

Nang Loeng Community

1. Background of the project

Nang Loeng community is a small community situated in one of Bangkok's historic districts "Pom Prap Sattru Phai". The community was founded 200 years ago, from an empty field located between "Rob Krung" canal and "Phadung Krung Kasem" canal in the ancient time, Nang Loeng has become a culturally diverse area of Thai and various ethnic groups of Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese and Chinese residents. During the reign of King Rama IV and King Rama V., density of population had increased gradually, since then Nang Loeng became a center of trade and famous entertainment area for over 100 years.

However, in the past several decades, Bangkok city has been developing significantly in all aspects and Nang Loeng community has been recognized as a thriving entertainment and trading place in early time of Bangkok and still visible as one of Bangkok's oldest community in Thailand history. The community is the place where many historical places are located such as the Nang Loeng market, an architecturally unique market reflecting a traditional way of folklore, the Sala Chaloerm Thani Cinema, a wooden built cinema which is another reflection of the area for entertainment during the early 20th century. There are some old temples such as Sunthorn Thammathan temple and some ancient arts such as Nang Loeng shrine; these are remaining few and rare memorable places & soul of the community which are well deserved for preservation. Nang Loeng community's way of life is very harmonize and sustainable. While absorbing some changes and development due to the modernism and high technology applied, people are getting familiarize and enjoy the new way of living, still the interaction and unity of the community are key elements in helping the Nang Loeng community to maintain its traditional way of life. Moreover, the community preserves and promotes the traditional activities, cultural arts and performance such as the "Chatri" old folk dance, just to keep these arts alive and not dying along the time. Even though Nang Long's folks have been residing in the community for more than 20 decades from generation to generation; still they are only the tenants without ownerships.

Bangkok city is now a major regional force in finance and business, the most parts of Bangkok are filled with skyscrapers and residences of over eight million population. Its rapid growth amidst inadequate urban planning & infrastructure systems, limited roads have resulted in heavy traffic congestion. The public mass transportation then becomes the solution in solving this critical problem; thus, many projects for mass transport are in operation with many more are under construction or planned by the government and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. This would certainly support and beneficial to the economic growth but in the same time causing major potential impacts to many old preserved communities including Nang

Loeng community. Unavoidably, the construction is going to take place soon and will have to surrender the old buildings around Lan Luang intersection to make its way up into a station of a subway. This area could be transformed to conform to a higher land value and modernization of the development as well.

2. Formation of community

The formation of the communities in the past was in the character of the village which appeared as traditional routes such as river and canal or occurred at various points in the form of node that have the landmark at its center. Later, when the transport development started, group of buildings began to grow along the transport route changes, facing in different directions with the original building.

As the population increases gradually, space was filled with residential buildings and became a community. Each household support each other in quite sustainable way but at the point of time that number of households increased significantly, this has caused disorderly crowded and congestion in the community. Buildings along the street became a shop house for commercial usage while the old buildings along the canal began to deteriorate turns an area into a slum conditions. With changes in social & economic conditions, the residents who mostly are temporary tenants seek for opportunities in being workers in commercial bodies and this has turned out into the community's lose in its sustainability and in this case (construction of the mass transit project), some space will be created as fully commercial space or be expropriated to build the infrastructure. An unbalanced development will impact the old community that should be conserved, every single unit that was dismantled doesn't mean just the buildings that were destroyed but we're one step away from our cultural prosperity.

3. Project issues and condition

Having settled down in the community for over 200 years, but Nang Loeng's inhabitants are still temporary tenants without ownership in those lands and buildings. As the area is projected for construction of a subway station, the villagers will be directly affected by this project or may have to move out from their community. Moreover, the project will bring along the rapidly changes to the community and can upset the balance and preservation of the community by placing a very large program into an area filled with smaller and delicate program.

The purpose of this project is the overlay layer within the area, layer of ownership but the aspects of different ownership, property ownership and cultural ownership. Despite not having the ownership of the properties, Nang Loeng's inhabitants settled and developed the area in cultural way which is a passive invisible layer that made this area highly valuable. (Value of the area cannot be measured only by profits

based on the belief of capitalism) The community leaders and villagers themselves have strong wish to live in the community where their ancestors lived their life in a simple and sustainable ways from generation to generation, thus, the concept of this project is not to create a new way of living but to distinguish the two layers apart for clarity and sort the relations programs to suit their lifestyle and fill in the gaps of this sort with new programs that promote quality of life and economic opportunities at the same time. Soon as a large public program comes into the area, what to be followed is number of guest user including new activities that knew from the first or may unintentionally occur. These will affect the privacy and traditions of the community and its residents but in the same time create opportunities for commercially trade and channel for presenting the ancient heritage art of the community.

4. Project Analysis

The site is located in Pom Prap Sattru Phai district on Larn Luang Road, if heading west will lead to Ratchadamnoen road and Bangkok's famous attractions such as "Wat Phra Kaew" (temple of the Emerald Buddha) and Khao San road. Heading east will lead to Petchaburi district and Phayathai district respectively and connected to the main transportation system and attunement with place for teenagers, such as Siam center and Siam paragon, while the area itself has attractions like "Sunthon thammathan" temple and "Sommanat" temple, also included is a route for cycling.

The community consists of various units together under the relationship which arrangement and shape up were disorganized over decades. To develop the area, it is necessary to analyze/inspect the original buildings in order to determine the profile of the new elements to be placed into as well as to find the best solution/direction for the arrangement of the old elements. Categorizing by the usage of space of old program, it's clear that the existing program consists of residential area, socializing, work, shops and homes of artists, all are assembled on ground layer and connected together by a narrow circulation which sometimes people in the community tend to relax or socialize in these areas. Creating new programs overlay to an existing circulation by ignoring the relationship between the old program may not be appropriate. The arrangement of the program with regard to level of correlation will make these overlapping programs to be isolated out more clearly and get a wide and clear circulation back and regenerate a ground layer that will be transformed to a "Living Gallery" (description will be discussed in the next chapter). As the site is a triangle and buildings were placed irrelatively to each other results in a reading of site's axis quite confusing but if we consider it from surrounding, the most influencing axis would be projected form a religious landmark such as temples, which itself was placed in relation to the minor road that connected from an inner to an outer road which divided the site into few plots enclosed by row-houses. So this axis should

be used in the design more than the axis parallel to the road, which makes the project receive an interesting open view from the road.

5. The Design Concept

The idea is to arrange the old programs under new relationship to cope with the impact to be occurred by the construction of transportation systems that overlap with the community. Also, to maintain the sustainability of the community and organize programs that happen unintentionally by the circulation or gaps in community and take an advantage of the restored space caused by the movement of these programs. Accommodating new activities to harmonize the traditional way of life and modern ways to live together in the period by synergies and sustainability is also one of the key elements.

The Design approach started by applying a grid onto the area to assist in orderly arrangement of the individual units themselves and with the circulation as well as other programs that are available by raising programs that have unnecessary relationship with a ground layer, such as a private residential area. To build up a new layer of community while maintaining the original program beneficial from ground layer, such as shops, restaurants, art house house, community dance hall, community leaders' house etc. in the way they are, these programs would have interact with the new usage of space and new guest users, assembled together in a "Living Gallery" on the ground layer.

The benefits receive from the arrangement of the new units together in an orderly manner is to get back and utilize the wasted space. The condition of these old adjacent Single-Mass buildings cause a niche between the buildings and results in loss of space and is often be the source of the garbage pile. By bunching these unnecessary stacked walls together also make the reclaimed material be available for using in the future.

6. Construction and Materials

The main construction material of the project mentioned above is all reclaimed materials in the community which can be removed in pieces and reassembled, With villager's skills in wood, including plywood, hardwood, galvanized plate for making building and community façade, this can be arranged into the slot reinforced concrete which is the main structural material and the cheapest and easy construction can be done by general construction workers together with the community's labors. The cost of general concrete construction in Bangkok does not exceed 10,000 baht per square meter. The concrete construction alone can be calculated by volume of concrete used by the unit of cube.

In addition to that, an important aspect of this idea is to take advantage from the construction of the

infrastructure. The construction is usually left behind a lot of junk materials and in some cases the contractor companies have to hire workers to clear these junk materials away from the site. These scraps comprising various modular materials like broken brick, block, concrete and concrete debris can be converted into a dust to be mixed as the wall material. Moreover, these K-Block have a porous and lightweight, material properties with low thermal mass can act as a thermal insulator. Also, all ceiling materials and ceramic tiles left from the cut can be used to decorate the walkway and the bathroom wall. Despite the poor conditions, wooden molds that left behind from concrete casting can be cut into little wall material or divided into smaller pieces to compose built-in furniture. As for the steel bars left over post-tension process with some length of about 2 meters, although it cannot be tied to reinforce concrete but with the paint welding together, it can be recycled as railing or used as interior materials & even an interior lamp. This initiative in using of these materials will not only reflect in saving a possible budget but most importantly it will promote the collaboration and unity of people in the community.

7. Living Gallery (Additional idea for Nang Loeng Community)

Extra idea of this project is to use the ground layer space for preserving and displaying Nang Loeng's way of life in the form of "Living Gallery" by using this exhibition space in passive way. Creating a space that draws the tranquility and contemplation in the mind of the visitors by using both intentional and unintentional forms, preserving the historic buildings associated with cultural roots as much as possible and defining a new path to connect with the road and the node address with intention to create a quite friendly space but imposing at the same time, not by size but with the dimension of space allow visitors to have the freedom to use the area in different way from other exhibition space. Gallery visitors must be follow 4 rules, 1. Admire with respect. 2. Observe in silence. 3. Learn and understand by oneself. 4. Leaving without traces.

8. Summary

This project is the arrangement of elements in the community that were not planned in the early time. To cope with the changes and development of the city, within a limited area, separation of the layers of civilization and cultural elements need to be clear to find a space for living together happily. Research was undertaken through the survey and interview arranged with the people in the community, it's clear that people are satisfied and happy with their current living condition and community. Unavoidably, the community will be disturbed by the unbalanced development and consideration from the disadvantages of the old community format, thus, the key challenge is how a designer can do as an architect and be able to recommend appropriate solutions and tried to turn the disadvantages from this construction into advantages as much as possible and then think in terms of aesthetics. The concept can be applied or adapted to both the selected site and other sites experiencing the same problem as well.