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Political Ecology in Asia: Plural Knowledge and
Contested Development in a More-Than-Human World

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POLITICS OF URBAN RIVERBANK DEVELOPMENT:

THE CONTESTED CHAO PHRAYA RIVER PROMENADE PROJECT IN BANGKOK

Thanawat BREMARD



Fluvial transport during the Rama 5 period.

Source: Chao Phraya for All [facebook page](#)

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

I. Introduction

II. Project timeline and actors of the controversy

III. Policy coalitions

IV. 3 Communities to illustrate the heterogeneity of the territory

IV. Conclusion



I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S THE PROMENADE PROJECT ?



DETAIL DESIGN – CHAO PHRAYA PROMENADE : รวม 6 แผนงาน

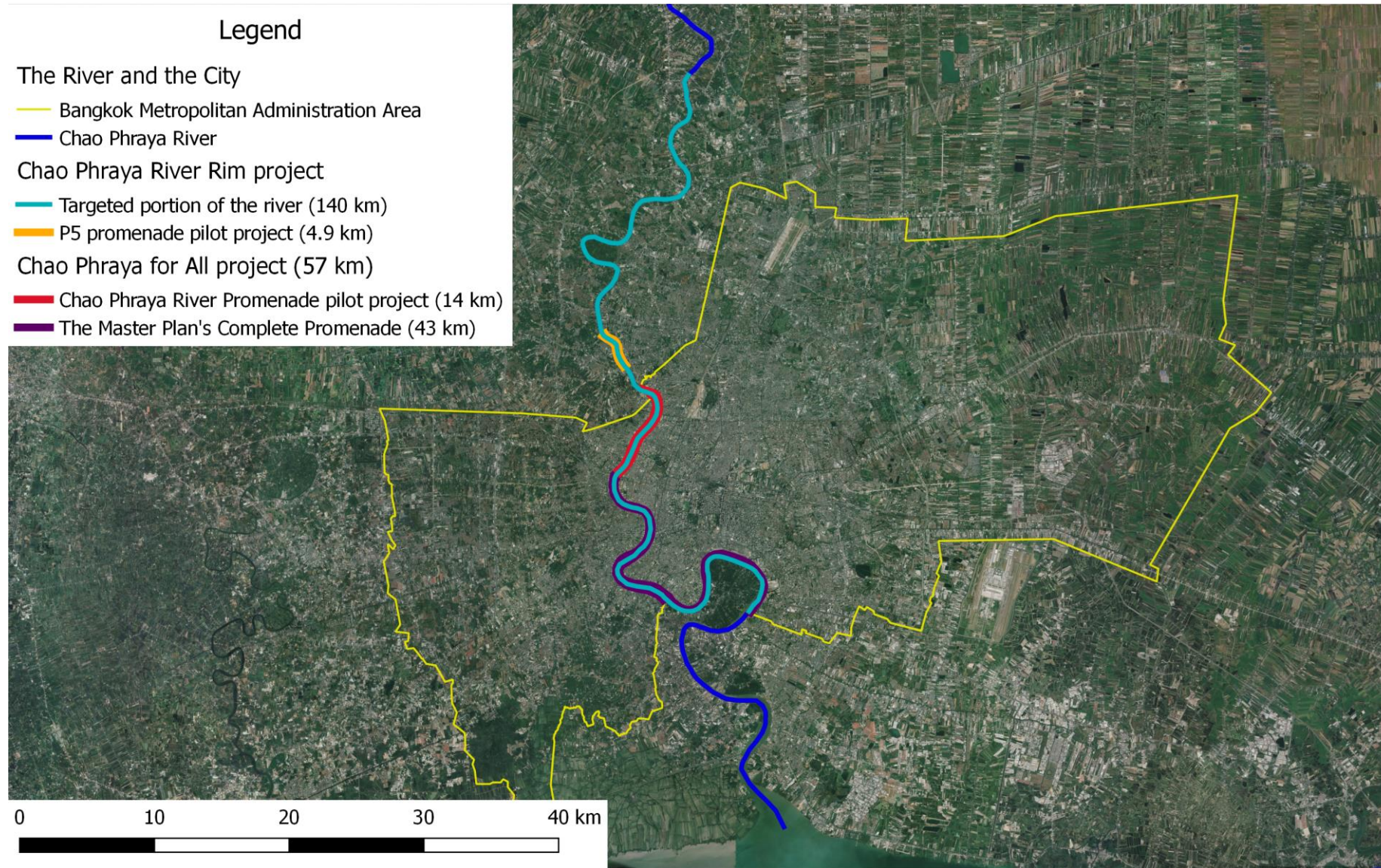
MASTER PLAN : รวม 12 แผนงาน

แผนงาน 1: เขววงบึงชีอ (Green Water)	แผนงาน 2: เขววงบึงชีอ (Green Water)	แผนงาน 3: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 4: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 5: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 6: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 7: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 8: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 9: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 10: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 11: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	แผนงาน 12: เขววงบึงชีอ (Public Park)	KEY PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 1.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 1.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 2.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 2.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 3.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 3.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 4.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 4.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 5.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 5.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 6.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 6.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 7.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 7.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 8.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 8.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 9.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 9.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 10.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 10.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 11.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 11.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> เขววงบึงชีอ 12.1 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.2 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.3 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.4 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.5 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.6 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.7 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.8 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.9 เขววงบึงชีอ 12.10 	

The promenade itself is one among 12 plans of the Chao Phraya for All (CPfA) project, corresponding to 10 out of 219 individual projects.

The Master Plan above is for the first phase of CPfA. If met with success, the project aims to develop the entire 57 km of riverside contained within the BMA.

The Chao Phraya for All and Chao Phraya River Rim projects





I. INTRODUCTION: WHY LOOK AT THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT ?

An infrastructure embedded with discourses, practices, ideologies and history (Bichsel, 2016; Star, 1999).

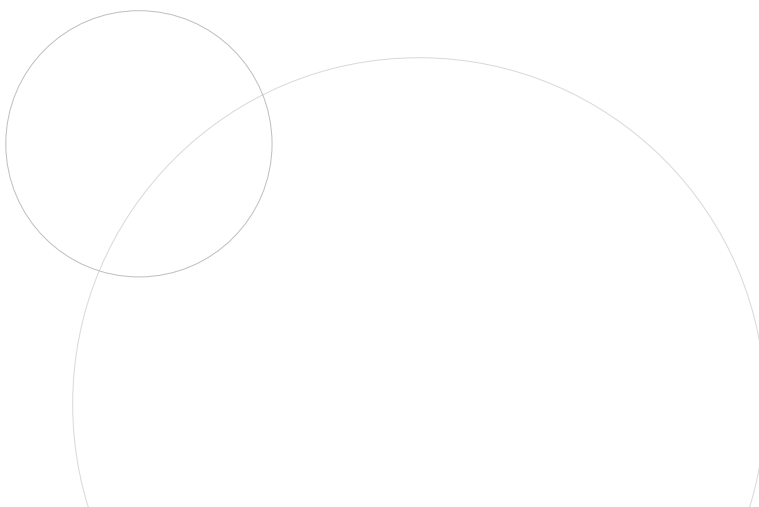
- Source of great public controversy
 - Economic: Initial overall Cabinet budget = 14 billion bahts (May 2015)
Construction costs determined post-study = 8.4 billion bahts (March 2017).
 - Cultural: Conflicting views on access to the river
 - Environmental: Potential Impacts on river flow, water level, water quality, etc...
 - Political: Riparian relocation policy and participation process
- It offers a window into the complexity of urban riverbank governance and decision-making
- The project was a catalyst to the emergence/reinforcement of a Bangkok-based civil society on the issue of public space, access to the river and development vision for the Chao Phraya within Bangkok.



I. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH QUESTION

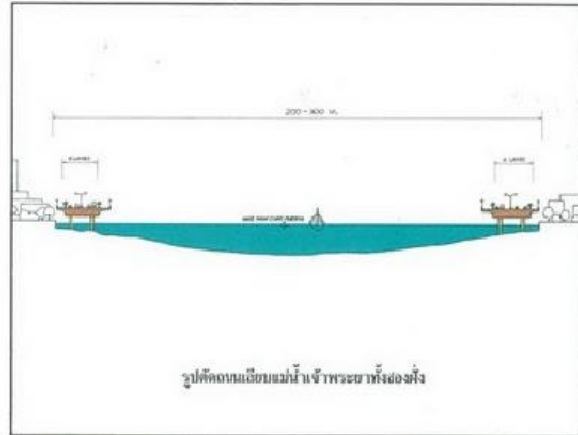
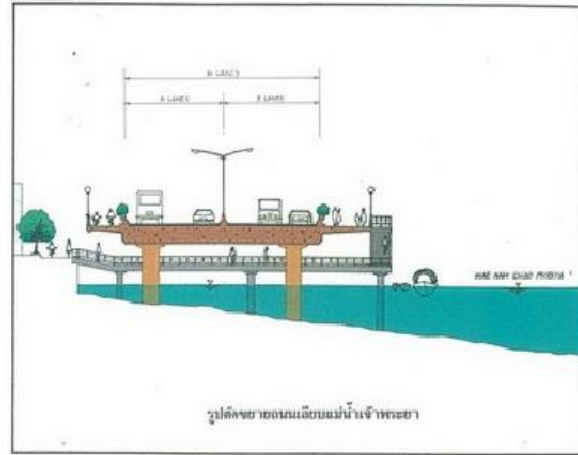
To which extent does the promenade project shed a light on issues of urban riverbank management, with their existing actors, interests and ideologies ?

- Who are the « **encroachers** »? To whom does the access to the river belong?
- How are the **cost and benefits** of the projects distributed among stakeholders?
- How did the controversy around the project serve as a platform which enrolled actors into a larger discussion on **public spaces** ?





Illustrations of the Chao Phraya River Highway Project from an OTP report in 1993.
Source: n.d.



II. PROJECT TIMELINE: AN OLD PROJECT RECYCLED

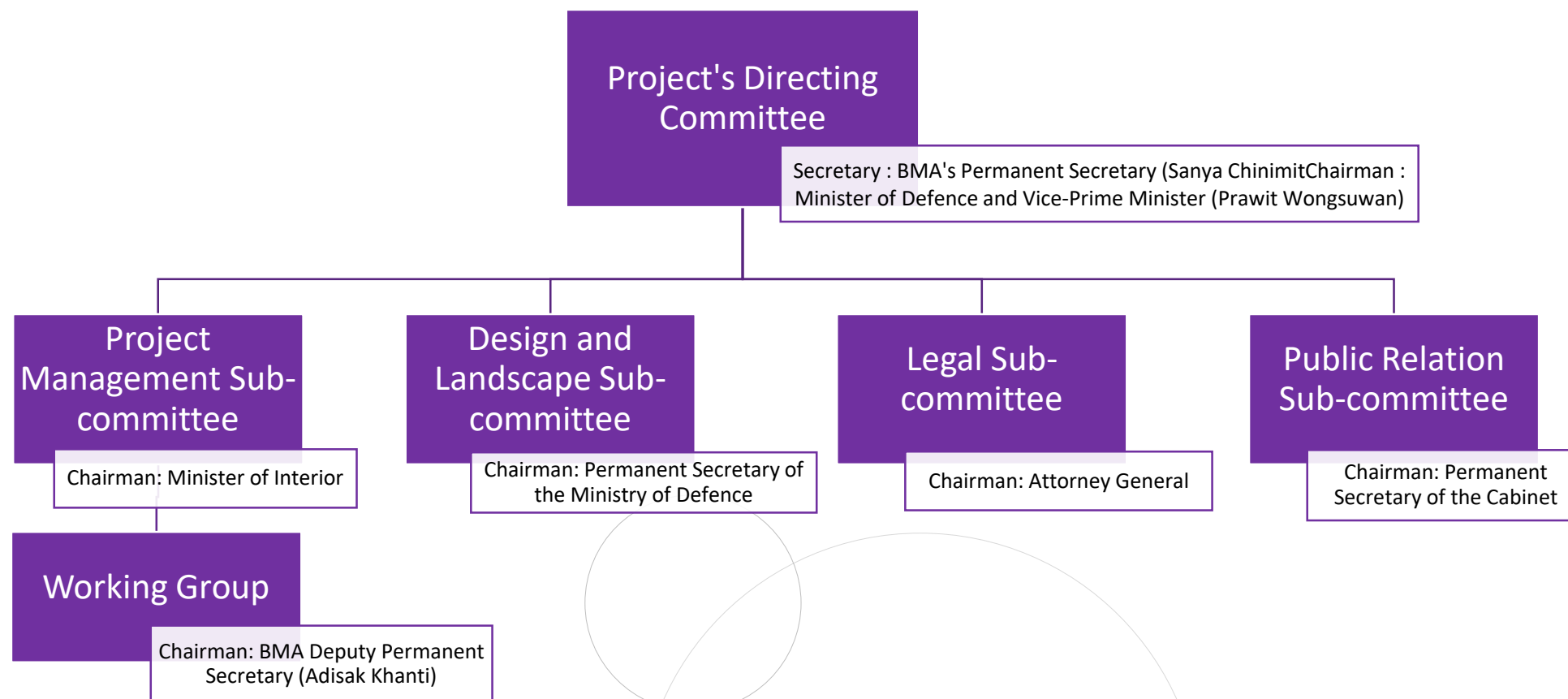
- 1993: First proposal by Gen. Winai Somphong (MOT under Chuan Leekphai)
- May 2014: PM Prayuth Chan-ocha's proposal
- Dec 2014: Cabinet approves MOI's plan

« It's about reserving the budget, which is a practice I can understand coming from the BMA in the elaboration of the project. They were afraid of letting this budget slip away. It consists in booking it with a temporary proposal which will be reworked after the budget's obtainment ».

- A professor from the Association of Siamese Architect (ASA)



II. PROJECT TIMELINE

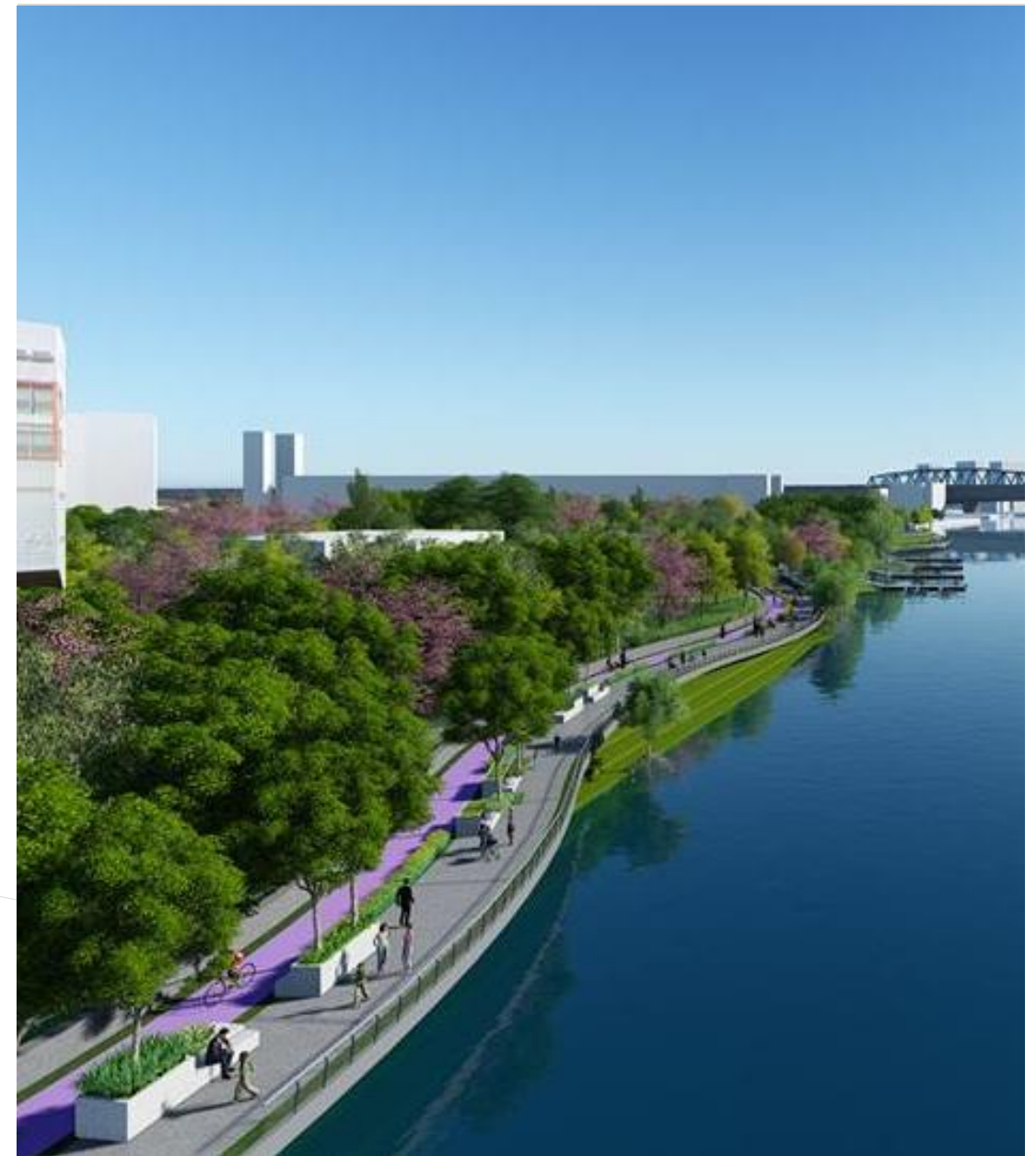


Organizational chart of the project leaders (06/03/15). The Working group has been formed a month later (16/04/15). Source: Thanawat Bremard.

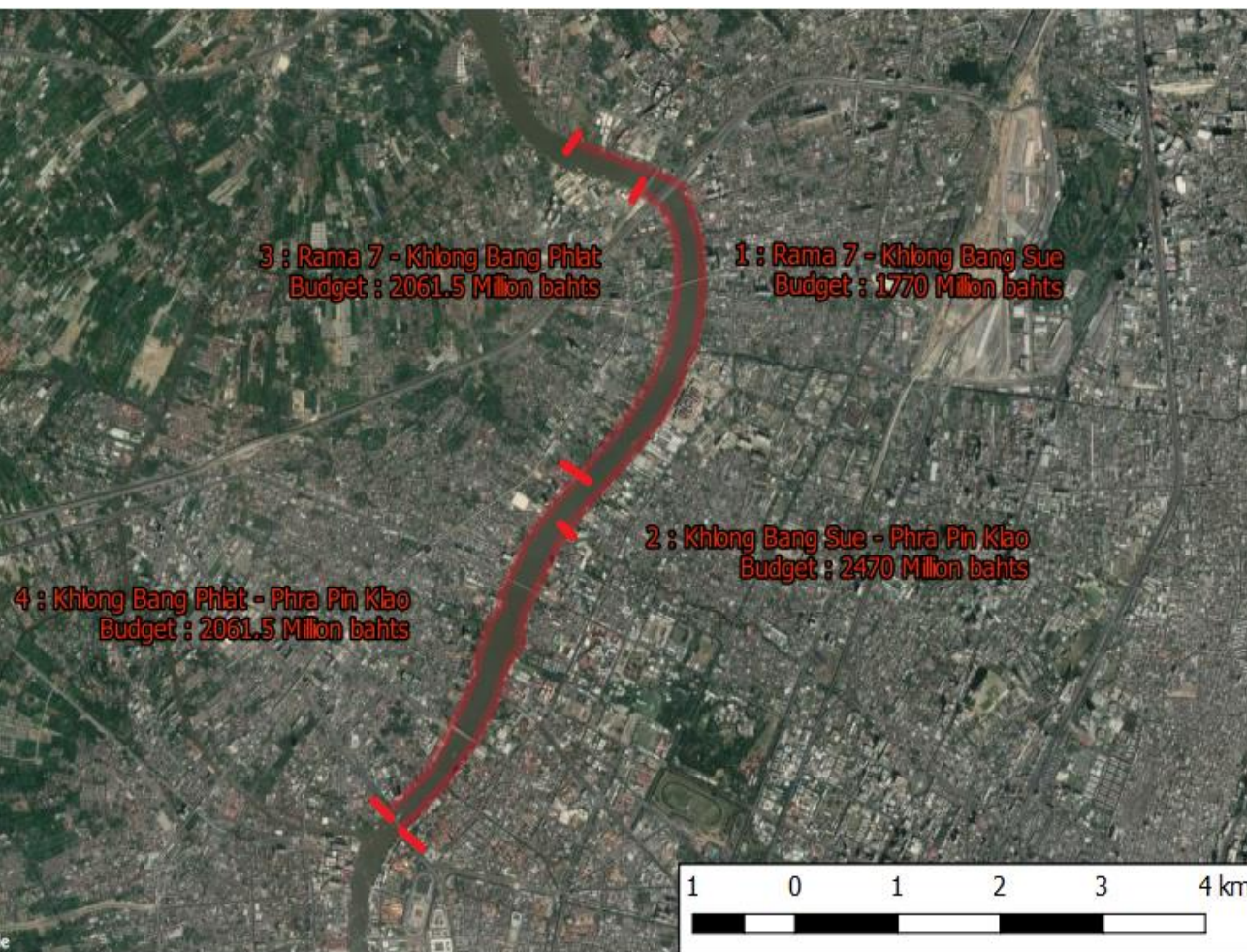


II. PROJECT TIMELINE: CONTESTATION DURING THE ELABORATION PROCESS

- Apr 2015: Discussion Forum at Chulalongkorn University by ASA, ICOMOS-Thailand and TUDA.
- May 2015: Cabinet approves 14 billion bahts budget. Creation of the FOR collective.
- Jul 2015: Released Terms of References (TOR)
- Jan 2016: Following public outcry, BMA hires KMITL for an EIA and SIA to be conducted alongside the design study.
- Sep 2016: KMITL submits final project design



Plan 1 (riverwalk) of the Chao Phraya for All Project, design by KMITL.
Source: Chao Phraya for All [facebook page](#).



The 4 sub-contracts for the first phase of the Chao Phraya for All project.
Source: Thanawat Bremard, 2018. Copyrights on the background layer: Google Earth Satellite image.

II. PROJECT TIMELINE: PROJECT IN LIMBO

- Mar 2017: Greenlit by MOI.
- Jul 2017: Demolition of encroaching houses begins.
- Mar 2018: ROCCDC meeting during which phase 2 and 4 are cancelled to preserve the Old City's landscape.
- Jul 2018: BMA waiting for MOI's approval of contracting process
- October 2018: Completion of River Rim P5 study
- Apr 2019: River Assembly sues Cabinet, project's directing committee, MOI and BMA.
- Jun 2019: The Administrative Court agrees to hear the case.



III. POLICY COALITIONS

- Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (1988; 2007)
 - Early stages of coalition formation
 - Core belief analysis
 - Advocated policy beyond the mere project



Mittakham 1 residents discussing a relocation program with CODI agents.
Source: Photo taken by Thanawat Bremard (09/06/18)

Upper left: CPfA team conducting a public hearing in Mittakham 1 (03/05/16).
Lower left: 3rd (last) grand public hearing forum (09/09/16).
Source: Chao Phraya for All [facebook page](#).



III. POLICY COALITIONS

Coalitions	Continuous promenade	Community design	Project cancellation
Main Actors	KMITL (Anthika Sawasri, Dean of Fac. of Architecture's team + Landscape architects), BMA, NCPO, MOI	KMITL (Ronarit Thanakoset's team + Archeologists), Wat Devaraj community	FOR, RA, ASA, Bangkok River Partners, some residents of Ban Pune and Bang Ao communities
Ideal project	Homogeneous promenade	Spot development: walkway on river + circuits inside communities	Co-elaborated project from surveyed demand instead of proposal.
Riverside dykes policy belief	Reinforcement of existing dykes	Depolderisation, return to two level of earthen dykes	Mixed view: amphibious architecture (sceptic about dykes) + more concerned about connecting riverside green areas.
Access to the river	Equality in access = parallel access for all = 'the riverside shouldn't be owned'	Mixed view = preserving some community and business' riverside privilege while allowing more outsider inflow	Equity in access = perpendicular access by spot = 'the riverside shouldn't be taken away'
Policy brokers	MOI, MD, ROCDCC, FAD		

III. POLICY COALITIONS: COMMUNITY DESIGN COALITION



Designs for the riverside promenade.
Source: Obtained from Ronarit Thanakoset (KMITL, 2016).



III. POLICY COALITIONS: PROJECT CANCELLATION



Designs for the riverside promenade and green area linkages. A proposed alternate design by 12 universities and architectural firms.

Source: The River Project 14 KM (For River's Voices magazine n 10, 2016).



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES

Community	Mittakham	Wat Devaraj Kunchorn Wiharn	Ban Pune
Cultural Background	Boat people, 1 st wave (merchants) arrived in the 60s, 2 nd wave in the 80-90s	Temple existed since Ayutthaya period. Local lords obtained land deeds during the 19 th Century. Presently, mostly old servants of noble families.	Settlement after the Fall of Ayutthaya (1767). Mostly Thai and Sino-Thai families with late northeastern tenants.
Land tenure regime	Registered at the district, no land titles, land belongs to Treasury department.	Mostly tenants of temple lands, land governed under Thai Sangha Act (2505).	Privately owned lands (powerful old families), residents are mostly tenants.
Encroachment	All considered encroachers, all agreed to relocate.	Initial controversy over encroaching demarcation but temple law prevails.	No encroachers and no relocation planned.
Position on project	First negotiated with the « community design » coalition. In the end, they felt like having no choice but to leave.	Initially part of the contestors. Then joined the « community design » coalition to have a project on their terms.	Some still remember the 1993 project. Indifferent majority, community council are proponents, hard contestation minority.
Supporting & contesting strategies	One part agreed to move out early on. The other barred the entry to all CODI and BMA agents for a year.	Fabrication of a consensual position and discourse. Grassroot research on community history to distinguish from encroachers.	Internal conflict between project proponents and opponents. The latter convinced students conducting the EIA and SIA to question the project.



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: MITTAKHAM



Aerial photography of Mittakham 1 (left) and Mittakham 2 (right).
Source : Sutheerattanaphirom, 2016 : 67.

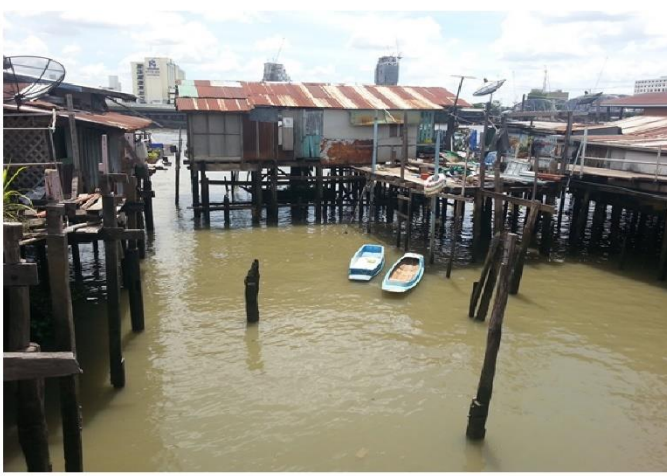


IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: MITTAKHAM



Photos within Mittakham 1 showing recycled boat parts used for the houses.
Source : Sutheerattanaphirom, 2016 : 81.

IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: MITTAKHAM



Photos within Mittakham 1 and 2 after demolition.
Source : Thanawat Bremard (lower ones) and François Molle (upper ones) taken on site on the 02/06/18.



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: DEVARAJ



Aerial photography Wat Devaraj Kunchorn Wiharn.
Source : Sutheerattanaphirom, 2016 : 87.



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: DEVARAJ



Photos within Devaraj community highlighting the wall built by the temple against floods mistaken for a dyke.
Source : Thanawat Bremard taken on site on the 10/05/18.



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: BAN PUNE



Aerial photography of Ban Pune.
Source : Sutheerattanaphirom, 2016 : 218.



IV. COMPARISON OF 3 COMMUNITIES: BAN PUNE



Photos within Ban Pune community. The central one highlights a poster against the promenade project.
Source : Thanawat Bremard, taken on site on the 10/05/18.





CONCLUSION

People and their river: the politics behind an urban leisure project

The politics of an envisioned urban amenity in a complex hydrosocial territory

- Hydrosociality of the limits of the riverbanks, a relational hybrid (Linton and Budds, 2014; Boelens et al., 2016)
- Unequal distribution of cost and benefits of the project. The 14 km first phase of the project is an easier target than the riverbanks downstream to the Phra Pin Klao bridge with all the hotels, restaurants, boutiques and malls.
- Plurilegalism around land titles and encroachment situation.

A greater debate on public spaces

- Prominent role of university professors (ajarn) as policy brokers.
- Creation of public space vs. dispossession of a cultural backyard access to the river.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- ACF: Advocacy Coalition Framework
- ASA: Association of Siamese Architect
- BACC: Bangkok Art and Culture Center
- BMA: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
- CPfA: Chao Phraya for All
- EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment
- FAD: Fine Arts Department
- FOR: Friends of the River
- ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites
- KMITL: King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang
- MD: Marine Department (Previously Harbour Department)
- MOI: Ministry of Interior
- MOT: Ministry of Transport
- NCPO: National Council for Peace and Order
- PM: Prime Minister
- RA: River Assembly
- ROCCDC: Rattanakosin and Old Cities Conservation and Development Committee
- SIA: Social Impact Assessment
- TOR: Terms of References
- TUDA: Thai Urban Designers Association



THANK YOU



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[PhD in progress](#)