

Social Transformation and Access to Public Spaces Policy into Practice: a case study on access legislation for disabled people legislation in Thailand

Antika Sawadsri

PhD Student, Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle, UK

Abstract

This paper presents the analytical discussion of socio-cultural attribute toward disability policy in practice in Thailand. By providing comparative approach of disability policy, analysis of social structural factors and a case study of legislation in action, revealed that law enforcement in a certain social context are struggled with understandings of disability as well as social and political system. The influences of new way of thoughts toward disablement from either internal or external are intimated. This paper also explores a crucial role of participatory approach, which prioritized voices of disabled people in academic research.

Keywords: Disability Policy, Access Legislation, Social Context

Introduction

This paper looks at the implementation of disability policy in Thailand. Begin with making comparison legislation with more developed countries. But act as the exemplar for other countries which liked Thailand are on the road to modernisation. The study of public policy, basing on comparative approach, focuses on Disability Acts and legislations of three countries which are United Kingdom, United States of America and Thailand. It is important to note that this compare and contrast aim not to investigate accessibility guideline to adopt within Thai context. Instead, this paper intends to understand mechanism and key factors which either facilitate or impede law implementation process in accordance with given Thai socio-political context.

From previous study (Sawadsri 2007) about consideration of adoption Universal Design guideline, which was developed in developed countries to practice in wheelchair users' residents in Thailand. It found that the extent of acceptance of home modification not only depend on financial capacity, but socio-cultural dimension, relationship in family and attitude toward disability also have significant role to play in the way to apply one concept within another social context. Accessible public spaces, full participation and equal involvement for and with disabled people have been heavily discussed in both geography and planning studies. An interesting point is that attitude, understandings and other social attributes evolve around disability such as politics are the key factors that can impede effectiveness of policy implementation (such as works of Oliver

1990; Gleeson 1997; Imrie and Kumar 1998; Gleeson 2001; Imrie 2001; Imrie and Hall 2001; Tavee 2005; Watchara 2006).

This paper is divided into four sections. First, a comparative approach toward disability policy between more developed countries which are USA and UK and the less one, Thailand. The second part analyse social change toward its attributes such as acknowledgement, understandings, and attitude toward disability, interpretation of religion doctrine, culture and politic which impact on development of enabling spatiality for disabled people. The third section then provides a case study which mobilise access policy into practice at different contexts. A case-study focused on a movement in pushing access legislation into action in urban area. There was a social movement to urge renovation of public walkway in city centre in Bangkok. Study found key issues in terms of implementation gaps which are lacks of acknowledgement toward disability and needs of accessible public spaces of disabled people. In addition, the study experienced deficiency of participatory perspective among different sectors during legitimating access policy and legislation as well as ineffectiveness of cooperative works among stakeholders at different levels such as between policy decisionmakers and practice actors and public workers and the end users. Nevertheless, research found interesting mechanism in the process which facilitate embodiment of accessible public pathway. This paper therefore, provides analytical respect of significant actors and structure of such mechanism.

The final section propose consideration of socio-cultural and political elements which provide opportunities for enable public environment for disable people beyond typology and physical features of accessible facilities. In this sense, this process can be seen as part of social capacity-building which empowers and leads to social inclusion.

Methodology

This paper aims mainly to understand conceptualisation of issues revolves around disability and access law implementation. This study bases on qualitative approach. Key attributes comprise of socio-cultural and political factors which impact on societal attitude toward disablement, needs and extent of accessibility in built-environments of people with differences. In doing so, this research stands on Grounded Theory approach by attempt to understand what is happening in the study context and how the key actors manage their roles. This research observed cases of policy implementation process through fieldwork, conversation, and in-depth interview. Comparative approach is used to compare and contrast disability policy of USA and UK, which influenced on Thailand's public policy for disabled people. Analytical comparison of disability policy complements with information from interview with policy decision makers and disabled persons.

Majority of research information gained from depth interview with individual and focus group discussion with people with and without disabilities. Integrating with transcribing information and postal questionnaires were used to understand bigger picture of understandings and conception

toward disablement in Thai society. Another part concerned with study of needs and extent of accessibility in public spaces of disabled people by conducting fieldwork and participant observation. Such information integrates with data from focus group discussion about experience in accessing public spaces of users with mobility and visual impairment. Online questionnaire from were used in complementing with depth interview in order to explore wider group toward needs of enable built-environment for disabled users. The final part of method, this study conducted fieldwork observation to gain data about the process of access legislation into action. Researcher and researched involved in the project as partnership. In this case, depth interview and focus group discussion were also used to investigate either facilitated or struggled factors to such implementation process.

Social Transformation, Development, and Disability

The wide range of changes of economy, social, and politic can be seen as crucial factors for disability and physical environment development in Thai society. It has been seen that Thailand has been modernized since the influence of colonialization period (1860s to beginning of 1900s), however, Englehart (2003) argued that it is actually transformation and adaptation to handle with the rapid change toward globalization economic. Thailand had been a Kingdom under absolute monarchy for over seven centuries. In 1932, the country officially became a constitutional monarchy, though in practice, the government was dominated by the military and the elite bureaucracy. Administratively, Thailand is divided into central, provincial, and local administration. Fourteen ministries represent the central administration. Each ministry is divided into departments, divisions and sections. The changes which substantially impact on societal and physical environment took place in the beginning of 1970s. Thailand has had ten versions of National Economic and Social Development Plan since 1963. The plan was emphasized on increasing national income per capita of agricultural workforces who were gradually introduced the coming industrialized-based economic. The plan also gave rise to the major urban development, especially the public infrastructure (Office of National Economic and Social Development Plan 2006). In addition, for over three decades, despite the significant amount of impaired persons in industrialized production system, there has been consider number of people with disabilities from fatality and injury in road accidents due to increasing of logistic and transportation. An interesting evident toward cause of impairment during 2000-2002 was that seventy-five percent of road accidents involved with motorcycle, and of that 72.6 percent were impaired (Yordphol 2004). Furthermore, the physical development of capitalist city can be seen as merely serve for 'civil' who work in industrialized spatiality or able body and youth, whom were viewed as the important force for country development. In contrary, the rest of citizen such as children, elderly in particular with the people with disabilities who have been excluded from their community because they were considered failure to serve their workforce in such industrious society.

For Thailand, public policy has been modified in accordance with the dynamic of world around her since the mid-1980s. The forces of economic globalization contributed powerfully to Thai

democratization in the 1990s. In particular after the currency collapse of 1997, Thailand was deeply involved in international trade and financial networks (Englehart 2003:265). Therefore, it is essential to consider the impact from international movement toward Thailand administrative. For disability public policy, after the successful establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, disabled Thai networks achieved the Rehabilitation for persons with Disability 1991. The influential conception of disability laws have been derived from international perspective, particularly from the western countries. In the recent Disabled Persons Empowerment Act 2007, for instance, the definition of disability is based on human rights, which replaced the previous individual and medical approach. Consequently, it is undeniable to take comparative approach in policy study in the case that one disability conception is practiced in another distinct social context.

Public policy and disability issue: comparative approach

This section public policy toward disability development is taken into account in the respect of compare and contrast between Thailand and its forerunner countries; the USA and the UK. Previously, a work of Tavee (2005) compared and contrasted three disability policies of the USA's Americans with Disabilities Act—ADA 1990, the UK's Disability Discrimination Act—DDA 1995 and Thailand's the Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act 1991. This work, which based on typology analysis, focused on investigation socio-cultural factors, which affect its ontology and practice of disability provision and law. Some interesting points apart from those issues are the intent of policy that is influenced from different conception of disability such as understandings, belief, attitude and notion toward disability, economic, social norm, as well as politics can influence implication and implementation of disability law.

Anywise, the comparison of those two disability acts from the USA and the UK unintended to provide exemplary policy regulation for Thai disability act. Instead, on one hand, it aims to understand the attribute in certain social context, which can be considered in the way of law implementation process. On another, this is because disability act and provision in Thailand have been influenced from disability movement in more developed countries, in particular from the USA and the UK. While the ADA and DDA of those countries are based on human right, Thailand access legislation is based on a medical and regulatory approach. Therefore, the essential question is that if disability act in Thailand have been adopted from forerunner countries, where have different socio-cultural factors, what are key elements and process to provide opportunity for enforcement access legislation in accordance with Thai context.

Ontology of disability act: root of conception impact on practice process

There are three disability Acts from the USA, the UK and Thailand are taken into consideration in this section. It comprises of American with Disabilities Act 1990, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the Rehabilitation Act for Disabled Persons 1991 respectively. For Thailand, although major part of the content of such act was abolished recently (Wallop 2007), in particular with

disability definition, the ministerial regulations which were issued in pursuant of previous act are still legitimised.

American with Disabilities Act, which was issued in 1990, which its conception can be seen as, rooted from Holy Bible which belief that human is a creation of god. All humankind, therefore, have equity in terms of human being to the god. Furthermore, this law was issue following with the Civil Rights Law in 1964, which intend to eliminate discrimination toward race, religion, and so on. If such act regardless of rights of people, consideration of understandings socio-cultural dimension are presumably dispensable. In this sense, American disability law emphasised on four essential aspect of disabled people, which are; rights for employment, rights for access to travel facilities and transportation, rights to access to public accommodation, goods and services and rights to access to telecommunication. For the UK, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 emphasized on creating equality and opportunities for people with disabilities. These two disability policies centralised on social welfare which authorized by the state. In general, the content of ADA and DDA share similarity toward value of disabled people in terms of humanity and pride. Tavee supports this notion that it is in accordance with 'universal valuation' (2005:50-51) which equalised humanity integrity.

However, the intent of disability law of those nations which based on human rights can be seen as a challenge when adopt its intention within the rehabilitation act of Thailand. Due to the conception of disability in Thai society has been widely discussed as it still bases on individual, merit and charitable approach (Puangkeow 2005; Topong 2006; Watchara 2006; Montian 2007). Furthermore, a major part in the Rehabilitation Act 1991 can be seen that *"it should be practice based on compassionate and voluntary in action"* [Extract from interview, Benja, law committee, 3rd August 2007]. Undoubtedly, rights base approach in the intent struggled with its implementation. Anyone who urges the public to eliminate discrimination and request for penalty may create conflict with their community. Information from interview with Earth, the activist with mobility impairment supported this point that *"the one who cries for their rights can be blame as aggressive and not be a good 'recipient'"*. The work of Tavee (2005), hence, proposes the extent to consider moral approach in development of disability provision in Thai context. In addition, he also mentioned the essential of participation of disabled people in policy decision-making process and practice. He added that solely regulating and providing welfare may be inappropriate in some context because;

"...there are other factors such as poverty in the way of implementation as well as level of commitment is low[...] most of [Thai] disabled persons need very basic facilities, their physical bodies are not ready to reach public services, therefore, help from the state mostly end up with cure and patronage. Traditional society still based on merit and charitable approach. Enforcement of law may lead to conflict within their society. The power of the state authority oversees actual needs of civil society. There is ineffectiveness of cooperation between different sectors as weak as lacks of

understandings public policy of local authority. [...] either law or policy, therefore, are merely the solution at the end of problem, it is a tool to chase follow the problem but not the prevent one (Tavee 2005:50-54)".

Montian, the activist with visual impairment and the policy decision maker supported above statement that;

"Thai society is Vedananiyom (pity orientation). Therefore, development of human rights needs to be parallel with democracy development of Thailand at the same time. Pitiful oriented very much depends on individual's decision to give. It is a kind of relationship of power, but in vertical linear. I think we should consider the horizontal one, which is accordance with new social conception. I prefer participatory approach which provides opportunity of people to have dialogue in the way to solve the problem rather than confrontation." (Extract from interview, Montian, a senator with visual impaired 10th September 2007)"

Statement above provides some thoughts in a certain context, where notion of disability exists. It is essential to regard distinct social elements of the way in which law is implemented. Although for the advanced social welfare system, in some countries, found it fail to guarantee full empowerment disabled people in the society. For instance, a disabled people organization in the USA, Northern Regional Center for Independent Living, New York, requested people with disabilities to go to work. Whereas the disabled individual concerns that if they have work status, they potentially lost their social security benefits (TWEAN News Channel of Syracuse 2006). Similarly, with a case in Thailand, where the disability act was enacted, but still struggle with societal attitude and awareness can be seen as a challenge. Werner Treder, a German resident with mobility impairment who lived in Bangkok sued the property owner about absence of parking space for disabled occupants. According to the regulation 2001(Ratchakitchanubeksa (the Government Gazette) 2001), the court upheld rights of access to his apartment. He won the case so that the owner ought to provide parking space within thirty days. *"The spirit of the regulation was good, but there should also be punishment of violators"* he commented (The Nation Multimedia 2006). This case can be considered as a historic case toward rights of disabled people in Thailand. It revealed lacks of acknowledgement of disability legislation as well as awareness of needs of disabled persons of general individuals in society. In addition, this scenario can also represent another struggle of law enforcement in Thai society.

Disability definition and access to built-environments

The notion that embedded in the intent of disability law can be considered in its given definition. 'Kon-pigarn' or 'disabled person' which is defined in Thai language shared similar perspective with the USA's and the UK's in the perspective that disability concerned with physically and mentally

impairment. Such impairment also effect long-term to pursue daily living. For the definition in the Act of Thailand, there is a new definition of 'disabled persons' which views disability as an interplay between deficient body and environmental context around persons with impairment or social model of disability (Ratchakitchanubeksa (the Government Gazette) 2007). This recent disability Act, which was issued in pursuant with the previous Ministerial Regulation 1994, specified 'disabled persons' based on individual or medical approach and categorized disability in five typologies in terms of physical and mental impairment (Ratchakitchanubeksa (the Government Gazette) 1991). For disabled people who fit in any category are legitimated in receiving cure and medical service from the state.

Although the definition of three countries has common ground toward meaning of disabled persons, there is distinction of law enforcement process. For Thailand, before the recent act in 2007, non-compliance is not unlawful and no penalty for the violators. On the contrary, to the USA, for instance, albeit American disability law has its various details in punishment in different states, it is clearly specified that it is law-abiding for who fail to do as it promised. Nevertheless, there also has a gap in the content of Thailand disability legislation, which based on merit or moral statute. In other words, the rights of disabled person tentatively depend on individual consideration and it could not guarantee for what promised. A comment by Benja, the policy decisionmaker and the government official, added a reason that *"[enforcement] depends on individual moral and extent of one's capacity to do [...] there are lacks of voices of disabled people in the way issuing the law. Authority with non-disability still has mounted of power amongst the committees."* (Extract from interview with Benja, a law committee, 3rd August 2007)

Aforementioned above, it can be understand that access legislation for disabled people has gaps in implementing as it basing on individual morality. There is no specified penalty for non-compliance and tend to be reconcile in enforcement. For instance, in the recent Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act 2007 (Ratchakitchanubeksa (the Government Gazette) 2007), exemplified options for whom who fail in obligation the section 33 to employ workers with disabilities legitimated to contribute financial for disability development foundation. At this point, it gives rise to a great barrier in creating accessible workplaces. The conception toward access facilities to the builders and the owners impede enforcement of access facilities. Architects, builders, and building owners who view that those accessible facilities cost extra expenditure, more expensive than funding for the foundation commented that *"[about building ramp instead of stairs] ...actually I've never calculated how much extra cost to pay, but I think I will require more space for a ramp. The owner has never seen their clients with disabilities, and then it is not worth for them [to invest]"* (Extract from interview with Atipu: a project architect; 27th August 2007). This comment represents attitude of the owner in preferring financially action rather than modifying their properties to be accessible for rare disabled users. As the furniture exporter affirmed this pecuniary conscious that *"...works in my factory are unable to hire disabled workers because it is too risk, the environments are not facilitated for them. Anyway, I'm pleased to pay annually for the*

funding foundation according to the state requested” (Extract from interview with Bunpot: the factory owner; 11th September 2007)

Despite from the intent of the law can either facilitate or impede its implementation, the definition and signification toward ‘Disabled Person’ in a society can reflect societal attitude toward ‘disablement’ in such community. To understand phenomena of disability development in a certain social context, it is crucial to understand its history and background. For Thailand, definition of disability in the respect of productive factors during the country development period, an individual with deficient body or mind had/has been perceived as ‘the taker’ who needs support from the state. Consequently, the state, in some respects such as cost and benefit oriented, may consider this situation as the national economic burdens. Likewise, this conception was discussed in Waranya (2005:7-8) toward Foucault: Power/Knowledge stated that power is not possess, it is exercised. In this sense, population was considered as a key struggle for the state to manipulate because they are important production forces. The common citizens, therefore, were ‘subjects’ for the state to control over, intervene, and adjust. Body of the citizens, hence, become new attributes not only toward economic status, healthy and toward weakness, but also extend of beneficial for investment. This included to what extent of citizens capacity to be trained.

Predomination of state as discussed above linked with ‘Eugenics’ conception had had widely spread around the world during the recent century. For Thai social context, in the late 1940s, a nationalism state leader, Field Marshall Piboonsongkram established a significant provision toward citizenship quality manipulation. This policy adopted perspective toward belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of a human population through statistical principle not only in order to signify desired citizen characteristics, it also attempt to limit and bound increasing of citizen with genetic defects. However, this plan failed and gave rise to the new policy. Thailand established public service provision for people whom were regarded as not ‘normal’ or ‘special’ and officially define them as ‘Kon-pigarn’ or ‘Disabled person’ first time in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons (Waranya 2005). Since then people with impairment or deficient have been legitimized as citizen.

The discussion above aims to provide essential factors to be taken into account in implementing disability law. One is the attitude or understandings toward disability, which linked to disability history in Thai society. Another is limit of economic capacity, which based on cost and benefits orientation. It is undeniable that key element in developing disability issue in the majority world countries revolve around poverty, in particular with accessible built-environments.

Thai Society and Disablement: importance of understandings the context

For several times, false notion toward disability has been/is constructed by society. Such misconception gave rise to oppression to disabled people as well as kept them partitioned from

human rights-based approach. Such notion are maintained *“by the false perception that disabled people are/were ‘takers’ and not ‘givers’ to the social system and society (Kitchin and Law 2001:296)”*. The previous section provided societal elements which effect on the extent of disability policy and law into practice. The following part, the role of belief, religious, cultural, and political influences and disability development in Thai society are discussed. Societal attributes, in particular the interpretation of religious doctrine, substantially play crucial role in the way to adopt one conception to practice in a distinctive context.

For Thai context, few works relevant with disability policy shed light on hidden social, and political elements [if some there are works of Tavee (2005),Roeder (2001) and Prayat (1997) so on and so forth]. Furthermore, those may lack of neither understandings nor realization of societal elements beyond the western context. Comparative study toward disability policy, therefore, needs to consider distinct socio-cultural factors. A recent work of Imrie and Edwards (2007:625) pointed that ‘Ethnocentric bias’ constituted absence of subject area toward disability research. They also recapitulated significance in considering socio-political and environmental context in the production of disabling spatiality. In addition, there has been plethora of socio-cultural foci in western context such as Europe and North America, which can influence on thoughts toward disability research elsewhere. For Ong, Back et al (2002) found that various dimensions in the respects of belief, culture, and religious doctrine impact on Medicare according to western medical principles for local patients in Singapore. They remarked that cultural elements such as way of family living influences on decisionmaking on extent of medical care from doctor. Their study also found that family member of the patient can make decision on behalf of the patient. Traditional belief, for instance, male value as family integrity lead family with eldest son has most power in decision-making for his family.

Disability in Thai society, thoughts and conception toward this issue have, in particular among archivists with disabilities, progressively transitioned from ‘normalization’, which impact on policy basing on individual and medical approach, to new conception that disability is no longer embedded in individual impairment. Instead, it is effect of environments or social model of disability (Montian 2007). However, new thought has been challenged with existing mindset in respects of cultural belief, way of life, as well as surrounded physical environments of disabled individuals. The key question toward extent of policy implementation in a certain context is continued.

In 2000, approximately ninety-five percent of Thai population is Buddhists (National Statistic Office 2004). Beside of Theravada Buddhism influenced belief toward ‘King’ as ‘god-like’, stratified, and hierarchical society from India. Thai society also obtained doctrines that believe in birth and rebirth, as well as acceptance result of action in the past for this and future life. ‘Kon-pigarn’ or ‘disable person’ in Thai society, for some people, have been perceived as an individual misfortunate who receives mal result from action in the past this or next life. As an informant with

mobility, impairment shared oppressive experience that neighbors in the community presumed her impairment as a result of fault action from her last life. She quoted a claim from her neighbor that *"...you must hit a frog's leg, that's why you can't walk now"*. In addition, religious representative underlined this view through Dharma sermon. Discussion with an informant on wheelchair raised a case about a monk who demonstrated a pilgrim with visual impairment as karma or result of shooting bird's eye in the past. However, at present, Thai society has transformed to 'Modernized' community. Buddhism can be newly interpreted, at some point, as mentioned by Einstein that *"I maintain that the cosmic religious is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research [...] if there's any religion that would cope with the scientific needs, it will be Buddhism (in Som 2008:126)"*. The doctrine meets new challenge. According to advanced development of modern western medicine, as well as new way of living has distanced Thai Buddhists from traditional religious principle and practice, a thought toward disability has changed. The earlier sample scenario of monk sermon ended with a response of the audience with visual impairment that *"If my blindness is proved as my result from the past, I shall take all of your donation money because I reckon that you owed me since last life"* [extract from interview with Paradon, wheelchair user, 26th August 2007].

Besides cultural belief toward disability, hierarchical and stratified social system also play significant role regarding implementation of disability law. For Girling, patron and client relations has long history in Thai society. The power holder has dominated the less one. In the respect of governing, such as bureaucratic values, 'Phu yai' or 'big man' is the patron, and the client is the 'Phu noi' or 'small man'(1981:37-39). To maintain the patron power, they have to display generosity and provide protection to the client. In this sense, a disabled individual has often been seen as the inferior, the society, therefore, view that they are the 'client' or the 'taker'. Furthermore, in some respect of religious interpretation, to give is to enhance power and wealth for the 'giver', merit-making such as donating money for disabled people can be widely seen in Thai community.

Aforementioned, understandings of disability among decision makers and authorities toward disability provision fused with individual karmic belief and social system, impact on policy decision-making and practice. Correction from impairment to be 'normal' is, consequently, an individual matter rather than society one. Notwithstanding, new idea of disability is emerging. In 2007, the new definition of 'Kon-pigarn' or 'disabled person' is established (Ratchakitchanubeksa (the Government Gazette) 2007). Disability is newly defined beyond individual problem, it yet extended as effect between impairment and surrounded environments.

In addition such coming idea toward disability understandings influenced on law implication and practice. The next section, a case study that focuses on implementation process in the given present socio-cultural context will be discussed.

Pathway Renovation Project: a case study of access law into practice

This section, how the existing legislation and new idea toward accessibility in built-environment can be implemented are explored. It begins with overview of phenomena that deliver opportunity for mobilising access issue into practice. It was described through range of evidences. The case studies comprise of successful achievement of accessible public spaces. Recently, after Accessibility in Public Spaces Ministerial Legislation was established in 2001 and 2005 (Office of the Prime Minister 2005), the prime attention has been focused on accessibility in public spaces for disabled people and the elderly. This section discusses the cases that mobilised by non-government bodies such as citizen, elite, and disabled people and their organisations. This group achieved accessible public spaces as this project planned because it has advantage in several dimensions, for instance, this footpath renovation project took place in Bangkok city centre, where has independent public administration structure, advance local media, residents who led the movement with acknowledgement of disability and so on.

There was a movement through the project “Footpath Renovation Project” on Rajadamri Road in Bangkok, a city centre in capital city of Thailand. The initiator, aimed to create liveable neighbourhood around the area he has lived.

The context: a non-disabled resident on Rajdamri road in Pathumwan district initiated this project. This road has footpath along its both sides for 1.6 Kilometres long. Apart from the location of the project took place in the central business area.

Process in movement: On 11th November 2007, it was the deadline of a project, which aimed to create accessible footpath for disabled people and the elderly in Pathumwan district. The project was started by communication the initial idea of the initiator with the head of Pathumwan district, who has been contacted with this project initiator for other issues such as noise pollution from construction site in the area he lives. Then the initiator was in contact with officer of a state enterprise ‘Thai Health Promotion Foundation’ to elaborate his idea about quality of life development concept through this project. At this stage, the disabled people’s self-help organisation was introduced as a project stakeholder. Although the prime focus on the project was to create comfortable pathway for residents in such area, it will be neutral reason otherwise, the necessity to the public awareness can be weak. Therefore, this idea has been developed for greater impact as the project initiator elaborated;

“... at the beginning, I was thinking about how to build public service spirit in the area I live. I intended to improve the quality of footpath so that it is comfortable to use as the Orchard Street in Singapore I’ve seen [...] when thinking about the coalition, it would be more interest if I claim the issue about creating walkway for the blind people rather

than for general users or visitors, which may be seen as luxury issue for someone.”

[Extract of an interview: Santi; Project initiator, 2nd August 2007]

Access audit: Since the idea has been developed and the disabled groups were included, the access audit was conducted. This activity was led by disabled representative from several disabled people organisations. The disabled representative from such various organisations played an important role in conducting survey through out the existing feature on the Rajadamri Road. The participants in access audit consisted of project initiator, person with visual impairment, wheelchair user, architect, government officials from Public Work Department and construction company representative. Its aim was to explore existing footpath condition can be accessed. Furthermore, together with the builder, it is to demonstrate how access can be built or improved through minor modification to install absented assistive features. The access legislation act 2001 was used as a tool in order to provide guideline for renovation to project stakeholders.

During the activity, by walking along the street as a group, it caught attention of general people who were passing by. It was not only an activity to observe physical barrier but also to perceive attitudinal one. As they hardly see disabled people around that area, therefore, for them, the reason of renovation of the footpath was sceptical. After the submission of audit report, it undertook joint review and agreement making among the participants. At this stage, the researcher took part in architectural team to present the feasibility of modification and design.

Networks and strategic alliances: the significant factors

The project initiator managed a collaborative discussion with project participants from several sectors. At this point, the title of the project was added that it was in the occasion to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the King's birthday. The stakeholders came from government sector, state enterprise, and private sectors consisted of head of Pathumwan district, representative from Water work, Electricity work, Telecommunication Company, building owners, construction firms, Architecture Company and so on. One of the key strategies of initiative in this project was creation of network. A multidisciplinary approach was created by integrating various expertises from different areas as above were generated. Electronic mails and mobile phones played vital role for communication in the network. It is important to communicate among coalition by e-mail because it gives way to mobilise the movement effectively forward as the initiator emphasised that “... *media in communicating such as group e-mail is really effective, it isn't only free of charge, but whenever the authority make commitment it also can't be deleted...*”. [Extract of an interview: Santi; Project initiator, 2nd August 2007]

The meeting successfully achieved agreement among different groups in working collaboratively to renovate existing footpath condition. The head of district arranged a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to be signed by all participants. The key agenda in this document focused

on commitment to get works done by each sector within certain deadline (11th November 2007). Signing in an open document can be seen as the way to move the change forward more effectively. The project initiator viewed this strategy as capable in forcing every stakeholder to pursue their works as they promised. Signing in written document is viewed as an effective tactic to sustain the outcome by the initiator when dealing with multiple responsible holders as he elaborated; *“Although all works are successfully finished, they [the public workers] might neglect maintenance systems in the long term. Signing in an open agreement like this can guarantee that the public will keep eyes on their works so that it is important to maintain those works in good condition”* [Extract of an interview: Santi; Project initiator, 2nd August 2007] However, not all stakeholders immediately signed in the memorandum of understanding. The public work representative, for instance, needed much more technical information before they could make a decision whether all works in their responsibility could be done within the given period.

Fund-raising: messages in the movement

During the stage of spreading the proposed idea around, the initiator aimed this project as a non-use of state's finance. The idea was to raise funding from non-governmental bodies such as the residents in that area, disabled people, and their organisations, owners of buildings and public. Sense of partnership was placed as a key goal of this project as the initiator explained;

“... if I need just a good footpath, it is easy to deal directly with the head of district alone, but how to maintain the quality of the outcome, how to create a coalition in the community, which are much more challenged for me. I want more than one road to be improved, therefore, it needed to include government sectors, media and particular with disabled people group so that they will fight for themselves [...] when people took part in something, in this case taking a share in the expense for renovation of street features, they will keep looking after it, hope it can sustain not only the physical outcome, but also the sense of belonging which connected to the community...”
[Extract of an interview: Santi; Project initiator, 2nd August 2007]

Besides of emphasising on creating a coalition through fund raising procedure, this project aimed to demonstrate a movement process to the public by non-governmental parties. This strategic method can be seen as an example of capacity building among citizenship. However, the project was sceptical by some stakeholders, in particular with disabled people group toward joint donation. Nevertheless, the project was claimed that it has a strength point of such a tactic that is acceptable in the way to achieve a pattern of mechanism in movement, which can be implemented to other circumstances. A disabled activist viewed that it can be presented as an interesting model in some context similar with Bangkok, as she commented;

“ ... I quite not agree with Rajadamri Project in the way that citizens have to pay for this because it's kind of double payment for getting something public done. [...] I would agree if this project is a temporary mechanism to present the state that the project like this is not too hard to get it done [...] this project can be good role model or pattern for some cities like Bangkok such as Pattaya, where have special administration structure...” [Extract of an interview: Earth; Disabled activist, 22nd August 2007]

Information dissemination: the power of media

The project initiator successfully extended the movement through effective communication resources. Through his e-mailing list, he circulated the content of movement and progress of the project to his social network. At this stage, the major media such as World Wide Web sites published the proposal of a footpath renovation for disabled people. During this stage, the initiator contacted with an English publication to generate his idea and progress of the project. As soon as this national newspaper published an article toward the new movement on a road in Bangkok city centre, more and more public work representative as well as private sectors presented their interest to join in the group. Considerable success of using media at this step was that the Bangkok Governor accepted to sign in the agreement and took the position as a project leader. A week after the news was published through out electric and paper prints; a daily news programme broadcasted the story of this project since it has been established on television at primetime [9:30pm]. The content of the news emphasised on the role of the Governor as project initiator.

The Footpath Renovation Project spent four months to achieve its goal. On the due date, it was announced as the open day of the first street in Thailand called 'Thanon-kon-sumpun' [a connection of people and road], which are accessible for disabled people, elderly and the cyclists. For the event in November 2007, the initiator announced through the print and electric mail group to extend the information about the open ceremony to broader group. In addition, on the day, the biggest group attend the event was the people from disabled people's network. There were several kinds of activities run by different group such as a concert by disabled people band, products by non-disabled organisations and so on. One of interesting activities was that the authority from various governments' departments, such as health department, district department, and public work department and so on, had a try with access audit as people with impairments. Some of the group used wheelchair to navigate around, some blinded their eyes used and white cane while they were participating in the event.

A key factor in this movement is that English newspaper influence on the motivation of project partners. For Thailand, has developed in the modern world, international attention impact on major areas. Conversation with a journalist of Bangkok Post found that the target of English language newspaper is mostly the elites in business sectors. A journalist added that *“The governor realized that considerable number of his voters shared the same target with our*

newspaper [...] this project is undoubtedly result with good effects, it is clever thinking of the project initiator to force the governor in this way”[extract from interview with Sujira, Journalist, 29th August 2007]

The role of disabled people: Is this project a new repertoire of law implementation?

Following the event, in the evening on the same day, there was breaking news on television channel broadcasted the event as a successful project which was initiated and run by the Governor and the residents on Rajadamri road. For the disabled people group, instead, the news reported that this group are the target users of this project. Not surprisingly, it goes accordingly with disabled activist concerned at the beginning of the project that they have to keep following with the progress in order to be part of the project “... our group need to trace with all paces of the progress, otherwise, they will forget about us, we need to be one of the mobilising partners rather than we are claimed as the receivers of this project.” [Extract of an interview: Saowaluk; Activist with mobility impaired, 3rd August 2007]

With the concern of the role of disabled group as mentioned, it is a result from experiences of disabled people when they work with non-disabled groups. Disabled people rather not prefer to be claimed that the construction of accessible features are only for them. In contrast, they expect to be seen as their achievement of the outcome is for all people in the society. In this sense, the disabled group are aware with some potential sceptical toward the use of this area in the near future.

Disabled people are sceptical about their role in achieving accessibility of this project. At the same time, however, the public agreed that this is a good project that it is based on voluntary mind of non-disabled people. The information which derived from online-questionnaires which was sent around to individuals in the project’s electric mailing list and disabled people networks’ websites, revealed that 34 percent of 47 informants perceived that this project mainly aimed to create accessible footpath for disabled people, and only 14.9 percent thought it is for general public.

Strategic tactics: Apart from conducted fund raising through prints and electric media, the initiator able to approach to a key elite via his social network. During the auction event which was organised by celebrity group(Oraya 2007), there was a letter which was sent from HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who offered to donate some fund. This cannot only be seen as a considerably driven factor among project stakeholders, it also conveyed that this project has greater important to the public. Consequently, there was increasing number of donators, in particular, who are celebrities such as artists, singers, actors, and some royal families. However, it is crucial to consider the key element of such factor. Although this movement was seen as a good model in mobilising change for better to the society, the process of fund raising and donation are challenged. In this regards, it is important to review the main aim of the project

initiator that is to create sense of social responsibility in urban context among citizens as he explained;

“... because the money of the state isn't belong to one particular owner, hence, the government officials need to be careful when they use those budget for the matter concerned with 'Civil'. They have to strict with the system, which takes long procedure in many cases. Then, there is a big gap between the government and the citizens. I want to help the government by not using their money, the system of the state is weak, and then it needs the role of civil sector [...] also this project will not use state enterprise's finance in order to avoid domination from them” [Extract of an interview: Santi; Project initiator, 2nd August 2007]

Nevertheless, the result of this project was viewed differently toward its process of that it is a kind of traditional strategy, which is based on charity approach. As a disabled informant elaborated in an open-ended question via online questionnaires that;

“This project will be a great role model because it was established collectively by various groups in the society. However, providing public facilities should be the government's duty. And also, there was a reflection from people with good will toward the donation and fund raising for disadvantage group that is a way to achieve 'boon' or virtue for them. Although it is good will, it lacks of well understandings from disabled people. If the government performs well on their duty, we wouldn't be called as 'disadvantage group'. It's because everyone has rights to access to all public facilities. [...] Is this right, if the government fail to perform their responsibility?” [Source: Anonymous informant with disability; online questionnaire, 17th December 2007]

In addition, there were relevant strategic activities alongside within the process of this project. During fund raising stage, the stakeholders disseminated awareness of disability and accessibility in public space issue through print medium. The initiator wrote his story with an extreme case about being refused by taxi service and wait by the street for hours with a wheelchair user. This personal experience emphasised on how important to understand people with difficulties and their needs. A wheelchair user also wrote a journal, which expressed insight perspective about value toward disabled people which has been misled by the society. Disagreement of taken 'Nam-jai' or kindness mind into consideration as it is a strategy to achieve social inclusion was published in partnership print and media. The researcher, in addition, also shared information from interview in an article, which focused on discussion of different perspective toward disability issue in Thai society. An interesting feedback from those written works was that the participants and general public began to share their self experience and opinion on electric platform, such as web board, electric forum and through group electric-mail.

After four months of the process, the pathway along Rajadamri road is successfully renovated. The key actors such as project initiator with non-disabled, representative from disabled people organisations, government official and authorities, property owners, and elites played crucial role and need cooperation across different sectors.

Conclusion

Although the sample project was not prioritized for disabled group, accessible pedestrian is successfully achieved according to the legislation. This project produces social movement to mobilize for change around the access issue. Ordinary people joined forces with more powerful citizens such as elites 'princess', media, and disabled partners took role to grab public attention. Eventually, the authorities drove the movement through reutilized charitable procedure. Such a component leads to the social movement achieving its goal as Tarrow (1998:23) summarized that contentious politics took place when the political opportunities broaden, when the potential of coalition is presented, and they reveal the opponent's vulnerability. It is clear that development of access implementation cannot be divorced from consideration of social attributes. The law implementation process, which attempt to be practiced in a transforming society, needed to consider its key actors as well as their acknowledgement toward disability. From the discussion above, crucial factors such as cultural belief, influence from western thoughts as well as key actors impact on enacting access law. Although hierarchical and stratified characteristic of social system still exist in Thai community, new idea and conception through modern economic and political force may bridge the gap of law implementation.

For further study toward disability policy implementation in any certain context, although globalization has been heavily mentioned, the next broader exploration suggested to consider existing socio-cultural elements such as understandings and history toward disability, social system and its influential factors. Most importantly, the opinion and experience of disabled people should be placed as privilege in considering in research concerning with policy implementation and enforcement. Achieving inclusive environments, perhaps, provide social integration to apartheid society.

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