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The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy Paradigms in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Despite sustained policy interventions, Thailand continues to face significant challenges in providing adequate and affordable housing for low-income communities. The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the paradigms underlying Thai low-income housing policy, an aspect that has been largely underexamined. These paradigms—defined by specific ideas, values, and beliefs—underpin policymaking processes and have influenced policy effectiveness. Through a qualitative analysis of three case studies—Din Daeng Flats, Klong Toei Slum, and Baan Munkong Projects—this research highlights the coexistence of two contrasting paradigms. The National Housing Authority (NHA) adopts a supply-driven, top-down approach, while the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) emphasizes a demand-driven, participatory model.

Findings reveal that this duality has both hindered policy integration and offered flexibility for adaptation. However, the absence of a unified housing policy for low-income groups exacerbates issues such as land disputes, funding shortages, and limited access to housing. Additionally, the rise of a rights-based paradigm driven by NGOs has shown potential for fostering negotiation and community development but faces barriers from entrenched power structures, particularly around land ownership.

Keywords: Low-Income Housing Policy, Policy Paradigms, Supply-Driven, Demand-Driven

Introduction

For over seven decades, Thailand has faced the persistent challenge of securing adequate housing for low-income residents. This issue is particularly acute in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, experiencing the nation's highest population growth and slum formation. Despite numerous government initiatives targeted at Bangkok, slums continue to exist. While some studies suggest a decrease in the number of slum settlements (Pornchockchai, 2002), the nature of the problem in Bangkok has arguably become more complex. Given its centrality and severity, this study focuses on Bangkok as a representative case to examine approaches to slum resolution in Thailand.

Extensive research by Thai and international scholars has analyzed the causes of government inefficiency in slum housing programs. These studies often critique project content, implementation, or the ineffectiveness of market intervention or populist policies. However, a critical gap exists in understanding the underlying policy paradigms that govern decision-making processes. This study aims to address this gap by examining the paradigms that shape Thailand's low-income housing policy and their potential contribution to the persistent low-income housing problem in Bangkok.

This study aims to investigate the evolution of low-income housing policy paradigms in Thailand, focusing on whether significant changes have occurred over time and identifying the factors or events driving these transformations. It seeks to explore the foundational knowledge, beliefs, and values underlying these paradigms to better understand their influence on low-income housing policies. Additionally, the study intends to provide insights that support comprehensive policy reviews, addressing the paradigmatic assumptions shaping Thailand's state approach to low-income housing while moving beyond immediate solutions and project-level critiques.

Literature review

To develop a conceptual framework for this study, three strands of literature are reviewed: (1) Peter Hall's concept of policy paradigms and subsequent research that employs Hall's ideas to examine housing policies; (2) changes in low-income housing policy in Thailand; and (3) changes in the policymaking process of the Thai state.

1. Peter A. Hall's Policy Paradigms

One of the seminal works that has significantly influenced scholars in the field of policy studies is Peter A. Hall's "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain" (Hall, 1993). Hall introduced the notion of a paradigm, drawing from Thomas S. Kuhn's framework, proposing that policymaking communities operated within a structured set of ideas, roles, and tools—what he termed a "paradigm." Hall's examination focused on shifts in macroeconomic policy in England from 1970 to 1989, with policy documents from the finance and treasury sector serving as the primary unit of analysis.

Hall has identified a three-step process in paradigm shifts within policymaking. Initially, there has been a modification of basic policy tools, aimed at addressing existing issues while retaining the overarching policy objectives. Subsequently, new systems and tools have been developed, often necessitated by persistent problems despite previous adaptations. However, the core policy objectives have remained unchanged. The final stage marks the emergence of a new policymaking paradigm, characterized by the implementation of new tools alongside the establishment of new institutions and reconfigured relationships within policymaking entities. Hall has underscored the sociopolitical nature of paradigm shifts, emphasizing their occurrence within the public sphere and their dependence on external influences exerted on the policymaking community.

However, subsequent scholarly examinations of Hall's framework have identified two additional considerations. Firstly, there has been a recognition of the relational dimension of policymaking, particularly concerning the impact of global dynamics on domestic policymaking processes, wherein external influences have necessitated internal adaptations and may have led to paradigm shifts. Secondly, it has been noted that the emergence of a new paradigm does not always entail the abandonment of the old paradigm. Instances of coexistence or oscillation between old and new paradigms have been observed, influenced by factors such as internal constraints within the state apparatus and differing policy perspectives among governmental entities.

These insights have been corroborated by empirical studies spanning various political contexts, including socialist regimes in China, liberal democracies in the West, and developing nations. Works by scholars such as Yonghua Zou (Zou, 2022), Ya-Peng Zhu (Zhu, 2013), Jules Birch (Birch, 2021), Kathryn Howell (Howell, 2016), Patrick Wakely (Wakely, 2015), and Lalita Kamath (Kamath, 2012) have contributed to a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in policymaking paradigm shifts.

2. Low-income housing policy in Thailand

Low-income housing policy can be construed as a mode of market intervention by governmental bodies. Accordingly, this paper has categorized the theoretical concepts and empirical works investigating Thai government policies for low-income housing into three distinct groups.

The first group of studies asserted that the housing market in Bangkok was not failure, particularly concerning the provision of affordable housing tailored to individuals' financial capacities and income levels (referred to as Affordable Housing). This contrasted sharply with findings from other developing countries (Dowall, 1989), indicating the robustness of Bangkok's housing market. Moreover, it suggested that increased state intervention exacerbated rather than alleviated housing challenges. This inefficacy was attributed to the Thai state's lack of proficiency in knowledge and understanding, as well as the absence of coordination among governing bodies. Past interventions in the housing market had been primarily driven by political motives, economic objectives, or state interests (Pornchokchai, 2014). Furthermore, the governance structure in Thailand operated within a patronage system, where power dynamics among politicians, bureaucrats, and capitalists influenced policymaking. State intervention often exacerbated urban poverty issues, disproportionately benefiting the elite class (Sheng, 2002). Consequently, this group of studies advocated for a reduction in state intervention in the housing market, advocating instead for the facilitation of private sector involvement in housing production, with the state playing a regulatory role to ensure market efficiency.

The second group concurred that the housing market was failure and asserted the necessity of effective government intervention. Notable contributions in this category included the work of Manop Phongsatat (Phongsatat, 1996) and a study conducted by a group of academics from the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University (Academic Service Center Faculty of Architecture Chulalongkorn University, 2009), which focused on the development of organizational models for housing development. This body of research synthesized insights garnered from the operations of the NHA, offering a comprehensive overview of three decades of housing development initiatives targeting low-income populations in Thailand. Of particular interest was the incorporation of interviews with numerous administrators and experts operating at both policy and operational levels. These interviews encompassed perspectives derived from extensive experience within diverse organizational contexts. As such, this compilation of viewpoints shed light on various aspects of government housing development policies, including concerns regarding institutional inefficiencies and inter-agency coordination challenges. Additional issues addressed encompassed decentralization strategies, monetary and fiscal policy considerations, tax measures, urban planning imperatives, and the impact of political fluctuations on policy implementation. Advocating for more effective state intervention in markets, this group proposed measures aimed at enhancing the efficacy of government interventions.

The third group has regarded housing for low-income as a matter of right. States and markets have been perceived to fail in resolving issues solely through the utilization of tools or mechanisms. This perspective posits that the housing problem is inherently rooted in power relations within Thai society (Visetpricha, 2019), particularly concerning the distribution of land resources and capitalist economic development, which has not fostered societal justice (Gomin & Subsingh, 2014).

This viewpoint has not merely advocated for reforming or altering urban landscapes; rather, it has advocated for a fundamental restructuring of political, economic, and social relations, with a significant emphasis on reshaping decision-making processes regarding urban space construction. Such restructuring has necessitated alterations in power

dynamics. Urban dwellers, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have been asserted to have the right to demand participation in city governance and urban planning processes. This has entailed prioritizing user needs over resident eviction and implementing effective democratic mechanisms for city governance. Furthermore, it has been proposed by this group that low-income people collaborate to cultivate bargaining power or participate in formulating urban development policies.

Conceptual Framework

To comprehend the Thai state's paradigm for tackling low-income housing issues – a problem with intertwined economic and social dimensions – this study adapts two broader conceptual frameworks and historical underpinnings of Thai problem-solving approaches. By reviewing relevant literature, key paradigms employed by the Thai state can be categorized as either vertical or horizontal axes.

- Vertical Axis: Top-Down or Bottom-Up Decision Making

The top-down approach emphasizes centralized decision-making and state intervention. Policies are formulated at the national level and implemented through hierarchical structures. On the other hand, the bottom-up approach prioritizes local participation and empowerment. Policies emerge from community needs and are implemented with significant local involvement.

- Horizontal Axis: Conservative or Progressive Agenda

This conservative agenda emphasizes Buddhist traditional values, social harmony, social capital and community base development. It may prioritize stability and adherence to existing social structures. On the other hand, the progressive concept emphasizes rights to the city, focusing on balancing power between the people and the state, and democratic processes. It may advocate for social change and challenge existing power structures.

It is crucial to acknowledge that this categorization does not imply a rigid separation. In reality, these concepts often demonstrate ambiguity, where the lines between these frameworks can be blurred, and fluidity, as these concepts are not static; they can evolve and influence each other over time. This framework serves as a starting point for analyzing the Thai government's paradigm for low-income housing. By examining specific policies and projects through this lens, a deeper understanding of the underlying assumptions, values, and power dynamics that shape Thailand's approach to this critical social and economic issue can be acquired. Based on the two critical factors mentioned above, four types of paradigms can be identified.

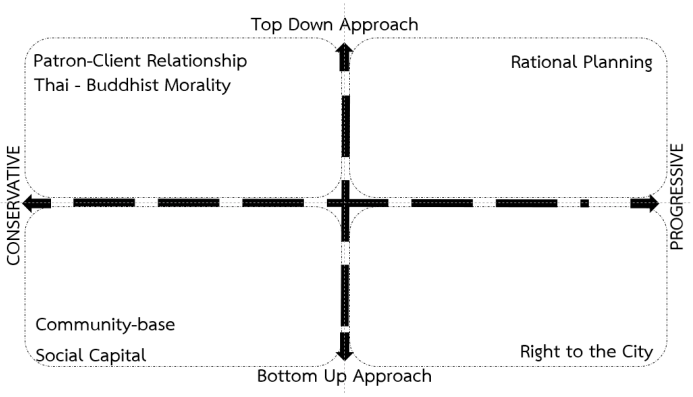


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

1. Top-Down, Conservative Approach: Patronage and Buddhist Morality

Thailand's patronage system, based on a top-down governance model, relies on hierarchical relationships where power flows from elites to lower-ranking individuals in exchange for loyalty. This system, noted by Akin Rapeepat (2005), creates unequal power dynamics in social welfare policies. Scholars like James C. Scott (2009), Andrew Walker (2012), and Phongpaichit and Baker (2004) have examined its impact on the country's sociopolitical landscape. Scott explores how marginalized communities resist centralized authority through "state evasion," maintaining autonomy outside formal state structures. Walker highlights how rural populations engage with the state through negotiation rather than resistance, often navigating unequal distribution of state resources. Phongpaichit and Baker emphasize how entrenched power relations and cultural norms perpetuate inequality, limiting grassroots empowerment. Their work shows how these dynamics affect policy implementation, particularly in housing and urban development, where top-down approaches often ignore community-driven solutions. Together, these scholars provide insight into the patronage system's enduring influence on governance and policymaking. However, around the year 2000, a shift emerged with the rise of NGOs promoting self-reliance within communities, challenging the verticality of the patronage system.

Meanwhile, Buddhist teachings emphasizing kindness and compassion towards the less fortunate usually motivate the Thai elite to engage in patronage as a means of merit-making (Netipo, 2024). This historically manifested in public services like education and healthcare. Concerns remained, however, regarding the potential for this system to degenerate into a form of "clientelism" devoid of Buddhist ethics. Netipo identified a concerning shift during the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) rule (2014-2019). The patronage system, once associated with Buddhist morality, allegedly became an instrument of control, employing intimidation and violence, highlighting the potential for abuse within this traditional approach.

2. Top-Down, Progressive Approach: Technocratic Development Planning

Thailand's economic and social development plans, guided by the "technocrats" during the Cold War, were heavily influenced by support from the United States. These plans prioritized industrial development and fostered the private sector's role in economic growth. This top-down, progressive approach reflected a synergy between technocrats and the bureaucracy, operating above the elected government.

The end of the Cold War and the rise of global market capitalism introduced new pressures for decentralization, human rights, environmental protection, and free trade. These forces challenged the traditional, centralized bureaucracy's ability to serve the people effectively. While the Thai government attempted incremental adjustments, this approach generated internal conflicts within the state apparatus and between the government and citizens. The influence of technocrats waned after the era of General Prem Tinsulanonda (Samudavanija, 1995). However, their role re-emerged with the rise of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) in 2014. Technocrats and bureaucrats regained influence in strategic planning, shaping national development policy to this day.

3. Bottom-Up, Conservative Approach: Community-Localism

Puey Ungphakorn's critique of top-down, industrial development models led to the establishment of the Rural Restoration Movement in 1967 (Nartsupha, 1990). This movement emphasized the inherent strengths of Thai rural communities, their social capital based on mutual aid and self-reliance. It challenged the view that these communities needed solely top-down intervention for development. The 1997 economic crisis further spurred interest in community-based approaches. Critics argued that prior development models, heavily influenced by Western concepts, had failed to ensure broad-based prosperity and social

harmony. This critique resonated with the Sufficiency Economy philosophy of King Rama IX, which emphasized self-reliance, moderation, and social well-being over unbridled economic growth. This bottom-up, conservative approach advocates for decentralization of power and increased community participation in decision-making. Proponents believe communities can manage their own resources and development trajectories effectively. They call for changes in laws, policies, and government procedures to facilitate this shift (Wattanasiritham, 2003). This approach prioritizes social harmony, stability, and sufficiency over rapid economic growth.

4. Bottom-Up, Progressive Approach: Right to the City

The Right to the City movement, drawing on the work of critical urban theorists Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, emphasizes the right of all residents to participate in shaping cities (Visetpricha, 2020). This approach prioritizes the social value (use value) of urban space over its market value (exchange value). Cities should not be commodities accessible only to the wealthy, but rather spaces shared and shaped by all inhabitants. The Right to the City movement has evolved to focus on housing as a fundamental civil right. This includes support for powerful social movements advocating for mass housing development led by the very communities they serve (Boonyabancha, 2019). The vision is for governments and local authorities to act as facilitators, not solely as decision-makers, collaborating with communities to develop solutions through participatory processes. Achieving these rights requires collective action and pushing governments to adopt policies that prioritize housing rights for the urban poor. Advocacy groups work through negotiation and public pressure to achieve fair access to land for stable and affordable housing (Gomin & Subsingh, 2014).

Research Method

Based on the above conceptual framework, a historical, comparative case-study approach is employed in this study to investigate the evolution of policy paradigms over time, with their interactions with economic, social, and political contexts analyzed from the past to the present, utilizing a longitudinal approach to analyze evolution and cross-sectional analysis to explore contextual relationships of each component during concurrent periods.

Case study: The case studies were selected based on their operational longevity, allowing for the examination of policy evolution over time. Each case has experienced changes in project design, tools, and policies in response to Thailand's socio-economic and political contexts. The projects represent diverse socio-political settings and policy paradigms, such as top-down progressive and bottom-up approaches, offering a comprehensive view of policy dynamics. Additionally, the projects have adapted to shifts in political ideologies and economic conditions, reflecting the evolving nature of policy paradigms in Thailand’s low-income housing sector. Three case studies are thus selected, namely:

- The Din Daeng Flats Redevelopment Community Project: Presently operational, it embodies characteristics of a top-down progressive initiative.
- The Smart Community Development Project at Klong toei Port pursued by the Port Authority of Thailand. This also represents a top-down progressive approach.
- The Ban Mun Kong Project: Comprising five projects, this set of projects embodies characteristics of both bottom-up conservative and bottom-up progressive approaches.

It is noteworthy that all three case studies, within their historical context, exhibit fluidity in project ideologies, responsive to external contextual factors such as political ideologies, economic conditions, or opportunities for public engagement in political processes. These external forces inevitably shape shifts in project paradigms.

The data for the analysis are collected from two primary sources: policy documents and semi-structured interviews. Initially, the documentary research primarily employs content analysis, encompassing two core components. The first section examines key documents instrumental in shaping government policies, including the constitution, ministerial resolutions, national strategic plans, and national housing strategies. The second section focuses on documents originating from governmental bodies directly involved in executing housing policies for low-income individuals, such as the NHA and CODI. These documents include project blueprints and promotional materials.

On the other hand, the semi-structured interviews engaged with five distinct groups of stakeholders participating in the policymaking process of low-income housing, namely:

1. A group of five academic researchers who have conducted extensive studies and monitored the evolution of Thai government housing policies.
2. Ten practitioners from various governmental units and organizations, including the NHA and CODI, operating at both policy and operational levels.
3. Three non-governmental organization developers actively involved in grassroots community-driven housing initiatives.
4. Seven individuals directly impacted by housing policies.
5. Seven members of the representative council.

Research Findings

The presentation of findings is organized into distinct periods, reflecting the emergence of projects, organizations, or policy frameworks considered as pivotal shifts, tools, or novel institutions in tackling housing challenges for low-income individuals. These periods are delineated into three chronological segments:

1. The initial period, spanning from 1945 to 1971, marks the inception of Thailand's inaugural low-income housing endeavor during the tenure of Field Marshal P. Phibulsongkram, operating within the realm of social welfare principles. This era culminates with the establishment of the NHA.
2. The subsequent period, from 1971 to 2000, encompasses the operational phase of the NHA, characterized by a top-down progressive approach. It concludes with the formation of the CODI, which adopts a bottom-up conservative strategy.
3. The final period, spanning from 2000 to 2024, witnesses the activities of the CODI in conjunction with societal movements advocating the Right to the City ideology.

The first era of Thailand's low-income housing policy (1945 – 1971)

The impact of World War II, coupled with the rural-to-urban migration trend, led to an increased demand for housing among low-income populations, resulting in a rise in slum settlements in Bangkok. During Field Marshal P. Phibulsongkram's regime, the Thai government implemented extensive measures to assist and care for the populace, perceived as crucial to nationalism-building efforts (Samudavanija, 1995). The construction of the first low-income housing project by the Thai government commenced around the year 2493, alongside budgetary support for the construction of subsidized housing units, enabling low-income individuals to rent or purchase residences through various projects (NHA, 2024). As depicted in Figure. 2, these initiatives were categorized as welfare programs falling under a Top-Down Conservative paradigm.

The self-help concept advocated by the United Nations did not garner significant attention from the Thai government during this era. This was due to the inherent contradiction with traditional Thai cultural practices, where decision-making was predominantly centralized and leaders, especially those from the privileged class with ancestral ties to the pre-Thailand era, held considerable political power and decision-making authority above the populace

(Chiu, 1984). As illustrated in Figure. 2, Self-Help initiatives were out of the scope of Thailand's governmental paradigm.

In 1958, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat staged a coup, abolished the constitution, and established a dictatorship regime, primarily focused on suppressing communist activities to secure increased aid from the United States. Sarit established economic development planning units to secure increased aid from the United States. The national plan was inclined to benefit urban areas more than rural areas. Consequently, the growth of Bangkok absorbed the economic surplus from the agricultural sector, channeling it into the service and industrial sectors, a process that had been ongoing since 1946. As a result, the issues of poverty and income distribution were largely neglected. Although rural development had been a focus of the Thai government since 1950, this interest had been primarily driven by the United States government. The rural infrastructure development project was implemented as a strategy to mitigate the threat of communist insurgency, rather than as a means to address poverty and underdevelopment. These actions transitioned Thailand's governance from nationalism-building to development-oriented, emphasizing private sector roles. Despite political changes and ideological shifts in economic planning during this period, Thailand's policy makers continued to prioritize housing issues as primarily individual concerns rather than collective problems.

The emergence of social movement initiated by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Thai society began around the year 1967, with the establishment of the Thai Rural Reconstruction Foundation. In 1971, the Faculty of Social Welfare, Thammasat University, released vital statistical data reports and social science research findings, particularly focusing on the deteriorating conditions around Klong toei Port, Bangkok (Faculty of Social Welfare, Thammasat University, 2514). The dissemination of such documents highlighted the significance of addressing urban decay, especially around Klong toei Port, laying the groundwork for subsequent grassroots movements concerning housing issues for low-income individuals. As demonstrated in Figure. 3, these grassroots organizations emerged as Bottom-Up Conservative entities.

Khlong Toei Slum (1957-1971): Eviction and Resistance

The Khlong Toei case exemplifies the challenges faced by low-income residents during Era 1. Between 1957 and 1971, the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT) evicted approximately 3,800 households to facilitate commercial development. This top-down approach, lacking resident participation, generated significant hardship. The 1970-1971 demolitions marked a turning point. Villagers, for the first time, resisted eviction collectively by petitioning the Royal Household Bureau (Tangkorblarb, 2005). This bottom-up response, albeit within a conservative framework (seeking royal intervention), signaled an emerging sense of agency among low-income communities. The Khlong Toei case can be positioned under "Bottom-Up, Conservative" due to the residents' petition, albeit a traditional form of seeking assistance (Figure. 3).

Din Daeng Flats (1945-1971)

The Din Daeng Flats represent a contrasting case, reflecting the government's top-down, welfare-based approach during this era. Built on a former landfill, the initial wooden dwellings deteriorated over time. The Public Welfare Department, identifying a need for improved housing, initiated a project to construct five-story concrete flats, completed in 1974 (Wiwat, 2018). This project addressed the immediate needs of low-income residents but did not involve them in the planning or decision-making process. The Din Daeng Flats exemplify a "Top-Down, Conservative" welfare project (Figure. 3).

These contrasting case studies highlight the limitations and tensions within Era 1's housing paradigm. While the government acknowledged the need for low-income housing,

the dominant approach was top-down and paternalistic. The Khlong Toei case demonstrates the emergence of resident resistance, laying the groundwork for a more patronage approach in future eras.

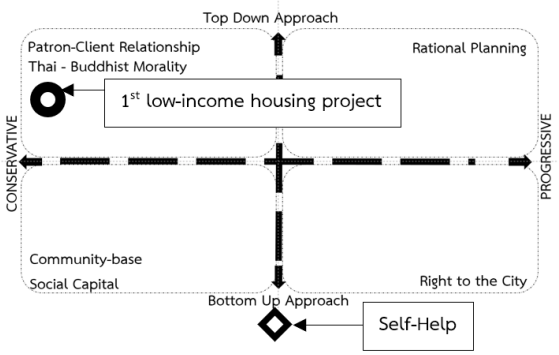


Figure 2. Pibulsongkram 1946 – 1960

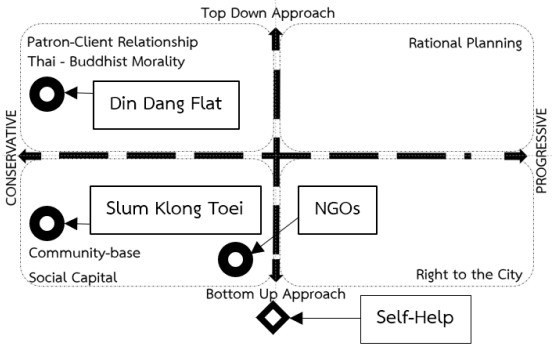


Figure 3. Sarit 1961 – 1971

Era 2: Housing under Political Control and Technocratic Influence (1972-2000)

In 1973, Announcement of the Revolutionary Party, in Declaration No. 316, established the NHA, reasoning that despite various state and private organizations already aiding in increasing housing, such efforts were fragmented and lacked genuine cooperation and coordination. While these endeavors aimed to enhance efficiency, in practice, they became political tools to garner support, aligning with traditional political trends in Thai society (Figure. 4 - NHA).

During this period, the NHA underwent a shift in perspective regarding housing projects for low-income individuals, influenced by two significant ideas from the World Bank following the HABITAT I conference in 1976: (1) partial housing development (site and service) to reduce costs for homebuyers and minimize government investment, a concept met with resistance from the Thai government at the time, leading to the suspension of related projects; and (2) redefining slum areas from threats to be eliminated to assets, termed Housing Stock. In 1978, the NHA established a Slum Upgrading office, aiming to physically upgrade slum communities and improve housing security through negotiating long-term land leases, creating employment, establishing loan funds, and forming community committees, illustrating a shift towards Top Down - Progressive policies (Figure. 4 – HBT1).

From 1980 to 1988, addressing the challenges of expanded and fragmented organizational mechanisms, the Thai government appointed numerous committees under the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan, including the National Housing Committee, tasked with policy formulation, problem-solving, legal amendments, and financial and tax-related recommendations to promote low- and middle-income housing development. This period marked Thailand's first comprehensive national housing policy in 1983, suggesting improvements to the national housing data system, land allocation laws, and private sector involvement in housing development for low- and middle-income groups. Notably, this era witnessed the NHA's academic progress and systematic planning, facilitated by knowledge and funding from the World Bank, enabling systematic project planning and implementation in a Top Down – Progressive (Figure. 5).

Between 1988 and 1992, the significance of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) diminished as governance and policy-setting shifted from state officials and military personnel to politicians and business tycoons who held key positions in ministerial cabinets, diverging from the previous bureaucratic structure (Uiyanon, 2021). Although political factions and business interests increasingly influenced the overall framework

of government administration, the presence of national-level committees and the establishment of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region Development Committee ensured a more efficient implementation of plans and policies related to investment, target groups, and managerial continuity within NHA, maintaining organizational status and continuity (Figure. 6 – NHA).

A pivotal change occurred between 1992 and 2000, during which the focus shifted from supply-side development projects emphasizing design and construction, to acknowledging the genuine needs of residents (demand-side). The inadequacies of previous projects to address both problems and actual community needs led to a reevaluation of housing development policies, with the 6th National Economic and Social Development Plan proposing the creation of a fund for urban poverty alleviation. A diverse committee including NGOs, government, and private sector representatives formulated new definitions of housing problems, shifting the focus from individual households to community-level challenges (Boonyabancha, 2019). Utilizing cultural capital and community-based development, this approach fostered community self-reliance (Figure. 7 – NGOs).

As a result of the government's promotion of private sector investment policies, the activities of the NHA manifested most prominently in community revitalization efforts, particularly through the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO). Aligned with this, in 1996, the HABITAT II conference aimed to ensure adequate housing for all through community-based development planning, becoming the mainstream development ideology. Consequently, this concept led to the establishment of organizations and community development efforts aimed at achieving self-reliance objectives in the future (Phovathong, 2023). UCDO functioned with a dual approach, valuing both community culture and rights, following a bottom-up, conservative, and progressive trajectory (Figure. 7 - UCDO).

The economic crisis in 1997 rendered the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan obsolete, prompting social reform discussions, particularly concerning constitutional amendments to address various rights such as women's rights, minority rights, and poverty alleviation. Notably, Four Regions Slum Network (FRSN) led significant efforts to advocate for state land leasing and propose appropriate housing improvements, resulting in SRT approval for 61 participating communities to lease land for residential purposes. This resolution set a precedent for community negotiations with the SRT (Figure. 7 – FRSN). This period highlighted the divergence in approaches among NGOs, with one group utilizing cultural lifestyles for community-based development (CBD), while another emphasized collective bargaining and rights awareness to guide state actions. However, both acknowledged the limitations of community mobilization in policy-making and recognized their role in addressing urban poverty intermittently, rather than achieving substantial policy influence (Figure. 7).

Slum Khlong Toei (1973 - 2000)

In 1973, during the tenure of Prime Minister Sanya Thammasak, a committee was appointed to assist in relocating residents from deteriorating areas in the Klong Toei port district. This committee comprised the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT), NHA, and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). This initiative was inspired by the success of addressing slum communities by providing flats for rental (Tangkorblarb, 2005). The proposal for the project was presented to and approved by the 9th King Bhumipol, as depicted in Figure. 4 – Slum Klong Toei: Flat Project. However, the PAT did not approve the land for the project. Subsequently, when the PAT sought land for port development, significant projects by NHA were initiated in the Klong Toei slum area. This included the 70 Rai project in 1986, which employed the Habitat II's concepts of Slum Upgrading – Land Reblocking and Site & Service, as illustrated in Figure. 5: Slum Klong Toei: Slum Upgrading. This project was highly successful, largely due to its ability to serve as a negotiation platform among various

organizations. Despite the large number of NGOs in the densely populated the Slum Klong Toei, social movements within the community largely aligned with political and particularly Teacher (Kru) Prateep, who played a crucial role in negotiating with government organizations (Figure. 5 – NGOs: Kru Prateep).

Din Dang Flats (1973 - 2000)

After being constructed for 30 years, the Din Dang Flats have been utilized ineffectuality due to the inefficiency in building management by NHA in 1990. The NHA recognized the deterioration problem of the buildings and acknowledged the increasing potential of the Din Dang community area due to infrastructure development and urban expansion. This led to the conceptualization of studying development and revitalization plans, which were then formulated into a master plan (Figure. 6 Din Dang Flat: Urban Renewal). The objective was to demolish and relocate 64 transferred buildings from the Department of Public Welfare and construct new buildings to improve the living conditions of the original residents. The proposal was approved by the NHA committee. However, due to the economic crisis in 1997, the NHA could only proceed with constructing four buildings as part of the Din Dang project. Originally, the aim was to accommodate the relocation project. Subsequently, the objective was revised to provide residential buildings for the general public (Figure. 6 Din Dang Flat: Urban Renewal). This led to a lack of trust among the populace regarding the NHA's operations, whether they were intended to benefit the residents of the communities or for the organization's own gain.

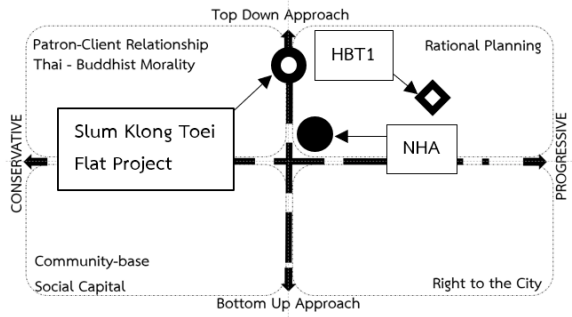


Figure 4. 1972 – 1980

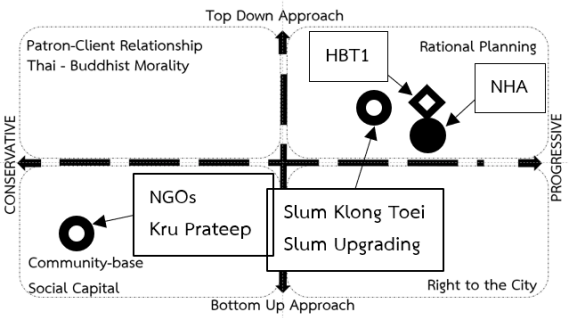


Figure 5. 1980 – 1988

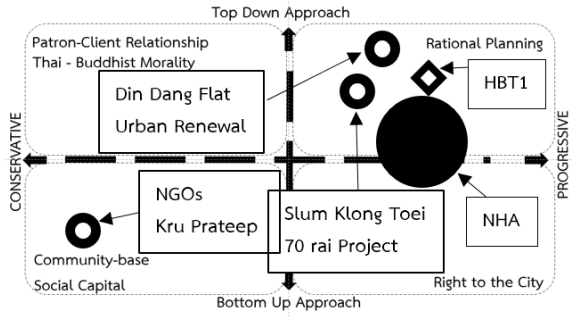


Figure 6. 1988 – 1992

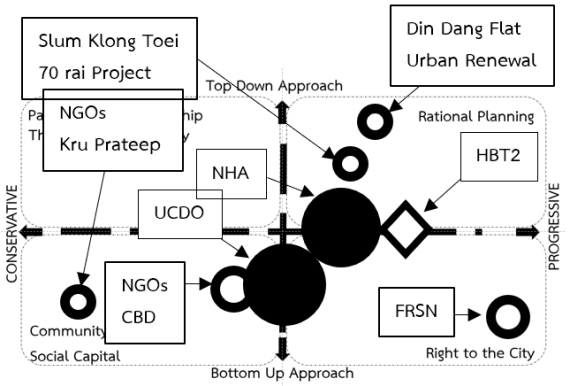


Figure 7. 1992 – 2000

Third era: Dual-track low-income housing policy paradigm (2000 – 2024)

The most significant project to date, which continues to influence current policy initiatives in addressing housing issues for low-income individuals in Thailand, is the emergence of dual-track community-based development projects. These projects, namely the

"Baan Eua-Arthon Project" and the "Baan Munkong Project," have been tailored to target specific groups, particularly those living below or at the poverty line.

The Baan Eua-Arthon Project, spanning a duration of five years (2003 – 2007), aimed to provide secure housing for 600,000 households capable of meeting installment payments. This initiative focused on constructing habitable residences along with essential community infrastructure, such as markets, childcare centers, and vocational facilities. Its success has been measured across dimensions encompassing socio-housing problems, economic stimulation, and urban physical development.

On the other hand, the Baan Munkong Project was devised for marginalized communities lacking reliable income. Specifically designed for such demographics, the government established this project, targeting slum areas. Ten flagship projects were designated to be completed by 2003, with subsequent years witnessing an increased scale of intervention, transitioning from demand-driven to supply-driven approaches. Financial management has become more flexible, aligning with community-driven and local-driven projects. The initial aim was to introduce ten flagship projects, followed by a progressive increase to 100 projects in the second year (20,000 units), and subsequently 500 projects annually for the subsequent three years, totaling 300,000 units (CODI, 2013).

Although the initial implementation of the Baan Eua-Arthon Project posed challenges for NHA in terms of budgetary constraints, land issues, and project sales due to its economic stimulation and political objectives, which were incongruent with the accumulated knowledge throughout NHA's operational history (Interview, Rassami Chaianant, March 22, 2024), subsequent revisions and problem-solving efforts since 2015 have enabled the NHA to provide bonuses to its staff for the first time since its establishment (Interview, Ubolwan Subyabun, March 24, 2024). Illustratively, Figure. 8 Baan Eua-Arthon Projects, originally conceived as a Top Down – Progressive approach, has transformed into projects operating within a Top Down – Conservative.

Currently, the official policymaking process in Thailand is supposedly governed by the 20-year National Strategy, particularly the Housing Strategy, formulated during the military government's tenure, established following the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) coup. This period witnessed heightened governmental emphasis on addressing inequality and societal justice issues, merging with traditional cultural values, notably Buddhist ethics.

Furthermore, the adoption of global agendas such as HABITAT III and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is explicitly outlined in the national strategic plan (Figure. 8: HBT3). Contemporary housing policies emphasize the interrelationship between housing and various multidimensional issues, including employment/income, family warmth, resource distribution, community-based development, and social justice promotion, culminating in the establishment of specialized organizations for policy implementation and oversight. This approach is deemed to represent the most significant housing policy orientation to date. In addressing housing issues for low-income individuals, the project's target groups are categorized based on income levels, with each organization assigned specific tasks corresponding to these income groups. Consequently, this categorization may potentially impact the resolution of housing issues at a more systemic, city level rather than merely addressing project-based, spatial, or income group-specific challenges (Interview, Nuttawut Usavakovitwong, March 3, 2024).

Slum Klong Toei (2000 – 2024)

Efforts have been made on multiple occasions by policy-makers to develop the land owned by the PAT into a commercial area, positioning it as a major economic hub within the ASEAN region due to its potential. However, a significant number of local residents, coupled with the political fragility of the government and the negotiating power of leaders who can

establish networks with both political and traditional elite classes of Thai society, has enabled slum Klong Toei to persist despite uncertainties. Amidst the likelihood of redevelopment projects, driven by the necessity to stimulate the country's economy, the latest decision by the Cabinet in 2024 endorsed the redevelopment of the Smart Port Smart Community project. In this instance, the local community, led by Kru Prateep, proposed the management of residential areas alongside the port land with a land-sharing concept. Currently, negotiations are underway, with the prevailing sentiment that this would represent a return to traditional Thai societal power dynamics in addressing this issue once again, that is to submit a petition to the Royal Palace. (Figure. 8 Kru Prateep)

Din Dang Flats (200 - 2024)

In 2016, the initial phase of the Din Daeng Flats rehabilitation project was officially launched, utilizing the absolute authority of the military/police state during the NCPO era. This phase was completed within two years. Previously, the project had been stalled for over 30 years due to resistance from residents with vested interests in the Din Daeng Flats. These residents claimed that the NHA aimed not to improve living conditions but to capitalize on the economic potential of the land, which had increased in value with urban development. The NCPO military regime, possessing absolute power, did not require negotiations and effectively quelled all opposition. It was publicly stated that the project proceeded with public participation (Interview, Wichaya Siricharoenklong, February 28, 2024), under the concept of "Understand, Access, Develop," (เข้าใจ, เข้าถึง, พัฒนา) inspired by the royal principles of King Rama IX.

Currently, influential local figures have re-emerged following the establishment of a democratically elected government. This time, their resistance will not be confined to traditional methods of negotiation and protest. Instead, they plan to employ modern media strategies, with a final recourse prepared: submitting a petition to the Royal Palace should their demands not be met.

Baan Munkong Project 2000 - 2024

The CODI Baan Munkong Project from 2000 to the present has served as a case study, examining five projects categorized into pilot projects (2), NCPO-era projects (1), and current-era projects (2). Through this study, it has been evident that CODI maintains a clear vision of utilizing community-based development and community networks to address its own issues. In the initial stages of the Baan Mankong Project, CODI's pilot projects were operated smoothly and successfully. Both communities involved in the pilot projects have demonstrated resilience in problem-solving, addressing not only housing issues but also income generation, education for children, elderly care, and knowledge sharing with other communities. However, it is notable that land acquisition in the early stages has relied heavily on benevolence, requiring negotiations with landowners for project implementation.

Subsequently, during the military government's administration under the NCPO, although the Baan Mankong Project initially aimed to construct houses through cooperative groups, it evolved into a unit-building project aimed at achieving political favoritism rather than fostering community organizations.

In the current period, CODI has had to confront both fraudulent cooperatives established to deceive villagers and land issues, particularly conflicts with railway land, which CODI lacks the potential to negotiate, exacerbating challenges faced by the community. In such instances, Four Regions Slum Network (FSRN) have demonstrated greater potential. To empower villagers to assert their rights, CODI has also been compelled to negotiate with political actors aiming to enforce policies to meet unit quotas. Furthermore, the transmission of the community culture paradigm from policy executives to operational personnel has

proven challenging. Consequently, Figure. 8 illustrates the steady shift of the CODI paradigm towards a Top Down - Conservative approach, diverging from its rights-based orientation Figure. 8 – CODI / FRSN.

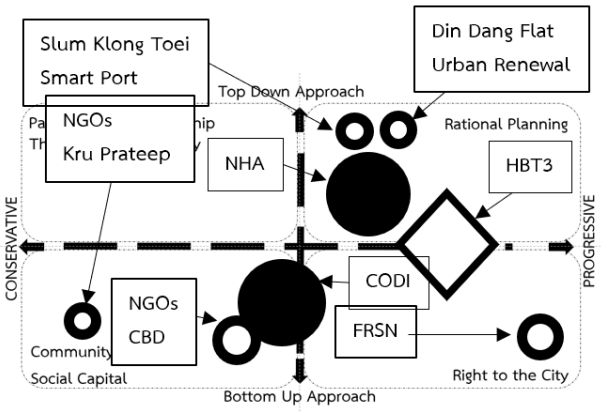


Figure 8. 2000 - 2024

Limitations

This study faced several limitations. Officers and staff within state organizations were restricted in providing or verifying information, leading to reliance on retired personnel, which may have introduced inaccuracies. In the case of CODI, clear insights were gathered, but this was an exception. The diversity of the Khlong Toei community hindered comprehensive analysis, as defining representative groups proved challenging, and survival strategies complicated data reliability. For the Din Daeng Flats Project, ongoing conflicts between the NHA and community leaders resulted in biased accounts, limiting objective information. Key organizations, including the Government Housing Bank and the Crown Property Bureau, were excluded, affecting the scope of analysis. Methodological overlaps further constrained hypothesis testing and interpretation.

Conclusion and Discussion

Slum Khlong Toei Community

The success of the 70 rai Project can be attributed not to the leadership of any singular paradigm, but rather to the collaborative influence of various factors. The rational planning approach championed by NHA was effective due to the leadership of Kru Prateep, who possessed a network of power relations within the patronage system. She played a pivotal role in bridging the community with political power and elite institutions in Thai society. Even in the present-day Khlong Toei Port Development Project, which follows a top-down, rational planning model, local NGOs, led by Kru Prateep, have negotiated land-sharing agreements with the Port Authority of Thailand, seeking to manage the land independently. This initiative reflects an ongoing effort to align local power with higher authorities, transcending the direct control of the Port Authority.

The Din Daeng Flats Project

The rehabilitation of the Din Daeng Flats Urban Renewal Project would not have been completed without the considerable influence of the military and police power held by the Minister of Social Development and Human Security during the NCPO era. The project was guided by a policy paradigm focused on process, public participation, and fostering public confidence, as well as promoting the royal philosophy. Those opposing the project were framed as mafias subletting rooms, with their objections dismissed without engaging

with the reasons behind their resistance. In contrast, opponents of the project, invoking a patronage paradigm, challenged the NHA for exploiting the poor, particularly in relation to rent increases resulting from the rehabilitation efforts. They garnered support from modern institutions, including the Human Rights Commission and Parliamentary Inspectors, and even sought royal intervention by preparing to petition the Royal Palace. The concurrent existence of these conflicting paradigms is not unique but rather a general characteristic of housing development conflicts in Thai society.

The Baan Munkong Project

The success of the pilot phase of the Baan Munkong Project was largely due to intensive grassroots efforts at the community level, with a focus on preparation, the establishment of learning networks, and participatory planning. The project leveraged community culture while also utilizing influential figures in Thai society to secure progress. Notably, the President of the Privy Council, General Prem Tinsulanonda, was approached to reduce land tax expenses, which facilitated the continuation of the project. The Secure Housing Project, situated along Khlong Lat Phrao, was also recognized as a royal initiative. The Boon Rom Sai community, in particular, highlighted the limitations of the CODI's work, which did not directly confront conflicts but instead aimed for compromise. Meanwhile, the state's role as a duty-bound servant of the people was affirmed through the engagement of the four-region slum network, which successfully negotiated with SRT to address local housing needs.

As a result of the evident breakdown of project plans within the parallel supply-driven and demand-driven paradigms, they have been confined to specific departments. Additionally, paradigms have remained restricted to various levels within agencies, both at the policy and operational levels. Coupled with the persistent pull back towards the conservative paradigm, these conditions have hindered the integration of all low-income housing issues into a unified policy framework. Based on the study's findings, it has been revealed that the Thai state has never formulated a housing policy specifically tailored for low-income individuals. If the Thai government continues to constrain the implementation of housing policies for low-income populations, an array of separate issues, including land disputes, funding constraints, administrative challenges, organizational management issues, academic cognition gaps, construction technology limitations, and urban development planning and housing accessibility concerns, will be exacerbated. Until a new paradigm emerges, such problems will persist in Thailand.

The social movement process initiated by NGOs advocating for the right to urban living for low-income individuals has represented another paradigm capable of fostering negotiations with agencies at the project level. This movement has also instigated a shift in community development thinking among participating community members and government agencies that have recognized its potential. Frequently, CODI, NHA and RST has had to adjust project operations to align with NGO demands, not solely out of altruism, but also as part of a negotiation strategy centered around public interest. However, this emerging paradigm must strive to strike a balance between the entrenched paradigms of both the NCPO and the prevailing Thai cultural power structure. Under such circumstances, this rights-based progressive paradigm has faced limitations in influencing participation in housing policymaking, primarily due to entrenched powers, particularly concerning land, posing formidable obstacles. NGOs have recognized their inability to wield sufficient bargaining power to effect change at that level.

Upon reflection on the concept of housing, it has become apparent that the Thai state lacks a precise definition of its meaning. Instead, interpretations of such meanings vary according to contextual conditions. This ambiguity provides an opportunity for different groups to negotiate meanings and collectively explore new avenues for divergent, parallel

paradigms to coexist. However, this equilibrium is effective only as a short-term problem-solving measure and should be regarded as a challenge that does not disrupt the cultural power relation structure of Thai society.

The Thai government should establish a unified housing policy that combines supply-driven and demand-driven approaches while addressing systemic issues. This includes fostering inter-agency collaboration, empowering community participation, securing land tenure, and promoting affordable land allocation. Innovative funding mechanisms and sustainable construction technologies should be prioritized, alongside capacity building for stakeholders. A clear legal definition of housing and a long-term strategy for urban development are essential to creating an inclusive system that meets the needs of low-income populations.

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