

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN URBAN FOREST DEVELOPMENT IN MUEANG DISTRICT, UBON RATCHATHANI PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This article is taken from a doctoral dissertation on the role of civil society in urban forest development: A Case Study of the Development of the Civil Society Sector in Relation to Dong Fahuan Forest, Ubon Ratchathani Province aims to: (1) study the context and development of civil society; (2) examine the effects of personal factors, private social capital, and public social capital on the role of civil society; and (3) investigate the impact of government operations on the role of civil society. The research results found that communities surrounding Dong Fa Huan Forest have long depended on the forest for benefits, particularly as a source of medicinal herbs and diverse food resources available throughout all seasons. Conflicts between local communities and Dong Fa Huan Forest began when the National Reserved Forest Act was enforced more strictly. Some officials adopted rigid and inappropriate enforcement methods. The people living around Dong Fa Huan Forest are closely connected through kinship networks, share the same ancestral spirit forest (Don Pu Ta), and use the same temple. These shared social and cultural ties fostered a collective sense of concern, leading them to submit proposals for the development of Dong Fa Huan Forest. Regarding personal factors, differences in gender, educational level, and occupation did not significantly affect the role of civil society. However, differences in age and annual income did have a significant effect on the role of civil society. Private social capital factors included knowledge of medicinal herbs and knowledge of natural food resources. Public social capital factors included the influence of respected community elders. Government operational factors included responsiveness to villagers' proposals and conflicts with local communities, both of which affected the role of civil society.

Keywords: Civil Society

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INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern Botanical Garden covers an area of 3,400 rai and is divided into management responsibilities among three agencies: the Northeastern Botanical Garden (Dong Fa Huan), covering 1,563 rai; the Zoological Park Organization, covering 1,217 rai; and the Forest Research Station, covering 620 rai. Originally, the area was declared a reserved forest area, but local people were still able to access and utilize some of its resources. The Northeastern Botanical Garden (Dong Fa Huan) was officially established in 1984, after which public access and utilization became more limited, resulting in illegal encroachment and unauthorized use. In 2018, the area was adjusted under the “Urban Forest, Pracharat Forest” project, which aimed to encourage coexistence between people and forests, including forest conservation, tree planting, and the creation of community forests as urban forests. This was because the area is located only 12 kilometers from Ubon Ratchathani city.

Most plant species in the area are from the Indochinese dry evergreen forest. The dominant plants belong to the Dipterocarpaceae family, including Yang Na, Krabak, Hiang, Krad, and Payom trees. There are also two rare species: Takian Bai Yai and Thalom. Communities surround the forest, and local people have traditionally collected vegetables, wild foods, and latex from the forest. Therefore, the forest has served as a major source of income for surrounding communities. In the past, local people valued the forest and cooperated with government officials in protecting and maintaining it.

The main responsibilities of the Northeastern Botanical Garden are:

- 1) Conducting research, promoting, and transferring knowledge in the field of botany.
- 2) Conserving, protecting, and maintaining forest resources.
- 3) Promoting tourism according to government policies.

The garden is responsible for facilitating and providing services for tourists who visit the area throughout the 365 days of the year. It also manages plant collection plots, including taxonomic plant collections consisting of 11 families: the palm family, bamboo family, Combretaceae family, Fabaceae family, Annonaceae family, citrus family, fig family, Rubiaceae family, cinnamon family, Myrtaceae family, and ebony family. The plant collection plots also focus on collecting and propagating rare and valuable plant species, distributing seedlings of rare forest plants and local food plants, and expanding plant genetic conservation efforts. The garden collects forest plant species, seeds, and ornamental plants for propagation and supplementary planting in various plant family plots.

Ornamental plants cultivated in the botanical garden include Plumbago, Neem, Ficus species, Krathong, Piper species, flying centipede plant, Houttuynia cordata, Lawsonia, balsam, Ardisia, snake plant, Solanum species, Madagascar periwinkle, fragrant fig, Indian camphorweed, Gloriosa lily, small orchid species, and Melastoma, among others. In addition, the garden is responsible for landscape improvement and the construction of entrance structures for visiting the herbal garden, fragrant flowering plant garden, and local food plant garden.

The Northeastern Botanical Garden also divides its areas according to their purposes of use, including Dong Fa Huan forest for community support, Huai Charamae riparian wetland forest, local food plant garden, herbal garden, fragrant plant garden, literary plant garden, Buddhist historical plant garden, auspicious plant garden, royal commemorative plant garden, multipurpose plant garden, provincial plant garden, ornamental plant garden, aquatic plant garden, fern garden, and orchid garden.

Community members can utilize the Dong Fa Huan forest for community support and the Huai Charamae riparian forest as natural study trails, scout camping areas, recreational areas, exercise spaces, and cycling routes. In the past, Dong Fa Huan requested cooperation from community members as forest protection volunteers, involving them in tree planting, firebreak construction, and landscape development. However, at present, most community

members work outside the area, making it inconvenient to request their cooperation. Therefore, Dong Fa Huan has shifted to hiring workers and contracted service providers instead. When hiring, priority is given to local residents in order to maintain good relationships with the community.

Public utilization of designated areas occurs both through group activities and individual visits. Some visitors notify officials, while others do not, especially those entering the area from nighttime until early morning. This creates challenges in providing comprehensive supervision and has led to unauthorized uses that violate government regulations. Officials have shown some degree of flexibility, except in cases involving entry into research and plant conservation areas, destruction of trees, insect excavation, or the collection of medicinal plants, which are strictly prohibited.

In addition, Dong Fa Huan faces issues related to overlapping land boundaries with nearby communities. Some residents wish to obtain land ownership documents in order to sell the land, but most residents and the forest management authorities continue to coexist well. Most conflicts with communities arise from differences in understanding, particularly regarding legal perspectives and the use of harsh language during negotiations.

For community communication, Dong Fa Huan mainly communicates through community leaders because, in the past, some officials had conflicts with local residents, causing people to participate less in public meetings and information sessions. Based on these developments, civil society groups have expressed interest in playing a greater role in developing Dong Fa Huan in ways that provide more benefits to local communities. Therefore, it is interesting to examine how people living around the forest can participate in managing this urban forest and what factors influence the role of civil society.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The current concept of civil society presents the following image of civil society: Cohen believes that civil society is a separate entity from the state and the market and has the right to oppose state authoritarianism. This concept originated from the clear separation of civil society from the state and is a model in which citizens have the greatest freedom from politics (Cohen, J. 1999). Jürgen Habermas believes that civil society has its own space separate from the state and the market. This space of civil society is a public space where interaction, communication, and exchange of views take place, leading to shared concerns, including the formation of public opinion. This space arises and is dispersed throughout society (Habermas, J. 1991). Larry Diamond believes that civil society is formed voluntarily, is independent from the state, and helps connect people with the state and the private sector (Diamond, L. 1999).

Civil society in terms of development and form Social capital, social networks, and associative life along with the associated norms of reciprocity and mutual trust. are the main components of civil society. Social capital can be classified into 2 levels: private social capital and public social capital. Putnam also proposes 4 types of social capital. The first type is formal social capital and informal social capital. Formal social capital includes trade unions, credit unions, professional associations, etc. Informal social capital includes relatives, households in the same community, neighbors, alumni associations, etc. Informal social capital has ties in the form of a network, with mutual trust and have norms of social exchange. The second type is cohesive and fragile social capital. Cohesive social capital refers to social capital that binds of connections between members to hold each other tightly, such as close relatives of the same age. They are best friends, grow up together, and share everything in life. Fragile social capital refers to relationships that are connected but still lack depth. The third type is social capital that focuses on the internal and external. Social capital that focuses on the internal refers to the pursuit of benefits, whether political, social, or material, for members of the same group, such as a union. In the modern era, labor unions

focus on demanding benefits for their members. without paying attention to other social and economic problems outside the group. Social capital that that focuses on the outside means directing attention primarily to the public interest, such as charitable organizations, the Red Cross, environmental movements, etc., although social capital that focuses the outside may demand greater sacrifice for the common good. The fourth type is open and closed social capital. Closed social capital means focusing on creating bonds between people who share certain characteristics, such as believing in the same religion, being members of the same family, belonging to the same class, the same ethnicity, etc. At the same time, it will build a wall to block relationships with people who are different from us. Open social capital, on the other hand, refers to the creation of a social network that is open to a wide range of diverse people who can come in and participate joint activities as usual (Putnam, R. 2002) Civil society arises from the state's failure to fulfill its duties and responsibilities towards its people. (Ekeret Samson, 2020) Frequent inter-group contact within civil society organizations results in close relationships with a higher level of community and trust outside the group among those with indigenous backgrounds who live in diverse neighborhoods. (Lundsen, S (2022)). The democratic atmosphere has led to the formation of civil society power, which therefore plays an important role in exercising the right to demand that the government formulate a national development policy plan (Thanapat Chalermrat, 2022). The development is derived from the use of cultural identity, beliefs, and the Lanna religion through social networks and various activities (Suthida Pattanasrivichian, 2022). The civil society sector arises from the inconsistency of the national development strategy and the local development strategy, the shortcomings of the state in policy planning that does not provide opportunities for local and civil society sectors to participate (Chirawat Sriruang, 2017). The civil society sector arises from the state's inability to act responsibly towards its people (Sampson, E. 2020)

Regarding that role, Klein, S. and Lee, C. (2019) propose the concept of a joint infiltration process between civil society, the state, and the economy, using the concept of a field of power or a field of influence, in which the state, the economic elite, and civil society actors infiltrate the scope of the other's organization. Therefore, the view of civil society should define a concept that is not a boundary or a sphere, but a set of diverse and intersecting networks in a pre-structured space. The concept of forward and backward infiltration of civil society in the state and the economy in three modes: the first is to influence the functions of the state and the economy through influential politics; the second is to take over the functions of the state or the economy through the initiative of civil society from within; and the third is to institutionalize the movement through entry into the state and the economy. These three modes of forward infiltration are politics of influence, politics of substitution, and politics of takeover, respectively.

Civil Society Sector in Thailand Thai people in rural and urban areas live in very different political and social environments. Not only do they differ in terms of participation in civil society, but there are also differences in terms of goals and political interests (Robert B. Albrighton and Thawilwadee Burikul, 2019). Being a civil society sector is grouping together to negotiate or demand the fundamental rights and freedoms of their group. (Thanapat Chalermrat, 2022). There is integration and coordination of work with the public sector, the private sector, and various network partners (Narawadee Intawong, 2020). Local government organizations are becoming more involved by formulating development policies in line with the problems and needs of the community and civil society (Santi Phatphan, 2019). People play a role in forest conservation because they benefit from the Dong Sam Kha community forest as a source of additional income, food, and medicine. The use of wood to create tools, appliances, and to repair homes (Nikon Noi Prom, Anucha Wilai Kaew, Thassana Kulathnam, 2019). The leadership of community organization leaders is characterized by key

qualities of leaders, These include having a sense of ownership of resources, just like the people in the community, and the ability to foster willing cooperation in conservation (Kittikan Saengngam, 2021)

The development of interactions, communication, and exchange of views occur, leading to shared concerns, including the formation of public opinion.



Personal factors, capital factors Private social capital and public social capital



The operations of the government sector in relation to the role of civil society



Forest development guidelines

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a survey study. The population used in this research is: Representatives of households of people whose land is adjacent to the Dong Fahuan Forest Reserve, namely Ban Nong Ma Kuea. Village No. 17 Population: 281 households, Ban Nong Bua, Village No. 13 Population: 190 households and Ban Nong Manao Village No. 7, population of 490 households Kham Yai Sub-district, Muang District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. The sample group was determined using random sampling according to the size and proportion of the population. and calculated using the formula of Yamane (1973) by setting the value of The significance level of 0.05 is as follows: Ban Nong Makhuea, 170 samples; 130 samples from Ban Nong Bua and 220 samples from Ban Nong Manao. A questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The Likert rating scale 5-point scale. The overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability test score was .80 or higher in all aspects. This indicates that the questionnaire is reliable (Kanya Wanitchbancha and Thita Wanitchbancha, 2015). Descriptive Statistics analysis Frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation Deviation) to describe the data. For the analysis of inferential statistics, (Inferential Statistics) uses independent sample t-test (Independent Sample t-test), one-way analysis of variance, and multiple regression analysis with a statistical significance level of .05.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Qualitative

People living around Dong Fah Huan Forest have long depended on the forest for various benefits, primarily as a source of medicinal plants and food throughout all seasons. For example, during the dry season, they collect mushrooms, wild vegetables, *phak khon khaen*, *man thian* (a type of wild yam), red ant eggs, wasp nests, honey, and wood for charcoal production. During the rainy season, they gather frogs, toads, crabs, fish, snails, turtles, fiddlehead ferns, and sweet bamboo shoots. In the cool season, they collect insects, vegetables, and various medicinal herbs, some of which are available year-round. These forest resources help reduce household expenses. In addition, bamboo is used for weaving and making household utensils such as sticky rice baskets, steaming baskets, winnowing

trays, baskets, and other items. Resin from **Dipterocarpus alatus** trees is also used as fire starter and sold for income.

Conflicts between the local community and Dong Fah Huan Forest began when the National Reserved Forest Act was strictly enforced, prohibiting many forms of forest use, including collecting tree resin, harvesting honey, hunting wildlife, gathering medicinal plants, and using timber. However, some officials continued to allow the collection of mushrooms and insects, while others enforced the regulations more strictly and sometimes used inappropriate methods, such as dumping mushrooms collected by local people onto the road. Legal action was taken against people accused of encroaching on the reserved forest, with nine local residents having been prosecuted. Conflicts also arose over the development of Dong Fah Huan Forest. For example, local people opposed the construction of a giant Buddha statue, and the forest authority did not permit the construction of permanent roads in overlapping land-use areas. In addition, Dong Fah Huan Forest has weaknesses in communicating with local communities, particularly with residents of villages adjacent to the forest, many of whom have low annual incomes and work as farmers.

Community leaders and residents around Dong Fah Huan Forest are closely connected through kinship networks, as they originated from the same village, share the same ancestral spirit shrine (**Don Pu Ta**), attend the same temple, and studied together from early childhood through lower secondary school. They have also shared the use of Dong Fah Huan Forest since the time of their ancestors. This long-standing relationship has fostered a shared sense of concern and responsibility. Discussions have taken place both within and among villages, with differing opinions regarding the direction of forest development. These discussions led to a number of demands being submitted to the forest authority, including issues related to land use, construction of the giant Buddha statue, road improvements, and the development of bicycle routes. Negotiations resulted in an agreement allowing the construction of a permanent asphalt bicycle route in exchange for improvements to unpaved village roads located in overlapping land-use areas, making travel more convenient for local residents.

Community members have also established rules governing the use of Dong Fah Huan Forest. They only use designated community areas, do not collect tree resin within the forest itself but instead collect it around the forest boundary, and avoid using fire to extract resin. They monitor and prevent outsiders from exploiting forest resources and manage the surrounding areas through organic farming practices. They have also created water sources for wildlife and jointly planted flowering plants and flowering trees on their own land, in public spaces, and along both sides of the road leading to Dong Fah Huan Forest to create a "flower road." This initiative has received financial support from the subdistrict municipality. In addition, local people wish to have greater access to Dong Fah Huan Forest than they currently do, with clearly designated areas and well-defined guidelines for resource use.

Quantitative

The results of the general data analysis of the questionnaire respondents showed that the majority of the respondents were female (58.1%), aged between 41-50 years (59.6%), had an education level below a bachelor's degree (57.1%), had an annual income of less than 100,000 baht (80.8%), and were farmers (53.1%).

The results of the analysis of social capital data (1) in terms of personal capital found that the overall mean was ($X = 2.72$, $SD = 1.39$), with the highest mean being participation in village traditions at ($X = 3.47$, $SD = 1.40$), followed by participation in the Don Pu Ta event at ($X = 2.91$, $SD = 1.44$), and the lowest mean being knowledge of medicinal plants at ($X = 2.18$, $SD = 1.32$).

The results of the analysis of social capital data (2) in terms of public capital found that the overall mean was ($X = 2.75$, $SD = 1.37$), with the highest mean being having respected elders

at a mean of ($X = 3.23$, $SD = 1.52$), followed by participating in the Don Pu Ta event at a mean of ($X = 2.91$, $SD = 1.44$), and with the lowest mean being helping when neighbors have problems at a mean of ($X = 2.43$, $SD = 1.28$).

The results of data analysis on (3) government operations showed that the overall mean was ($X = 2.46$, $SD = 1.30$), with the highest mean being Dong Fa Huon's response to the villagers' proposals at a mean of ($X = 2.57$, $SD = 1.37$), followed by Dong Fa Huon's public relations work with the villagers at a mean of ($X = 2.50$, $SD = 1.30$), and the lowest mean being agreement with the bicycle path in Dong Fa Huon at a mean of ($X = 2.40$, $SD = 1.37$).

The results of the data analysis on (4) the role of civil society found that the overall average was ($X = 2.49$, $SD = 1.30$), with the highest average being gathering to submit proposals on the utilization of Dong Fahuan at an average of ($X = 2.55$, $SD = 1.25$), followed by cooperation in the development of Dong Fahuan at an average of ($X = 2.50$, $SD = 1.38$), and with the lowest average being the role in the conservation of Dong Fahuan at an average of ($X = 2.36$, $SD = 1.35$).

The results of the hypothesis test from Table 1 show that the personal factors of gender, education level, and occupation do not have a different effect on the role of civil society. The factors of age and annual income have a different effect on the role of civil society with a statistical significance at the level of .05.

From Table 2, it was found that the social capital factors that are personal capital include knowledge of herbs ($b = 0.146$, $t = 3.349$, $Sig. = .014$), knowledge of natural foods ($b = 0.285$, $t = 3.349$, $Sig. = .001$) affect the role of civil society. Both variables can explain 41.1% of the variation in the role of civil society (Adjusted $R^2 = .441$) with statistical significance at the .05 level.

Table 3 shows that the social capital factor, which is public capital, in terms of respected elders ($b = 0.092$, $t = 2.405$, $Sig. = .017$) affects the role of civil society, which can explain 19% of the variation in the role of civil society (Adjusted $R^2 = .019$) with statistical significance at the .05 level.

Table 4 shows that government operational factors, namely, responsiveness to community proposals ($b = -0.100$, $t = -2.507$, $Sig. = .012$), conflict with villagers ($b = 0.470$, $t = 10.525$, $Sig. = .000$) affect the role of civil society. Both variables can explain 31% of the variation in the role of civil society (Adjusted $R^2 = .310$) with statistical significance at the .05 level.

Table 1 shows the results of the hypothesis test for individual factors.

Personal Factors	Statistics used	Statistical Value	Sig.
Personal Factors	F-test	0.263	.885
Gender	F-test	9.296	.000
Age	F-test	3.113	.603
Education level	F-test	3.113	.015
Annual income	F-test	2.685	.100

* $p < .05$

Table 2 Social Capital Factors that are Personal Capital

Role of the civil society sector	b	Std. Error	B	t	Sig.
Constant	1.720	0.590		9.428	.000
Knowledge of herbs	0.146	0.059	0.153	3.349	.014*
Knowledge of natural foods	0.285	0.085	0.321	3.349	.001*
Participating in village traditional events	0.034	0.039	0.038	0.884	.337
Utilization of Dong Fahuan	-0.059	0.089	-0.066	-0.666	0.506
Attending the Don Pu Ta event	-0.007	0.038	-0.008	-0.189	.850
$R = .387$, $R^2 = .149$, Adjusted $R^2 = .411$, $SE_{Est} = 1.16628$, $F = 18.063$, $Sig. = .000$ *					

* $p < .05$

Table 3 Social Capital Factors that are Public Capital

Role of the Civil Society Sector	b	Std. Error	B	t	Sig.
Constant	2.317	0.173		13.357	.000
Respected elders	0.092	0.038	0.111	2.405	.017*
Provides assistance when neighbors have problems	0.083	0.087	0.085	0.952	.342
There is reliance on others	-0.045	0.041	-0.050	-1.095	.274
There are people working with Dong Fahuan.	0.023	0.087	0.024	0.264	0.792
R = .163, $R^2 = .027$, Adjusted $R^2 = .019$, $SE_{Est} = 1.24646$, $F = 18.063$, Sig. = .008*					

* $p < .05$

Table 4 Factors of Government Operations

Role of the Civil Society Sector	b	Std. Error	B	t	Sig.
Constant	1.629	0.161		10.116	.000
Responding to proposals from villagers	-0.100	0.040	-0.110	-2.507	.012*
Publicizing the work to the villagers	0.046	0.041	0.048	1.114	.253
Conflict with villagers	0.470	0.045	0.476	10.525	.000
Invite your village representative to attend the meeting.	-0.026	0.045	-0.026	-0.591	0.555
Agree with the bicycle lane	0.076	0.039	0.083	1.960	.051
R = .562, $R^2 = .316$, Adjusted $R^2 = .310$, $SE_{Est} = 1.04569$, $F = 47.547$, Sig. = 0.000*					

* $p < .05$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The role of civil society in the development of urban forests in Ubon Ratchathani Province is summarized and discussed as follows:

1) The social capital factors that are private capital include knowledge of herbs and knowledge of natural food, which affect the role of civil society. This is consistent with the concept of Putnam, (2002), which proposes that social capital, social networks, and associative life, along with the related norms of mutual reciprocity and trust, are key components of civil society. It is also consistent with Nong Noi Prom, Anucha Wilai Kaew, and Thassana Kulathnam (2019), Study of the Dong Sam Kha Community Forest: Value and Economic Value of Ban Nam Kham, which found that the benefits of the Dong Sam Kha Community Forest include being a source of supplementary income, a source of food, medicine, and the use of wood to make tools and appliances and to repair dwellings.

2) Social capital factors that are public capital The aspect of respected elders affects the role of civil society.

This is consistent with Suthida Phatthanasrivichian (2022), Study of the Communication Strategy of the Chiang Mai Social Movement, which suggests that civil society relies on cultural identity, beliefs, and the Lanna religion through social networks and various activities to communicate with each other. It is also consistent with Kittikan Saengngam (2021), Study of the Status and Role of Community Organizations in the Management of Common Resources in the Form of Public Land, which concludes that the leadership of community organization leaders is characterized by the following key qualities: a sense of

ownership of resources equal to that of the community and the ability to foster willing cooperation in maintenance.

3) Factors related to government operations include responding to proposals from local residents and conflicts with local residents, which affect the role of civil society. This is consistent with the concept of Cohen, (1982), who proposed that civil society is a separate entity from the state and the market and has the right to oppose state authoritarianism. This is also consistent with Jirawat Srirueang (2017), who studied civil society movements: a case study of the Krabi coal-fired power plant project, which proposed that civil society arises from the inconsistency of national development strategies and local development strategies, as well as the shortcomings of the state in policy planning that does not provide opportunities for local and civil society participation. And Sampson, E. (2020) study on the role of civilian actors in peace mediation and post-war recovery, which suggests that civil society arises from the state's inability to act responsibly towards its people.

Policy Recommendations

1) The Pracharath Forest policy should continue to be promoted by expanding its role as a conservation area and as a source for distributing medicinal herb seedlings to community members for greater public benefit.

2) The designation of community land-use areas should take into account the needs of both community members and all relevant stakeholders.

Academic Recommendations

1) In explaining civil society, psychological concepts should be incorporated, particularly Ken Wilber's integral psychology, along with the concepts of discourse and discursive practice. This would provide a clearer understanding of civil society.

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