of planning process and participation techniques. Action research is a powerful planning tool. In combination with appropriate participation techniques, it can produce satisfactory strategies and policies. The achievement of urban conservation and regeneration in Amphawa is remarkable in terms of building restoration and tourism development. This successful story has inspired many local communities to look back to their cultural heritages which have been neglected for a long time. It has also propelled a new movement in urban conservation and regeneration in the nation. A very significant output deriving from the study is the model for urban conservation and regeneration at the local level, or “Amphawa Model.” This model incorporates the community core value – the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy – with four dimensions of sustainable development and two conservation principles. Putting the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy at the heart of the model makes it more stable and directive. The principles of moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity are very helpful in developing issues, strategies and policies in urban conservation and regeneration. The determination and patience of the planner is another important condition for the success, especially when dealing with negative attitudes of local residents. Long-term planning and continuous working are also the keys for success. Thus, a partnership between the planner, the local community and directly related agencies must be established.
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