

Article

Design Thinking and Urban Community Development: East Bangkok

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Abstract: This research focuses on community development and ways in which community members can express their opinions and maintain well-being. However, in many contexts, these voices have been enfeebled through top-down approaches, lack of a concrete scenario, and attention to community problems, all of which are frequently associated with prejudices based on social status, education, or gender. For the first time within an urban context, the Ban Bu/Wat Suwannaram community in Bangkok, Thailand, has been given the opportunity to voice their opinions about the community, the direction it should take, and the overall improvement to be made, without the constriction of external authorities. This study applies design thinking, which despite being one of the major trends in business over the last couple of decades, is not generally used to address social issues. Since design thinking requires data collection and the creation of a model/prototype, two complementary procedures are employed. Firstly, the community is studied through observation and interviews, which helped creating a SWOT analysis to identify its potential and facilitate an informal discussion with members of the local community on the situation before urbanisation loosened community ties. After this initial stage, a prototype for various areas of community development is discussed in a community workshop to enable participants to offer their opinions on how the community could develop further. The results reveal the aspirations of the local community towards improving social and environmental issues.

Keywords: sustainable community development; design thinking; Bangkok; Thailand; tourism; community well-being



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1. Introduction

According to United Nations urban studies, more than half of the world's population lives in cities [1], with urban communities expanding significantly over the last few decades [2]. Such urban expansion requires additional public utilities, advanced infrastructures, and job opportunities for local communities, but these are often scarce due to a variety of factors, spanning reduced public funding for utilities and infrastructures, deindustrialisation, and skill upgrading for job opportunities. Lack of investment and reduced job opportunities mean that the weakest members of society are left behind, while new settlers move in, promoting population density, traffic congestion, slums, pollution, and poverty. Emigration and immigration also contribute to the loosening of local communities since most new arrivals are often temporary residents, renting a room or accommodation in proximity to their place of work without merging with the community. Criminality such as drug dealing, rape, violence, and elderly abuse is also more frequent in urban areas compared to rural [3–6]. Thus, a balance needs to be found between urbanisation and its consequent development, and retaining the cultural and social structures already present

on the territory to achieve a proper and sustainable direction through economic growth, social inclusion, and better livelihoods.

In 2019, the majority of Thailand's population were living in urban areas and cities (50.69%), representing an increase of about 15% from the previous decade [7]. However, these numbers can be taken with a pinch of salt since non-registered people live within urban areas, work during the week in the city, and then move back to their hometown for weekends or long holidays. In fact, the National Statistical Office of Thailand (NSO) conducted a survey in 2019 and found that about 8.02 million people (11.2%) of the total population (68.02 million in 2019) were not registered or considered as a commuter population [8]. Although this figure has not been included in the database of the Bureau of Registration Administration, it implies that urban facilities and utilities may be overused.

As urban areas develop and grow, the number of elderlies also increases. Members of the Eastern and South-eastern Asia population aged 65 years or over almost doubled from 6% in 1990 to 11% in 2019 in Eastern and South-eastern Asia [9]. Thailand became an ageing society during 2000–2001, and people aged 60 years or over now represent about 10% of the total population [10], and it will be the first developing country to become a 'hyper-aged society' by 2035 [11]. The increase in Thailand's elderly population will create a series of infrastructural problems for healthcare services, resulting in unfulfilled job openings, generation gap, and poverty in the near future, since retirement schemes are virtually absent in the country, with the exclusion of those working in the public sector.

As far as urbanisation is concerned, there is no better site for studying the difficulties than Thailand's capital, Bangkok, which still has riverine communities mixed with more recent urban developments, thus leading to nostalgia for past lives, increased segregation, and loss of community values. While various potential communities were considered for such a study, attention is devoted to one in particular for field research: the Ban Bu community in Bangkok Noi District (Figure 1).

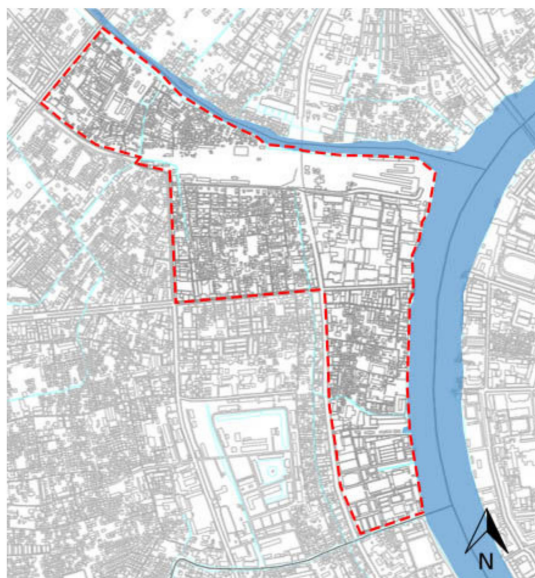


Figure 1. Position of Bangkok Noi, on the Thonburi side of the city (map created by the authors, after Google Earth Satellite Imagery).

The choice of community is based on its antiquity, which predates the foundation of Bangkok, since it dates back to the late Ayutthaya period (1767), but also corresponds to the general demographic and social decline of long-established local communities in Bangkok. Elderly people form the nucleus of the original community since most of the younger generations have moved to live in other suburban areas [12]. Newcomers tend to rent a room or a house in the community due to its proximity to Siriraj Hospital, one of the major public hospitals in Bangkok, and many students and workers live there, leaving early

in the morning and returning late in the evening, lacking any sense of belonging to the community in which they live. The social decline of these communities also relates to issues of gentrification and urban development, segregating older lifestyles to the margins, with the usual loss of community identity and well-being [13]. As for elderly communities in Bangkok, it has been remarked that in general, environment within the community, family relationship, and social relationship were variables that influenced financial satisfaction and health satisfaction [14,15]. While the research just mentioned referred to slum communities, it is also clear that the same issues are present in other areas of Bangkok that could not be considered as slums but which had a large part of the communities made up by the elderly.

‘Leave no one behind’ is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [16]. The SDGs aim to upgrade the well-being of all people and build social inclusion under the umbrella of strong partnerships, sustainable economic growth, and good governance. As well as the 17 SDGs, 169 targets have been set under the primary concept of ‘Leave no one behind’. Thus, any development programmes or policies must be tailor-made to meet the needs and wants of the local people to achieve sustainable implementation. Originating from previous consultations with the locals from the governmental agencies, the local community highlighted the needs of a revitalisation. At the time of the initial visits of the community, as a university in Bangkok had attempted community revitalisation through tourism a few years previously, such planning floundered as soon as the academics left. Therefore, also based on the initial suggestion of the local community leader, the initial input for this research was again toward the development of a more inclusive and long-lasting tourism activities. Yet, as the fieldwork started, it was discovered that tourism was not necessarily the path, as the community only searched for maintaining the inherited values and keeping the community alive, and tourism was only a pretext more than a necessity—but certainly, a further source of income was searched for. Again, the needs and wants of the community remained unclear; therefore, in order to create a sustainable community, together with the concept of ‘Leave no one behind’, the following objectives of this study are identified:

1. To understand the needs and wants of the local population.
2. To analyse the relationships among community members.
3. To understand the intention of community members to participate in activities.

In order to focus on these objectives, design thinking is used as the main research framework since the process of urban development does not simply involve methodology but problem-solving and co-creation [17,18]. In the context of Thailand, some recent contributions specifically target health, the elderly, as well as the need for design thinking in education and business development. However, its specific application in addressing social and/or urbanisation issues remains lacking, despite the mechanism being previously discussed at the academic level [19–22]. The project itself was under the aegis of the Siriraj Hospital project “Bangkok Noi Model”.

2. Bangkok Noi and Wat Suwannaram

Bangkok Noi was formerly known as Ammarin, a district in Thonburi Province, on the west side of the Chao Praya River. Due to city expansion, Thonburi was merged with Pra Nakorn Province in 1971, subsequently becoming Bangkok Province. Bangkok Noi District (Khet) covers an area of 11,944 sq. km, with a population of 101,511 as of December 2021 [23]. There are five sub-districts (Kwang), namely, Siriraj, Ban Chang-Lo, Bang Khun-Non, Bang Khun-Sri, and Arun Ammarin. Siriraj is the smallest sub-district, measuring 1.258 sq. km with 16,105 people. There are also 42 communities within the district.

Bangkok Noi has been a historical quarter of the Thai capital for more than 200 years, going back to before the foundation of Bangkok. Within the Bangkok Noi District is located the big canal, or ‘Klong’ (in Thai ‘คลอง’), and the so-called Klong Bangkok Noi has become the main waterway for the Thonburi population [24,25]. There are ferryboats along the Klong Bangkok Noi, connecting insiders to the Phra Nakorn District and other parts of Bangkok via the Wang Lang pier (adjacent to Siriraj Hospital). Besides, Bangkok Noi is

a traffic node for trains from southern Thailand. Thonburi train station is a big hub for Thonburi people with a fresh market nearby called 'Talad Sala Nam Ron'. Thonburi train station has inspired several writers of historical works relating to World War II.

Thus, the Bangkok Noi area has its own characteristic images, famous for the riverside lifestyle, charming culture, and attractive heritage sites, such as the National Museum of Royal Barges, Ra-Khang Kositaram Temple (or Wat: in Thai 'วัด'), Suwannaram Temple (or Wat Thong), Wang Lang Market, and Siriraj Medical Museum. The tangible and intangible heritage of the Bangkok Noi area attracts tourists with its lively atmosphere. Moreover, the community is located close to the Chao Praya River, Grand Palace, and Bangkok city centre, which can be easily reached by foot, bicycle, train, or boat. A nearby sky train station is also being planned.

Ever since Bangkok Noi moved towards urbanisation, some areas have become degraded, and the local community has experienced problems with security, traffic, public infrastructure, waste management, migrant workers, pollution, and other health issues. Furthermore, the community is home to an ageing population, with about 27,401 (25.43%) of its total population being over 60 years of age [26].

The Wat Suwannaram community is close to Siriraj Hospital and has a floating market (Talad Nam), beamless market (Talad Rai Kan, in Thai 'ตลาดไร้คาน'), traditional medicine (sangun o-sod, in Thai 'สงวนโอสถ'), Wat Suwannaram temple and its paintings, local museums, and many other cultural attractions. Bronzeware, or 'Khan Long Hin' (in Thai 'ขันลงหิน') is one of the more well-known activities, involving an old construction technique dating back to the Ayutthaya period [24,25]. The Wat Suwannaram community is known as 'Ban Bu', to reflect the method by which copper and tin are alloyed into objects, mostly bronze bowls, and through this name it was usually known until a recent past, and it is the name adopted by the elderly in the community, and is therefore kept within this paper, while Wat Suwannaram has now become the administrative name of the community itself, which is known as such from official documents. During the interviews with community members, elderly people recalled that in the past, all households were blacksmiths, and visitors to the community could hear the sound of bronze bowls being made when arriving in the area. Thonburi train station is next to the community and the last stop on the route from southern Thailand to Bangkok [27].

The community is in proximity to Siriraj Hospital, established in 1888 as the first modern and traditional medicine hospital in Thailand [28]. Siriraj Hospital became the University of Medicine in 1943 when the faculty of medicine transferred from Chulalongkorn University. The medical school was subsequently named the Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital in 1966. Since then, the hospital has been significantly expanded to include parts of the Bangkok Noi community.

Based on information from the Siriraj Hospital Community Social Responsibility Office, tourism development has been attempted in the past but revealed to be unsustainable, even in the short run. Most of the old community places and activities have closed, and the idea of a local market has not been sufficiently successful as a tourist attraction, while boats no longer stop at the tourist pier, as it has also been noted during the interviews. In recent years, the area of inhabitation has been radically reduced due to the expansion of the nearby Siriraj Hospital.

Since the community was established long before cars existed, the local roads are quite narrow, about 1–1.20 m, and thus, only bicycles and motorcycles can pass. Houses in the community are mostly made of wood, following the usual Thai style of construction: most being two-storey houses and very close to each other. In 2006, the community was devastated by a fire, damaging 30 houses, while another fire occurred in 2014, ravaging the temple and surrounding area.

3. Community Participation in Thailand

As for community development in a worldwide perspective, it has been recognised that community participation remains the main approach to develop a sustainable com-

munity [29,30], but the problem of participation was already raised two decades ago [31]. Within Thailand, stakeholders' participation has been implemented for tourism for instance, whereas the local community could offer suggestions about the possible services that their own tourism destination could offer [32,33], but such "suggestions" only remained possible for areas of new development for tourism, or not belonging to nationalistic expression of heritage, or within the reach of more powerful tourism players or important family businesses [34–36]. In case the more powerful tourism players do not have extensive political support behind, the bottom-up approach had quite limited success in blocking damaging extensions of hotels, such as in the case of Amphawa Floating Market, made famous by the nightly firefly's tours [37,38], or in the case of unwanted museum closures that would have damaged the local community [39]. In such cases, the consultation process only started after some decisions were already done; therefore, it was a protest of the locals more than a process of consultation.

As for the bottom-up approach, local wisdom and major local actors were employed in order to have the local community participation in health projects, as it was acknowledged that health system could not work out without the communities being actively involved [40–45]. Participation in central initiatives has been pushed toward environmental participation, in which the local community has the obligation to keep the environment in order [46–49]. Another more recent area of intervention is now urban studies, in which the local community mostly appears with an embellishment or improvement of the areas in which they live, but again, their possibilities of participation are reduced to the consultation stage [50–56]. Community participation remains, however, more on paper than really applied whenever powerful interests come into play [54,57–60].

4. The Concept of Design Thinking within Academia

In the last couple of decades, the concept of design thinking has become a trend within social sciences academic literature. While it was the subject of about 168 publications less than a decade ago [61], research and publications on design thinking have continued to increase, and a basic Google Scholar search of the terms 'design thinking AND society', now results in more than 1.5 million results (as of January 2022). The original discussion on design thinking goes back to Simon [62], who highlighted the importance of the artefact—considered to be an idea that becomes a product—as the interlocutor between two spheres, the 'inner' substance of the artefact, and the 'outer' environment, in which the artefact operates. As defined by Brown [18], design thinking merges together feasibility (what is functionally possible within the foreseeable future); viability (what is likely to become part of a sustainable business model); and desirability (what makes sense to people and for people). Yet, such a process also provides the scope for insight, as Brown states: it is an analysis process of relationships existing between objects and products, as well as people and people, and this leads to empathy, whereby we try to understand someone else's thinking from their own perspective.

The discussion of design thinking is likely to involve brainstorming for further ideas, where the subjects involved can discuss their aspirations and feelings to create a broad range of choices in which the next element can be inserted. In fact, one of the most difficult processes of transformation involves shaping ideas into something that can be tangibly considered, and at this stage, mostly concerns the creation of a visual model. According to Brown [18], such visualisation might be as simple as sticking notes on a wall, but for more socially focused projects, 3-D visualisation (referred to by Brown as 'Prototyping') is more suitable for modelling buildings, services, or activities, possibly originating from the brainstorming session. However, all the processes discussed by Brown essentially focus on taking a human-centred approach: individuals and groups remain the engines of this development, rather than other interests external to them, potentially weakening the entire process of idea generation. These individuals remain part of a bigger system, with access to specific technical competences that may not be part of the original discussion group, along

with the financial budget to develop ideas into products or services, helping to make the entire process permanent.

The following model can be considered (Figure 2).

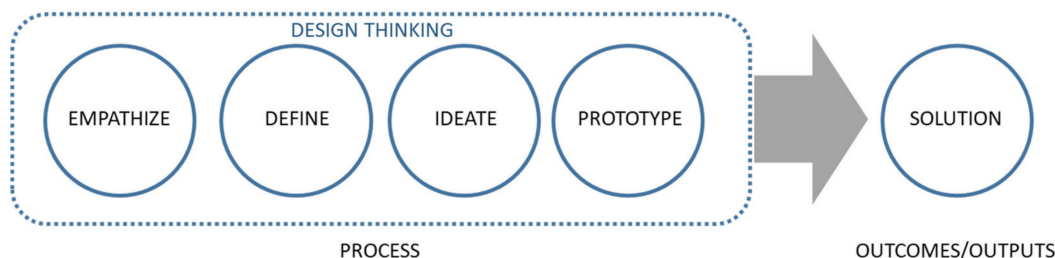


Figure 2. Design thinking process (developed by the authors).

5. Design Thinking for Community Development in Thailand

Participation by the general public in Thailand's development is a relatively recent conquest. While public participation in the planning process has existed since the Eighth National Development Plan (1997) [63], policy implementation maintains a top-down approach, with government officials at all levels still dictating national guidelines and locals being rarely involved in planning or implementation [64].

Furthermore, national development policies and projects originating from the central government lacked any comprehension of the actual needs and wants of local people, creating a vicious cycle in which development outcomes were not sustainable even in the short run. While some communities might strive, the majority found the plans impossible to achieve, and such impossibility is especially significant when the local community is made up of vulnerable groups, such as the low-income and elderly, since they face highly placed interests.

During the past decades, the pattern of national development in Thailand has been slowly transferred from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, as witnessed during the drafting of the Eighth National Development Plan (1997–2001) [63]. The focus of the national development paradigm then moved from economic growth orientation to people-centred development and community engagement at both the national and local level. As a consequence, people from all walks of life were encouraged to participate in the formulation of the Ninth National Development Plan (2002–2006) as evidenced by the community strengthening strategy, 'Empowerment of communities and development of liveable cities and communities' [65]. With respect to community empowerment, the strategy concerned four main factors: people, local economy, society, and governance, focusing on human well-being and sustainable development. Local community participation has been mostly restricted to tourism development in Thailand and rarely applied to social studies in general [60,66–77].

The country's economic growth has helped to create a trickle-down effect, with the better off giving part of their wealth to the disadvantaged through taxation [78]. Nevertheless, even in developed countries, between 1990 and 2015, wealth inequality increased significantly, and the income gap increased, with the bottom 40% in over half of 92 countries receiving less than 25% of the overall income [79]. However, inequality goes far beyond money, income, and purchasing power, with gender or low-income urban populations being discriminated against and marginalised.

In 1987, the first document on sustainability appeared [80], but any community development until the 1990s mainly focused on achieving a sustainable economy, especially in relation to tourism activities. Other approaches involved the triple bottom line (TBL), and while it considers the environmental, social, and economic aspects, it fails to address the involvement of local stakeholders in the decision-making process [81]. Therefore, any cooperation between stakeholders is also afflicted by power relationships, passed down through educational inequality or the intervention of government and non-governmental actors.

Consequently, people's participation in community development may only occur when engagement exists to help upgrade community well-being, creating a sense of belonging, educating liberal democracy, and designating development policies from the grassroots level [82–85].

6. Materials and Methods

Design thinking in the academic sense involves collecting data on the background of the community, cultural tourism, well-being, and potential development for stimulating economic activity. Based on the steps described above (Figure 1), the research team merged with the local community, as they walked through the community and interviewed the available members. Based on both SWOT analysis as results of the observation and interviews, the models were thought based on those exigences, then the prototype was created and the possible solution offered. In detail, this study consists of a three-month field survey with 20 volunteers (Students from the Architecture and Urban Design Department, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin), and two qualitative data collection procedures were envisaged. Firstly, field observation took place in the community as the various aspects of history, social, economic, physical issues, and surrounding area to the community comprehensively went on between October and November 2019, in accordance with previous studies [86–88]. Together with observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 villagers—mostly elderly—and the interview questions mostly focused on the impression of the community and the participants' memories of the past. Convenience sampling was adopted for the interviews [89], as all the members of the community available at the time of the observation fieldwork, usually between the hours 9:00 to 15:00. All the doors within the community were knocked on for their opinions, and as the fieldwork was done during the normal working hours, the people who actually gave their answers were also those more affected by the decline of the community, as they were staying within the community borders for most of the time. While the number of 20 people was due to mostly to the availability of the community members during the period of the visit, not searching for further interviews is also in agreement with academic research, which confirms that even after only 8 interviews, same or similar concepts are actually repeated [90–99]. As for the villagers, they represented mostly retired long-term members of the community, but they did not represent any role within the community administration, with the only exception of the community leader. We asked them basically two questions:

1. What were their memories of the community in earlier times?
2. What was their perception—negative or positive as it might be—of the community in the actual conditions?

Both observation and interviews were used in the SWOT analysis, contributing to the creation of possible guidelines for community development [100]. In fact, the interviews were coded [101–103], and have been here added to the relative SWOT analysis table (Table 1).

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the Bangkok Noi community, 2019 (the number in brackets refer to the interview parts in Appendix A).

Element	History	Physical	Social and Community
Strengths	The community has historical sites such as Wat Suwannaram, dating back to the Ayutthaya period, as well as Thonburi train station and beamless market (or Talad Rai Kan), dating back to before the Second World War, which should be conserved. (7.1; 7.4; 8.1; 16.1; 17.3; 18.3)	The community is close to the Chao Praya River (the main river in Thailand) (19.1).	Community engagement. Local people participated in various activities (6.1)

Table 1. Cont.

Element	History	Physical	Social and Community
	Historical assets, such as bronzeware and stainless ware (1.1; 6.2).	The community has sufficient public utilities.	Various and unique economic activities, such as bronzeware and stainless ware. (1.1; 6.2)
		There is a commuting hub involving trains, buses, and boats.	Community participation in folk shows and traditional activities, such as tiger-piercing cockatoos (Kratoo Tang Soa), martial arts (Kra-Bee, Kra Bong), and the tradition of floating lanterns (Kratong) in the river, but in the community, they hold lanterns and walk around the temple.
		There is a building conservation law to help conserve old buildings.	
			Social: The community is an ageing society (17.2).
		The architecture in some areas has been ignored and abandoned, such as Talad Rai Kan (15.5).	Economy: The economic conditions in the community have deteriorated due to increased business competition nearby, such as the Talad Sala Num Ron (19.2).
Weaknesses	Some people do not pay attention to the community traditions and culture.		Security: Some zones are unsafe or lacking privacy. (9.1)
		The roads inside the community are narrow, preventing access to some parts of the community. (7.2; 16.2; 16.3)	Youths taking drugs mingle in dark areas. (4.4; 10.1; 18.1)
			Buildings are made of wood, so there is a fire risk. (13.2)
			Some buildings do not meet the legal requirements. (4.3)
			Water pollution.
		Potential to conserve the antiquities and buildings in the community, such as the beamless market (Talad Rai Kan), Bronzeware Museum, and Stainless Ware Museum. (1.1; 3.2; 4.3; 9.2; 13.1; 13.3)	
Opportunities	Potential to upgrade the community into a tourist attraction through historical and cultural tourism. (1.1)	Opportunity to develop some abandoned areas in the community. (7.3; 8.2; 15.3; 18.3)	Potential to develop cultural tourism. (1.1; 3.3; 10.5; 17.4)
		Areas near the BTS Sky Train have the potential to change into commercial activities. (14.2; 17.3)	Potential to develop an ageing-lifestyle community.
		Opportunity to improve the environment in the area to make it more attractive. (5.1; 5.2; 7.3; 15.3; 15.4)	Potential to develop economic activities. (2.3; 8.3; 10.5)

Table 1. Cont.

Element	History	Physical	Social and Community
Threats	Advanced technology disrupts the maintenance of culture and tradition.	The future mass rapid train project will lead to overcrowding and the overuse of community facilities. (14.2)	The way of life in the community has changed due to economic growth. (2.1; 6.1; 12.1; Handicrafts have slowly disappeared. (6.3; 6.4; 13.3)
		Overpopulation will occur in the future.	People have left the community, and the latent migrant population replacing them has eroded the community culture. (2.2; 3.1; 4.1; 4.2; 10.4; 11.1; 11.2; 12.3)
		Damage to the architecture from flooding.	
		The construction of a sky train station will obscure the landscape. (14.1)	The numerous shops and other ways of trading have led to strong competition. (10.2; 10.3; 12.2; 17.1)
		Respiratory disease may be caused by the construction of sky train rails and the station.	

The results of the SWOT analysis would have contributed to reveal the needs and wants of the local communities emerging from the early interviews, and physical improvements were suggested to the local community for the various areas. As the SWOT analysis highlighted the relative parts that the community wanted to improve, students from the Architecture and Urban Design Department, Rajamangala University of Technology, Rattanakosin, built models considering those elements previously discussed. In fact, the design thinking models followed closely established steps [104], in which the models were created based after public consultation [105–107]: as SWOT analysis and interviews connoted specific issues about the community, its public spaces, and the issues of building preservation, as well as community revitalisation, all those elements were considered when the models were actually created. Those models were tri-dimensional models, as a previous health project that had created a mobile application demonstrated that elderly community was unwilling to use any technological instrument. After the preparation of the models, all the members of the community were officially invited to a workshop with discussion groups organised under the supervision of the researchers (14 December 2019). While the invitation was extended to all the members of the community, the majority of those attending the workshops (80 people in total) were mostly again from the community of elderly, with a few exceptions. The workshop was divided into three parts:

1. Important historical issues that had a significant impact on the community, such as memories of the community's past economic activities and cultural heritage.
2. Current issues in the community and suggestions for improvement.
3. Issues that should be promoted in the future to develop the community, such as what it wants to achieve.

7. Results

7.1. SWOT Analysis

The results of the SWOT analysis are given in the following Table 1, with comments after that. The number in brackets are also giving the opinions as given in the various interviews, relatively to those issues, as given through the original transcripts as given in Appendix A.

7.1.1. Historical Assets

As brief historical introduction, the community and surrounding area are home to historical assets and architecture, dating back to the Ayutthaya period (more than 250 years

ago). The historical sites and tourist attractions consist of the Suwannaram temple (Wat Tong), which has murals by Kru Thong Yu and Kru Kong Pae (according to an interview with one of the monks). The murals, located in the ordination hall or 'Ubosot', are well preserved and considered to be masterpieces from the Rattanakosin era. Moreover, the beamless market or Talad Rai Kan is more than 100 years old. There are also old-style handicraft factories for creating Ban Bu bronzeware and stainless ware. Therefore, this community has the opportunity to be upgraded as a historical and cultural tourism attraction.

Based on such an account, the observation confirmed some of those potentialities, especially the importance of Wat Suwannaram temple and the beamless market, or the economic and cultural activities as expressed by the stainless ware and the Thai herbal medicine, which goes back to the foundation of Thai cultural tradition, as it is also an important component of Thai traditional medical tourism, also including Thai massage in the account, with the tradition of Wat Pho traditional school, for instance [108,109], and it also represents an important component of the nearby Siriraj hospital [110–112]. Most of the community still also live in the old Thai traditional houses, and the atmosphere of Bangkok past times can still be perceived for the ambience of the community, as well as the atmosphere that the elderly community perceived when they were younger. Having assessed such historical and cultural strength of the community, however, it also leads to the major concerns of the historical or social importance: the community is dying and not much of it will be preserved in a non-distant future. Yet, while the future may not belong to the actual elderly of the community, they identify tourism as a potential panacea for the community. It is certainly true that the community has the potential for economic development and attracting tourists. The area is surrounded by several traffic nodes, such as a boat hub, rail station, roads, and bicycles lanes, allowing easy access to Bangkok and its vicinity (Figure 3). And what the community identifies as an area of concern, the small roads that block any form of motorised transportation with the exclusion of the unmissable motorbikes, may be considered the selling factor, as the old atmosphere is preserved, without the impending traffic.

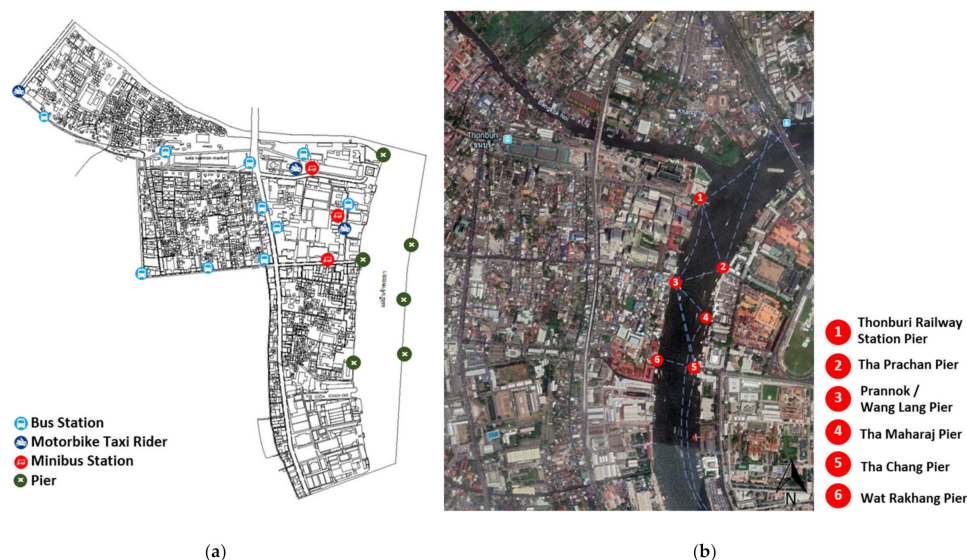


Figure 3. Bangkok Noi: (a) Transportation connections such as bus stops and piers are indicated in blue; (b) Possible stops for a Chap Phraya River boat tour (maps created by the authors, after Google Earth Satellite Imagery).

Therefore, looking at the historical assets for future development, there is a building code in place to help preserve old buildings [113], and to preserve such as the bronzeware and stainless ware factories, which would help keep the unique identity of the community [114–116]. Old buildings can be preserved and upgraded to become local museums. As the community has noted, there are several abandoned areas that can be developed

into public spaces, parks, or playgrounds [117–119]. From observation, the area around the train station can be used to build commercial buildings, as the station is now an isolated and almost external place from the community itself.

7.1.2. The Community

As it results from the historical accounts and the interviews, the local people have a strong relationship with the place, often going back a couple of centuries, when the original members of the community migrated from Ayutthaya and settled in the area. They sold their own products, fruit, vegetables, fish, and so on. Most residents are retired (from government offices) and excluded from old age benefits. Besides, Bangkok Noi has been a historical water community for more than 200 years, and there is a unique sense of Chinese tradition mixed with local Thai: food, traditional medicines, arts, and crafts are well known, some of them based on local wisdom, passed down through the generations [120]. Community members are therefore able to use their skills to produce the artworks, food, and traditional medicines so important for a future creative economy [121].

The community has the opportunity to develop in a way conducive to the lifestyle of the elderly, with economic activities such as bronzeware, stainless ware, traditional medicine, tattoo artists, as well as local foods and products.

Moreover, during interviews with the elderly residents, they mentioned some unique traditions and events which should be preserved, such as Kratoo Thang Suo (Tiger-piercing cockatoos), Vien Kra Thong, (similar to Loy Kra Thong—the floating of an illuminated leaf, but without floating an elaborate bowl in the river). Thus, the community can use its unique ways of life to encourage cultural tourists to the area. The interviewees expressed that they would like to develop a local market in the beamless market, which has been abandoned for a while due to a lack of tourists. They would like to conserve bronzeware making as part of the community's local heritage [122].

7.1.3. Weaknesses and Threats

Most community residents are elderly, with the younger generation mainly relocating to the suburbs. Many of the current residents are tenants and do not pay much attention to the local culture and traditions. Technology advances have also disrupted the community way of life and distorted the old culture, with handicrafts such as products made from coconut shells or bamboo slowly disappearing.

The buildings in the community are old and of wood construction, meaning they could be at risk of fire, which has been identified as area of concern for the entire Bangkok a few years back, as no many of the building follow fire regulations [123]. Besides, some of the areas are abandoned, dirty, and contaminated, and no longer suitable for economic and social activities, such as markets and piers. Some remote parts are at risk of being used by younger members of the community for drug dealing, potentially creating an unsafe society [124–126]. In the past, water pollution and flood damaged the foundations of the buildings.

Roads inside the community are very narrow, measuring about 1–1.5 metres, enabling only motorcycles to pass through, while cars have no access to some parts of the community [127]. Thus, in case of fire or a health emergency, it is difficult to reach victims in time. Furthermore, the proposed sky train station is almost operational and will soon lead to changes in the area such as overcrowding and strong business competition [128]. It will also obscure the community landscape, and the construction work may cause respiratory disease [129].

7.2. Workshop

The second stage of the project involved a workshop held on the school premises, with community members invited to discuss the results of the first stage and the potential developments based on previous observations and further analysis. Based on the SWOT analysis above, as developed both from observation and interviews with the local community, the

participants to the workshop looked at the models created for further improvement of the community and therefore offered their opinion about it. Moreover, discussion groups were formed and the content recorded, in order to independently confirm or refuse some of the conclusions reached during the independently conducted interviews. As the idea of problem-solving arises from the spatial analysis and seminar activities, the workshop acted as a place to share knowledge. The prototypes were therefore shown to the community, and those models depicted the public areas where community members spend most of their time. Four important areas of the community were identified for potential improvement: 1. The 100-year-old market; 2. Floating market; Bangkok Noi community; 3. Ban Bu Walking Street; and 4. Providing a railway crossing for pedestrians and the developing area around Thonburi Railway Station.

The proposed models were created by undergraduates at Rajamangala University, Rattanakosin, Faculty of Architecture, each representing a summary of the suggestions made by the various groups participating in the discussion. The design steps for the models were therefore based on the following considerations.

7.2.1. One-Hundred-Year-Old Market

Current nature of the area/problem: The One-Hundred-Year-Old Market is a unique area of the Ban Bu community and has been used as a community centre and trading area for a long time. It also has distinctive architecture depicting the build technology of the past, with the original roof structure still strong. However, nowadays, many areas have become less important and abandoned due to a lack of trade and economic development. The market area is also dilapidated, while other places are not hygienic and filled with garbage and rats.

Ideas and future development trends arising from the design thinking process: The One-Hundred-Year-Old Market is the landmark of the Ban Bu community, and its revival should take into account the preservation of the original market structure since the community residents want to retain the same trees and make the area more accessible for holding events and festivals [130–134]. Space will also need to be provided for commercial use and a new walkway axis designed to link the market to the old waterfront road, as was also planned elsewhere in Bangkok [135]. The roads and waterfront areas should be improved to enhance the beauty and usability of the community for tourists, such as by adding public benches and seats to public areas, stopovers, and developing the road network to enable access to other attractions such as the Ban Bu Museum and stainless-steel factory.

7.2.2. Bangkok Noi Community Floating Market (Floating Market)

Current nature of the area/problem: The floating market is an established area along the riverside, selling food along the waterfront on Saturdays and Sundays to encourage more tourists to enter the community. There is currently no market trade due to the sluggishness of the area and lack of effective management. Furthermore, there has been no tourism promotion in the Ban Bu community for the past five years. The open space appears to be used only as a seating area for locals rather than promoting economic activities. Moreover, the increase of markets along waterways is a phenomenon that has been also attempted for other communities in Bangkok and revealed successful [136], as putting more plants and the creation of piers in alignment with older building was what it was built upon.

Ideas and future development trends arising from the design thinking process: The concept of economic stimulation through the restoration of old areas can help to revive the waterfront market for the community by adjusting and incorporating the natural environment. Community residents can use the area for public meetings and socialising by increasing the space available for relaxation, walking, sitting, and eating. The increase of public spaces is also considered in other researches relative to Thailand in general and Bangkok in particular, as the creation of open spaces and parks has seen as particular beneficial for elderly population [137,138]. Moreover, it can be employed as a boat dock

for tourists since there is a seating area near the waterfront. Shops can be redesigned into unique spaces using architecture and the elements of a traditional floating market.

The old floating market area has the potential to be linked to the community through vacant spaces. Therefore, the interconnected areas should be restored to allow more people to access the floating market, both by foot and boat.

7.2.3. Ban Bu Walking Street

Current nature of the area/problem: Old-style buildings worth preserving can still be found in the community, but most have now deteriorated or been abandoned, and the traffic route is dirty. There are no shops in the area, and its lack of attractiveness, associated with the lack of promotion towards the Ban Bu Museum, acts as a deterrent to visitors.

Ideas and future development trends arising from the design thinking process: Walking Street and its network of streets and alleys in the Ban Bu community should be developed, and old buildings turned into commercial spaces (Figure 4). The alley could also become more attractive by bringing in street art to help improve the landscape and identifying points of interest along the route to promote history and commerce [139,140]. In addition, dilapidated and abandoned buildings could be renovated into cafés or specialty shops selling homemade products made by the Ban Bu community to support tourism and related income distribution.



Figure 4. Ban Bu Street and the relative model (photos by the authors).

7.2.4. Level Crossing over Commuter Railway Line for Pedestrians

Current nature of the area/problem: The footpath crossing the railway into the community is currently used by residents to reach the station, market, and outside area. However, the area is currently unsafe since the pavement on the crossing is uneven, making access problematic for elderly residents.

Ideas and future development trends arising from the design thinking process: The community entrance and exit at the railroad crossing should be developed by taking into account the safety of road users. To enable all age groups to use it, the area should be landscaped to make it more attractive and functional. The design may involve constructing a public shelter at the train station with a space for selling food and eating. The building itself could also be employed to mark the entrance to the Ban Bu community.

In addition, the pavement used as a railway crossing to enter the community should be renovated and redesigned using a construction material more suitable for pavement. The height of the soil should be adjusted to accommodate people of all ages, including those with disabilities, and an automatic barricade provided for safety purposes. The area should be landscaped to increase walkability, with trees planted to provide shade. The design also considers the sustainability issues, as it will be usable by any member of the community [141].

Members were really enthusiastic for pier development, for instance, and in general, the members were satisfied with the proposed improvements of community life, so much so that they asked for the models to be kept within the community, in order to use them as starting point for any future planning. As those models were generated in base from students' research, it was not possible to leave them within the community; nonetheless, the visualisation part was certainly a success. Most of all, the participants' satisfaction was mostly based on the fact they had direct participation in the different stages of the project.

As for the focus group, the opinions from the eight working groups were summarised and recorded on the boards, and are given here as divided by topic (Table 2).

As can be seen from Table 2, the focus groups noted the elements the community were proud of, as well as the life in the past they actually emphasised. They celebrated the importance of the local temple, and the beauty of its painting, from the cultural point of view, as well as the activity that have made the community renown in the past, such as the stainless bronzeware and the traditional medicine tradition [142,143]. As for the interviews, nostalgia over what was lost was the major feeling: the lively market, and most of all, a lively community were their major longings from the past.

As for the issues, they also followed what the one-to-one interviews had already declared, and already hinted by the remarks over the past: give life back to the community; the needs for a better community life, which implies both a safer environment—being drug free as a major example—as well as an improvement of the community buildings were considered. There was a discussion about economic improvement, which would generate more income within the community, and such income would come from the revitalisation of the beamless market, as well as tourism-related activities [12]. The consideration of tourism and its generated income for local communities has been recently dealt with [144], which also reveals the difficulties inherent in many communities to generate an adequate income, especially in the case of sites of lesser importance or not sufficiently marketed for tourism promotion.

Table 2. Discussion originated from the focus groups.

Memories of the Past to the Community	Community Economic Activities in the Past	Problems Encountered in the Community	What Should Be Encouraged	What Do You Want the Community to Be Like in the Future?
1. Every house in the past had stone bowl making. 2. The canal played an important role in the community both in terms of transportation, traffic, and consumption.	1. The beamless market was the main market of the community. Trading was mainly from boats. 2. Stone bowl making was the main occupation in the past for the whole community.	1. Traffic and access problems: the entrance to the community area is narrow, narrow alley roads, not enough parking. 2. Drug problems. 3. Demographic problems, which include people in the community moving out and new population groups moving in. latent population problem and including the population in the area, there is a large population of elderly people. 4. Problems of the community are economic stagnation and the fact that local shops cannot trade.	1. Let the new generation inherit the stone bowl making. 2. Thai herbal medicine shop, Sanguan Apothecary. 3. Provide historical knowledge of the area to the people in the community. 4. Promote the beamless market in order to stimulate trade and community economy.	1. Have a better economy, by promoting careers for people in the community Children should get involved with the community. 2. Being a tourism community with learning resources within the community.
	Cultural heritage in the community		What should be improved	
	1. Creating bowls. 2. Ancient murals that still appear at Wat Suwannaram. 3. Sanguan Medicine Pharmacy Traditional Thai Medicine 4. Other traditions that appear in the area include long drums, lions, and Krabi Krabong.		1. Improve the beamless market for the commercial area and the main economic area of the community. 2. Improve the area in the community, such as organizing parking spaces, garden areas, organizing sidewalks, making road signs. 3. Public relations for tourism, in order to create a focus on the community	
	The value this community can provide outside		Help the community needs outside	
1. The value of the identity of the community’s wisdom, such handcrafts work, stone work, stainless steel work. 2. Cultural values: Wat Suwannaram and old murals the food culture in the Rai Khan market community.		1. Promoting occupations for people in the area and promoting income for the elderly. 2. Take care of the health of both the elderly and children. 3. Promote tourism through tour guides.		

8. Conclusions

The field visit data, analysis, and interview are summarized in the analysis of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and obstacles. It can be noted that from the analysis of field visits and data collection, it is consistent and consistent with the key points of the operating meeting. The analysis can be taken into consideration together with the information obtained from the Bangkok Noi Community Area Operations Conference. The vision that creates guidelines for improvement and development in the future mainly focuses on the economy of the community, space identity, and basic life safety. Based on the various results above, the community has the following potentialities:

- Community development to be a cultural tourist attraction: reviving the traditional traditions of the community to be a neighbourhood with a unique lifestyle with a touch of the Rattanakosin era including the floating market area of Wat Suwannaram. As for other places in Bangkok, the possibility of alternative destination to the usual Bangkok routes, such as the Grand Palace or Temple of Reclining Buddha, or Khao San

Road, can also offer more limited—and less frequented—visits to ancient communities in Bangkok, as also happened for other communities in Bangkok [145,146].

- Development of transport in the surrounding context, especially by boat for the community to create a new thoroughfare. The waterways have been again seen a resurgence of interest, from the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, which has created boat services along the canals, in order to supply further experiences, both for local and international visitors [12,147–149].

From the point of view of community participation within the various phases of the project, participative action theory is used in this research to encourage participants to develop positive attitudes and foster acceptance and a sense of belonging to the community. Since participative action theory is coupled with development models originating from the spatial needs of the local people to reach a real solution for the community, it can be concluded that:

- As for the economic stagnation of the community, there are too many business options and there is a lot of competition; thus, the shops cannot trade. It is necessary to find interesting patterns to allow people in the community to shop in the community shop, or a new way to increase tourists into the area. In order to create economic development, it means the rehabilitation of the main commerce in the community, namely, the beamless market, waterfront market, and Ban Bu Walking Street. There is also a generic disregard of traditions in Thailand, unless they are mainstream, or national symbols, and it remains important that the community can find a way to express those traditions [13,150–152]. The main aims are to create a lively, more dynamic area to encourage tourists while preserving and restoring the local handicraft culture, such as with stone bowls and ancient Thai medicines to provide an income stream for the people in the community. From the academic perspective, since the fieldwork and discussions for this research were completed just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the hope that tourism could provide an economic panacea for the community marketing plays an important role in developing an effective tourism policy [144]. From a cultural perspective, the creation of a focus on the community values remains fundamental, also including youth's education and allowing children to participate in the community life [125].
- The other issue is the environmental deterioration of the community and safety of people in the area. In this case, infrastructure and management improvement helps to ensure safe living by helping communities to become safe, clean, livable environments [153–155]. Any development project should include the renovation of streets and piers, walking streets, and pedestrian walkways at railway crossings, as has been planned for other situations in Bangkok and Thailand in general. The architectural improvement of communities in a worldwide context was already considered in the academic literature as connected to community wellbeing [156]. It also highlights the polycentric—and different—nature of modern cities, whereby different cultural expressions are part of the same urban pattern [157].

Apart from the development possibilities, which are essentially derived from funding at the local level, the results achieved are certainly interesting in many respects. The first is obvious, since studies on the bottom-up perspective in Thailand within urban communities are almost non-existent; the presence of this research gap demonstrates the necessity for an open dialogue between communities and city planners, independently of educational level or organisational power. In the future, cooperation from stakeholders, the government, and the private sector is needed to push forward projects that align with the needs of the community [43,56,158–160]. As for design thinking, in the case of the Ban Bu community here discussed, the empathised process was adopted during the initial interviews, as the researchers familiarise themselves with the community; then, the community helped define the nature of the problems and issues they had, therefore indirectly contributing to ideate the prototype model, which would contribute to solve their problems. Therefore, design thinking, especially as consultation and development of models based on community input,

can be an effective tool in developing a dialogue between stakeholders, since the process of visualisation helps to provide a tangible element for discussion, as has happened in other cases and situations [161–165]. It also helps to fully understand the flexible elements of the model/prototype, which can be adjusted depending on the input of the various discussants.

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Appendix A. Interview Transcripts

Interviewee	Transcription (Thematically Divided)
1. (Male, 62 years old, businessman)	1. I think our community has potential for tourism. Before, there were tourists who came to our areas by boats to see the Taksin statue, Wat Suwannaram, mural wall painting, and stoneware. Now, I rarely see tourists. I don't know why. They went further to Taling Chan Floating market. So, we cannot sell any and the market nearly dried.
2. (Female, 65 years old, seller)	1. I want to see our community livelier. 2. When I was young, foods were so cheap and delicious, such as Khanom khrok (coconut pancake), Sa-ku Sai Mu (Tapioca balls with pork filling), and noodle. For instance, coconut, of about 1.50 baht per kilogram. They were able to put in more ingredients, palm sugar, coconut, and so on. 3. If the tourists visit my place more, I and my neighbours can sell foods or local products.
3. (Female, 72 years old, seller)	I have lived here more than 50 years. 1. Our community has become quieter, not many people, no busy lifestyle as before. 2. I want to preserve our community heritage; market, stoneware, and pier. 3. I want to see many more tourists visit my place. People would not feel so lonely.
4. (Female, 72 years old, housewife)	I was born here, and lived here, never moved out. 1. I saw many young generations relocated to the suburbs of Bangkok or nearby provinces. 2. Newcomers just rent a house for working. 3. Our place became semi-slum area. 4. There were drug problems and gangsters. 5. I want to preserve our heritage, such as Stoneware, our pride.
5. (Female, 61 years old, retired)	I have lived here for more than 60 years. I worked for Siriraj hospital and now I am retired. I feel happy living here. 1. I want more public space for activities, to do some exercise. 2. But I know it is difficult to enlarge. Here, it is an urban community. 3. The coming of the sky train may create more pollution.

Interviewee	Transcription (Thematically Divided)
6. (Female, 70 years old, retired)	<p>I have lived here for more than 70 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the old time, there were many people come the community. They came by boat, stopped at the pier. They visited the market and were walking around the areas. 2. The market was lively. Now, not many people come by. 3. The stoneware can be stopped. No one continues the activity. 4. Also, the Thai herb, traditional medicine cannot for much longer continue. The market would be quiet.
7. (Female, 72 years old, seller)	<p>I have lived here more than 70 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I want to preserve Wat Suwannaram. 2. The roads are so narrow, if possible, I want to see: cars having access into the community, or improvement of the roads, and having more parking lots. 3. I want to have more public space to do more activities, exercise. 4. People can visit Wat Suwannaram more.
8. (Female, 61 years old, seller)	<p>I have lived here more than 20 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I thought Stone ware, and Wat Suwan, should be preserved. 2. Besides, public space near the pier should be developed, particularly the pathway from the pier, accessing into the community. 3. The road signs and other signs would be improved for tourists. I want to see more tourists come to my community.
9. (Female, 19 years old, seller)	<p>I am a student, studying at vocational school. I help my family, selling garland during weekends.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am OK with the current situation, but I want more privacy because there are very noisy from the motorcycles passing by. 2. Anyway, we should preserve the stoneware, tropical medicine shop, noodle shop. 3. As the sky train will start operating, it might be possible that more pollution may be generated, and the community will be moved out.
10. (Female, 67 years old, seller)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drug trafficking is our community problem. Some of our kids are addicted. I want to see this problem solved. 2. The community market was dried out. Partially, it was because not may tourists visited; partially, the sellers are getting old and stop their business. 3. I normally go to the nearby market (Sa-la num ronn). 4. In the afternoon, there are some kids playing on the small roads, and not many villagers talking in front of their house. 5. If the market is revitalized, I can sell some products.
11. (Female, 64 years old, house worker)	<p>I am 64 years old and was born here. My income is from taking care of my grandchildren and the laundry.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The community is so quiet. When I was young, it was lively. 2. People are moving out. 3. Villagers rarely talk to each other as before. 4. I want to see improvement of streetlights; some parts are dark and there are drugs. 5. There are some tourists visiting the market, but I want more, I can sell my products.
12. (Female, 70 years old, retired)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the past, there were many people who came into the community. The Market was full of people, such as venders, commuters. They came by boats, stopped at the pier, before going to Thonburi, Siriraj hospital, or Phra Nakorn (Bangkok). 2. Since Sa-la-Nam-Ron market came closer (close to Thonburi train station), people have moved there. 3. Here has not been as lively as before.

Interviewee	Transcription (Thematically Divided)
13. (Female, 77 years old, shop owner)	<p>I have been here for more than 50 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. But the factory is more than 200 years old, since King Taksin (2310 B.C.). All people in the community made the stoneware. The name Ban Bu is from the sound of hitting the stone (bu-bu-bu). You could hear when you entered inside the community. 2. The house was one floor house, made of wood. There was a big fire, which burnt 50 houses in the year 2549 B.C (2006 CE). The factory also went on fire. 3. Now, the factory is closing down. It does not have staffs, nor relatives to continue making the handmade stone bowl. It will re-open as a museum.
14. (Male, 61 years old, retired)	<p>I've been here more than 40 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have commuted by motorcycle. 2. I have heard that sky train will be here soon. The station may not be far from our community. It may be better for the community to get into the city. 3. The area may be busy.
15. (Female, 56 years old, seller)	<p>I have been here more than 50 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I commute by bus. 2. I walked across the rail track which is dangerous. 3. I want to see improvement in the community, too. A Community Fund should be set up in order to help us. 4. No public space for children. Small children cannot play inside the football ground, because there are bigger kids playing. The small kids run around small roads. 5. I am sorry that many heritages nearly vanished. The temple is OK, but other parts are not well preserved.
16. (Female, 69 years old, retired)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The temple is very outstanding and attractive. Many people come to ask for it, particularly not to join the military service. If they succeed, they will wear loincloth and run around the temple for three rounds, as well as shouting happily. So, there are many people who come to ask for this (not to join the military service) every year. 2. The commuting inside the community is suffering. Roads are small, only motorcycles can pass, but cars, no. Cars have to park around the temple. 3. In the past, we went to the south by train, also west, to Kanchanaburi province. 4. I think to develop this area we need wider roads.
17. (Female, 61 years, seller)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I used to sell sweets at the floating market, but now the market has closed down. I moved to the 100 years market. I also take care of my father (cataract eyes). Only at the weekend I went to sell my products at the Taling Chan floating market. 2. Most of the community members are the elderly and children. The young generation work weekdays. They come back in the late afternoon. So only the elderly and children live here. 3. Wat Suwannaram is the highlight. There is a story about war during King Taksin. Some parts also fought and died here. <p>If there is sky train station around her, it will be busy. We can sell foods and other products.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. I want more tourists stopping at the pier or Wat Suwannaram. Before there were tuk-tuk (three-wheel taxi) carrying tourists into our community. Now, just a few. I want more tourists; we can sell more. <p>We can have more money. Sometimes, tourists come by bicycles who went from Siriraj museum to Royal Barges Museum.</p>
18. (Male, 56 years old, working at the train station)	<p>Have lived here for 10 years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I don't like drug trafficking. I want to get rid of them. 2. I also want some public space for the community. 3. I also want to preserve the steam engine to be shown.
19. (Female, 83 years old, retired)	<p>I am not from here, but moved here long ago with my family, to sell products.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the past, there were taxi boats, long tailed boats, a canoe from Prachan pier to here, now stopped. 2. No market, no people.

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