

# Nakhon Si Thammarat Province and Local Participation in the Process of Nominating Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple to be Inscribed on the World Heritage List

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the process from 2009 to the present of nominating “Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province” to be Inscribed on the World Heritage List (March, 2021). The methods of the study include literature reviews, observations, interviews, and small group discussions. The results of the study reveal the government’s active roles in interpreting, controlling, and driving the directions of the process. Although civil society causes many conflicts in the process and proposes many alternatives, cooperation as specified by the government sector is provided. The existing relationship with the administration of the Thai bureaucracy confirms that the federal government and the provincial agencies hold the direct power to make decisions. The process of the proposal to the World Heritage Committee in Paris hardly involves the needs of civil society. The participation of the parties in the process was carried out in the middle of a controversy and argument. The suggestion drawn from the study is the urgent need to raise the roles of the civil society in the process.

## Keywords

Participation; Nakhon Si Thammarat Locals; Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan; World Heritage List

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## Introduction

The concept of “Heritage” first gained attention in Europe around the 18th century or the early period of “Nation Building” (Esposito & Gaulis, 2010) resulting in many questions related to what to choose and who to be involved in the process of selecting the “heritage” of the nation to be passed on to the following generation. When the World Heritage Committee was established in the 1980s, the states and their experts were key players in making a decision. Although the participation of local communities was more emphasized later, there has been no direct content of community participation since the establishment of “International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites - The Venice Charter 1964” or a main charter of the World Cultural Heritage. If referring to Article 11, the content derived from the interpretation is barely related to community participation. Moreover, the Florence Charter established in 1981 (Historic Gardens - The Florence Charter, 1981) still contains no content relevant to community participation. In 1987, the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas-Washington Charter, 1987, finally emphasized community participation in writing such as Article 15 of Washington Charter (1987), Section 2, 6, and 9 of the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage (1990), Article 2 of the Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage (1996), the International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999), and the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999). Therefore, the management of heritages and cultures has emphasized more on community participation.

In Thailand, there are three of the World Cultural Heritage Sites on the list in the 1990s as follows: Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns, Historic City of

Ayutthaya, and Ban Chiang Archaeological Site. In 2009, another proposal for “Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple” to become the World Heritage Site occurred in accordance with the criteria and principles of the World Heritage Site under the collaboration of civil society and local people in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province (Bongsasilp, 2016). Therefore, the participation among different groups in Nakhon Si Thammarat under this circumstance is studied to understand its concept, form, level of each group’s participation, and related reasons.

## Literature Review

### Participation

The concept of “Participation” has gained serious attention since the 1960s where the concept of the World Heritage Site started to be formed along with global transitions of economy and society in general. For example, while the Vietnam War took place, an anti-war group and declarations of independence in many colonized countries happened. Revolutions of society and expansion of civil rights resulted in several social movements (Miroshnikova, 2014, pp. 9-14). Developers and planners of public administration started to focus more on the people by creating channels for decentralization to the people especially in the development of urban areas with the understanding that rapidly growing population required a concept of participation.

One of the leading developers with the widely used models of active participation was S.R. Arnstein (1969, p. 219). His proposal of “Citizen Participation” in 1969 suggested that effective participation must include true power and control, not just an existence of each group. Arnstein also proposed a framework to analyze participation called “Ladder of

Citizen Participation" divided into 3 levels and 8 steps as follows:

Level 1 is called "Non-participation". At this level, the public has not actually participated in the decision-making yet. There are 2 steps (1-2) in this level: Step 1 called "Manipulation" where the purpose of the participation is to be recognized or to be represented with no intention of involving in the process of making a decision, and Step 2 called "Therapy" where participation is in order and members coexist according to the leader's expectation with no involvement in making a decision.

Level 2 is called "Tokenism" where partial participation takes place. The involvement is at the ritual level because some matters are handled by the authority. There are 3 steps (3-5) in this level: Step 3 called "Informing" where the leader allows the members to have partial participation, Step 4 called "Consultation" where the leader allows the members to consider opinions with no obligation to be followed by the leader, and Step 5 called "Placation" where the contribution of opinions avoids conflicts by offering only sympathy and conformity.

Level 3 is called "Citizen Power" where the citizens actually involve in decision making. Power and control belong to the people through representatives or the public itself. There are 3 steps (6-8) in this level: Step 6 called "Partnership" with a common nature of collaboration, sharing of opinions, consultation, and negotiation to jointly make decisions, Step 7 called "Delegated Power" with the exercise of power provided power by the leader to make decisions through representatives, and Step 8 called "Citizen Control" or "Power and Control" with true power to make a decision and the identified roles belonged to the people.

Since the 1980s, the concept of participation has been increasingly challenging due to a lot of changes in society such as time constraints leading to more hectic lifestyles among people. Planners have to work with much smaller groups of people with varied and different definitions of justice. Since the 1990s, considering participation has become more complex due to computer technology such as the introduction of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) applied to planning. People are expansively connected through social networks and many new channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs (Miroshnikova, 2014, p.14). The studies related to "Participation" provide the opportunity for the researcher to find new conclusions through a wide range of phenomena and inductions.

Arnstein's concept can be applied to analyze a process of different groups. As a result, Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation is applied to the analysis of this study.

### **Concept of Community Participation in the Management of World Heritage Site**

Since 1978, the World Heritage Committee has been performing their duties in making a decision on the World Heritage List. The constantly modified concepts of community participation in the management of the World Cultural Heritage Site can be classified into 3 periods:

In Phase I, community participation (1977-1993) was not emphasized. The concept of the World Heritage was mainly based on western philosophies, so there were many contradictions in the global context. Over 40 years, the

requirements of Operational Guidelines were amended for more than 20 times due to their conflicts in practices (Labadi, 2013). The first amendment of the guidelines involved only 30 paragraphs while the latest involved 290 paragraphs. European philosophies were the main influences of the concepts on the World Heritage where only intrinsic values were considered (Labadi, 2013). There were very few sites outside Europe selected as the World Heritage.

In Phase 2, the focus was on a site distribution among the member states (1994-2006). The World Heritage Committee established the Global Strategy in 1994 in order to balance the numbers of the World Heritage Sites among different regions by adjusting the meanings of "World Heritage" to be more practical: "The World Heritage Site consists of a balance of multiple perspectives" (Turtinen, 2000). The strategy was to encourage the Third-World countries to recognize the importance of their heritage sites. Preserving the World Heritage Sites required local people to take part in the process, and the benefits were shared. The results of the Global Strategy were the increasing number of countries joining the program and more sites of the World Heritage outside Europe (Moulder, 2014).

In Phase 3, the focus is on civil society and sustainable local development (2007-2021). Since The Budapest Declaration on World Heritage 2002, there have been two important advancements in World Heritage: civil society and sustainable local development. The declaration in honor of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention was intended to guide the future adaptation of the World Heritage Convention called "4 C" including Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, and Communication. In 2007, the fifth 'C' or Community was added.

According to the literature review, the World Heritage Committee has given greater importance to community participation in the management of the World Heritage Sites with no specific rules to allow the management of each heritage site to be interpreted and adjusted to reflect actual conditions in the area. However, debates on the concept and the appropriate forms of local community participation remain. Moreover, the regulations by the World Heritage Committee continue to play leading roles in each area of the World Heritage Site according to the existing Eurocentric concept (Labadi, 2013).

### **Methods**

Every stage of data collection was analyzed. The framework was periodically adjusted and analyzed until the completion of the project. One of these data was obtained from a literature review based on the main questions and sub-questions from both first and second classification of the studies. Observations, in-depth interviews, and group discussions were conducted to obtain personal profiles with two target groups divided into two groups: 22 individuals from formal organizations and 21 individuals of informal organizations. Relevant roles and comments to further the progress were, then, documented along with recommendations from experts and relevant parties. The results from the discussion platforms were documented to complete a full report.

## Results

From the study, the participation among various groups was divided into 5 parties: 1) provincial government agencies, 2) local government agencies, 3) civil society, 4) communities and locals, and 5) support mechanisms of the World Heritage Committee. If considering the relationship among these parties, the power of the participation was divided into 3 groups: the main controlling group, the support and operation group, and the group with less bargaining power.

In Group 1, the main controlling group consisted of the government sector led by the governor of Nakhon Si Thammarat with the highest power in the provincial government agency. The governor was directly advised by the Prime Minister. The governor of Nakhon Si Thammarat was also guided by the academics department on the direction through various mechanisms directly and indirectly while building cooperation with civil society to move all parts of the process in the same direction.

In Group 2, the support and operation group consisted of the provincial government agencies, the local government agencies, and civil society such as the deputy governor, the provincial office, local departments of different ministries, Nakhon Si Thammarat City Municipality, and Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Administrative Organization. This group was mainly complied with the provincial governor's advice in the form of a committee. The governor played a key role in enabling these diverse groups of people to collaborate. Government agencies, therefore, played another role in the operation while the local government agencies only worked in coordinating but not as key players.

In Group 3, the group with less bargaining power held a very small role in the process. The group consisted of Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple and the peddlers around the temple. This group was directly affected by the management of the World Heritage Site especially in determining the Core Zone and Buffer Zone. As a result, the conflicts in prohibiting the peddlers in the area occurred in the management of the temple area. The key players in Group 1 and Group 2 did not allow people in this group to obtain enough involvement in the process. This group of people was only provided information. With no confirmation of the same understanding, there were movements of opposition to the process led by Group 1 and Group 2.

One of the main arguments affecting the participation of the three groups was the requirements of the World Heritage Committee. Groups 1 and 2 might not completely agree with the rules set by the World Heritage Committee, but they were not provided any opportunity for consultation with the Committee. For example, the presence of relics at the base of the architecture might contradict international principles while interpreted as a local characteristic representing the authenticity of the site. However, the main player of the process shredded the relics in order to meet the requirements of the World Heritage Committee or considered as an international rule. This act aimed only at meeting the international rule to make the site possible to be considered as the World Heritage Site.

The driving force emphasized on complying with international rules while the locals had no bargaining power resulting in negative impacts. The attempt to meet an

international requirement could cause sensitive issues while Group 3 who were mainly affected by the decision had no bargaining power to negotiate such as the determination of the reserved area.

It was clear that the movement of these 3 groups continued in the midst of the ongoing conflicts .

## Discussions

### Level of Participation

The studies showed that there were different levels of participation in the three groups because the relationship among the government committees, the governor, and the academics department was very active. In addition, the committee did not hold any activity to clearly create participation. The levels of participation were adapted from the idea of Arnstein (1969) called "Ladder of Citizen Participation" divided into three levels with eight steps based on the power of the citizen in participation. The decisions and controls were only found the highest in the main controlling group. Another with participation at a moderate level followed the governor's advice. The other held the least participation in the process.

In Group 1, the main controlling group contained the official sector or the government sector including provincial government agencies who controlled the direction of the process through government mechanisms. The governor played the main role according to his duty to mobilize resources and people from the government, civil society, and communities. The roles of the governors were mostly related to the academics department recognized as having expertise and specific knowledge. While the academics department gave advice, the governor drove operations of the process by using the state mechanisms. The highest level of participation or Level 3 was in "Citizen Power" compared with Step 6 (Partnership), Step 7 (Delegated Power), and Step 8 (Citizen Control or Power and Control). As the governor and the academics department worked together, they thought together, consulted one another, negotiated, and made joint decisions. Delegation of power means that representatives will participate in the decision-making and actually take part in the process directly.

In Group 2, the support and operation group was at the middle level including government mechanisms and the operation crews such as government officials, state enterprises, local administrative organizations, intellectuals, businessmen and civil society. These parties entered within a predetermined framework led by the governor and the academics department; therefore, the experience and ability of the group were not fully applied. They had to alter their roles in the original organization first and then get involved on behalf of their organizations such as Ruk Baan Kerd Club (Loving Hometown Club), Nakhon News Agency, and Nakhon Si Thammarat Municipality. These organizations were called on for their expertise in some technical work despite the fact that power is to be decentralized to them to allow participation in the structure of the process. The participation of Group 1 and Group 2 was the source of power for the management leading a wide range of benefits. This group held Level 2 of participation or a low to moderate level of participation compared with Step 3

(Informing), Step 4 (Consultation) without obligation to follow the leader's advice, and Step 5 (Placation) where opinions are sympathetically accepted to avoid conflict instead of actual agreement. Level 2 contains partial participation called Tokenism because the full authority is still reserved

In Group 3, a group of people had a small amount of participation in the process. The group held the least systematic bargaining power including the temple itself and people in the community who took advantage of the temple area for their occupation especially peddlers. This group's participation was considered Level 1 or Nonparticipation when there was no participation in making a decision compared with Step 1 (Manipulation) where appearances are to be represented and recognized without intention of participation and Step 2 (Therapy) where participation is placed in order to work together complied with the leader's advice with no participation in making a decision.

It was obvious that all groups were negotiating under the international requirements without any attempt in bargaining. Each group interpreted international rules in accordance with their interests or ideas. Each interpretation was to be used to empower them to justify their action in bargaining with other local groups. The local universality, thus, stemmed from the struggles among different groups depending on their focus of each requirement.

### **Important Factors Affecting Local Participation in the Management of World Heritage Sites.**

There are 3 reasons:

First, factors at the level of international regulations include determination of how much potential the site holds as World Heritage depending mainly on the rules set by the World Heritage Committee. In particular, it must be compared to the OUV (Outstanding Universal Value) and the implementation of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which is constantly changing.

Second, factors at the state level contain the structure of Thai administration with centralized power. The provincial government agencies hold a lot of power resulting in the lack of decentralization. Local government organizations, both Nakhon Si Thammarat Municipality and the Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Administrative Organization, played only a small role because they had to follow the advice from the provincial government agencies. Local communities were less involved in the management of their own cultural heritage.

Last, factors at the local community level include various levels of community participation depending on the level of awareness in civil society and local communities. The study also found that civil society and local communities were active because they realized their connection or ownership of the site. Civil society and local communities were also active at the level of individuals and organizations. An objection from the community was also considered an important contribution to the process.

Although the management of the World Heritage Site involves the public sector as a leading role in the process especially in the coordination with the World Heritage Committee in Paris, the management of the World Heritage

Sites can be proposed upwards from the local government agencies. It is interesting that in the conditions with the government's leading role in the process civil society can be involved in many levels affecting the process as mentioned above.

### **Impacts of Community Participation in the Process**

Despite the attempt of both Thailand and the world to encourage local communities to take part in the management of the World Heritage Sites, the committee played the most important role without local participation in the process of nominating Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan Temple to be Inscribed on the World Heritage List resulting in major impacts as follows:

A. The needs of civil society and people in the local community groups were not correctly and completely recognized.

B. The involved parties lacked opportunities to apply their full potential to the process.

C. Nothing was applied to resolve conflicts among local groups, and there was no attempt to avoid conflicts during operation. As a result, there were several groups of people excluded or not fully involved. Their participation included only receiving information with no convergence of ideas and opinions. The conflicts did not lead to a full potential in building a mutual management system for the World Heritage Site. Conflicts still existed among the local people.

D. The official or government sector included federal and regional mechanisms. The roles in guiding other parties meant a progress of the process mainly driven with the implementation of the government mechanisms. The governor took a leading role in conjunction with the academics department. The committee expected the participation from different groups after the end of the process, not during the process. Therefore, the local administration organizations held little participation in the ongoing process.

E. The process had to adhere to the World Heritage Committee's guidelines as a core. Recently (March, 2021), the committee placed great emphasis on the development of the documents for Nomination Dossier and a management plan. An integral part of the presented documents was to explain why the site was unique, so the academics department played a key role in interpreting the requirements of the World Heritage Committee without any support from civil society and local communities.

### **Conclusion**

The study of the participation among civil society and local communities suggests the direction of decentralization as a very important mechanism especially in the context of Thailand. The government can theoretically refer to the right of legitimacy to directly provide the measures and the standard as the framework of the government action based on the requirements from the World Heritage Committee, an international organization. However, decentralization is the most important model to allow the participation of civil society and local communities in the management of World Heritage Sites. If the administration is centralized,

community participation will be obstructed and likely affect the process.

The above findings confirm the leading role of the government on the management of World Heritage Sites. When the public sector takes the lead role, the coordination with the World Heritage Committee in Paris directly goes to the federal government. In some cases, the management of the World Heritage Sites was proposed upwards from the local government under the controlled conditions by the federal government. The questions are followed: “what roles civil society can involve in?” and “what will be the effects of the participation?”

### Limitations and Future Studies

The limitations in this study are the limited documents due to the ongoing of the process. Some documents and resources were not allowed to be published during the time. Besides, there are very few case studies or limited sources related to the ongoing process. Most of the studies on management of the World Heritage Sites are relevant to the ending stage. In addition, this study does not include any comparison among the processes occurring in Thailand, Southeast Asia, Asia and other regions around the world.

The further study on participation should include a comparison of case studies such as at the regional and national level, the ongoing process, the preparation of the process, and the end of the process. The guidelines should be developed to formulate a management plan including actual participation of local communities as mechanisms. Civil society and all local communities should be engaged in the process equally at the level of individuals, organizations, and networks. Such mechanisms must allow brainstorming of opinions and needs from every group. Conflicts must be handled collaboratively to find mutual solutions. The study should encourage each group to adopt their potential into the process appropriately. A study should provide guidelines of monitoring systems or prevention plans to tackle economic, social, and political issues such as inequality that may arise from the management of the World Heritage Sites. Balancing conservation and development must be studied to develop mechanisms for the management of the World Heritage Sites to become effective tools to strengthen local communities. The study should also provide a solution of an administrative structure with decentralization to the local community for better management of the World Cultural Heritage.

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