

Abstract

"The Urban Revitalization" is a current of ideas that becomes a model of urban development at present. It demands that the community be in consonance with the concept of civil society arising from a combination of people from all walks of life whose will are beyond their private interests. Besides, it also calls for the opening of physical public space along with the arrangement of participatory activities in order to create cultural milieu inclined to result in a strong civic sector. On the whole, this current of thought hinges on nostalgia and Utopian ideals.

Pra Arthit Road area is an old quarter (ย่านเก่า) situated amid the stream of urban revitalization. Bangkok Forum, the NGOs that materializes this idea through organizing a street walking fair, initiates "Prachakom Banglumphu" (the civil society of Banglumphu). This society creates many activities for "the habitable city" (เมืองน่าอยู่), ranging from street walking fairs to a variety of activities in Santichaiprakarn Park, until it is widely known as a strong civil society.

The focus of this study is to investigate and debate this trend of ideas as well as explore attitudes of people, living in this area, towards this phenomenon. Also, the emphasis is on the ways or plans implemented to invent "the habitable city" (เมืองน่าอยู่). In this study, "Trok Kianivas-Kaichae Community" is selected as a case study vis-à-vis "Prachakom Banglumphu". The standpoint of this research is to resonate the voice of the community which is usually imperceptible to outsiders. Consequently, in the field research, the role of a "student" is played during the entire participant observation.

In conclusion, there are confrontation, contestation, and struggle for attaining legitimacy and defining social meanings between the community and the "Prachakom" (the civil society) which establishes itself as the representative of Banglumphu community. Both groups have its own ideology and tradition. "Prachakom Banglumphu" is based upon formal relation, organizational networks, and systematic working. Additionally, it values cultural and historical heritages, ways to revive a senses of community, together with activities, contributing to promoting image of strength as well as creativity, and crucial for opening space to define meanings of the "habitable urban" in its own manner.

In contrast, the existence of community rests on mechanism and system which are too complex to be supplanted by outside ideologies germane the concept of civil society. The community occupies flexible spaces contingent upon change, namely space of everyday life, social space, and economic space whereas "Prachakom" (the civil society), the outsider, has a rigid idea of space. Moreover, the community has its strong organization, history, and collective memory in accordance with real life. From the community's point of view, Prachakom's activities are merely image construction, exploitation, and less communal participation while the community's activities are deemed weak and even disorganized by "Prachakom". Nevertheless, these exceptional characteristics of the community, giving rise to the "habitable community" (ชุมชนน่าอยู่), make obvious that under no circumstances will the community require additional definition of meaning from outside.

For the most part, the ideology which tries to intervene and open social space for its own in terms of "Prachakom" depends on the definition of "habitable city" (เมืองน่าอยู่) that values old / authentic culture, physical public space which embodies historical roots, and romanticized activities. These are typical of nostalgia and Utopia irrelevant to real life. Without an insight into on socio-cultural dimensions of the community, this ideology ineluctably leads to the opening of space for the sole group which pushes the community to the margin devoid of communal voice and meanings. Thus, the identity of community finally disappears from the picture of Banglumphu as "habitable city" (เมืองน่าอยู่)