Bangkok SME Resilience Profile

Bang Mot’s Sustainable Community Tourism

CATALYZING CITY RESILIENCE SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESS
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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:
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Introduction

Catalyzing City Resilience Solutions

In Bangkok (Thailand), the Resilient Cities Network (R-Cities) is running the Catalyzing City Resilience Solutions (CCRS) program with support from the Citi Foundation to help the local economy recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. This recovery will catalyze urban resilience by empowering and strengthening a selection of critical small and medium enterprise (SMEs) to develop locally relevant solutions.

Together with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), R-Cities has identified the opportunity to use the CCRS program to revitalize community-based tourism along the Bang Mot Canal in innovative ways. By co-creating interventions or solutions with BMA and local SMEs as the main program beneficiaries, the program will promote and develop community-based tourism, in turn addressing wider resilience challenges such as river degradation, waste management, and accessibility.

SME Resilience Profile

To ensure that all program activities are responding to city’s needs and are grounded in the realities that the critical SME sectors are facing, the CCRS program starts with assessing the challenges that both the Bang Mot Canal community and the tourism industry are facing to understand the industry’s role in, relationship to, and impact on the community.

This Bangkok SME “resilience profile” summarizes the results of the assessment process carried out by the local implementation partner, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), in close coordination with BMA and the Thung Khru District Office.

Context

Bangkok’s canals – Bang Mot Canal

Bangkok’s canals hold great significance for the city’s development. Historically, the canals were used for transportation, as a source of food and water, and in ceremonies, to name but a few of their key functions. Even though the role of the canal system has lessened in recent years, many canal communities continue their traditional lifestyles, uphill Bangkok’s culture and history.

One such canal is the Bang Mot Canal, which is situated in southwestern Bangkok and is part of the Chao Phraya River basin. The canal stretches for 15.8 kilometers and runs through three Bangkok administrative districts: Thung Khru, Chom Thong and Bang Khun Tien.

Early settlers in Bang Mot earned their living through agricultural production. Fertile soil from the Chao Phraya River allowed orchards to develop all around the area. Bang Mot became famous for its tangerine orchards in the late 1980s – 1990s. However, a multitude of factors, including climate change, have led to the area no longer being suitable for farming today.

With the decline in agriculture, the Bang Mot community wanted to bring the area back to life by facilitating community tourism as a way to generate alternative income for residents. They established a community market, created an annual festival and started other touristic activities such as halal food tasting, canal cruises, and arts and crafts workshops.

Bang Mot’s community tourism was quite a success until the Covid-19 pandemic hit and all tourism activities came to a halt. Many locals lost their source of income as the markets, enterprises and houses closed their doors.

Now, as Bangkok is recovering from the pandemic, the city wishes to revitalize economic activity in Bang Mot while strengthening the capacity of the community through the promotion of tourism that is centered around the authentic Thai lifestyle and sustainable practices. This will allow community members to enhance their own economic resilience while becoming more adaptable to future shocks and stresses.

1 Source: Bangkok River
Understanding the SME Ecosystem

Bang Mot Canal’s diverse community tourism SMEs

SMEs at the heart of the Bang Mot community

SMEs are an integral part of the Bang Mot community and represent the community’s diverse mix of ethnicities and religious-cultural backgrounds. The SMEs are owned and operated by an aging population, mostly above the age of 50. These entrepreneurs lack formal higher education, making them less able to adapt to changes in technology.

Owners of 18 SMEs in Bang Mot were interviewed and surveyed. These SMEs are active in seven areas: livestock and aquaculture; learning spaces; agriculture; tourism-focused; food and beverage (F&B); local shops; and tourism-related. These seven areas constitute a first set of categories. However, since each SME can have more than one business function, they can be further grouped according to their overlapping interests, as shown in the Venn diagram in Figure 2.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many SMEs had to close their shops and lose their businesses. At the same time, some of the SMEs continued to provide food and other assistance to the community, showing the close intertwining of the SMEs and the community.
Community enterprises and activities in Bang Mot

Since 2017, Bang Mot community members have been self-organizing. They have officially registered two community enterprises, including the Dar-ul-Ibadah Enterprise and the Bang Mot Canal Creative Community Enterprise. The objectives of the Bang Mot Canal Creative Community Enterprise are to promote community participation, develop a sustainable economy, preserve identity and multiculturalism, and protect the environment. These community enterprises comprise F&B, organic farming, and crafts, and can work together to promote community tourism and showcase the identity of the Bang Mot Canal community. The community also used to organize other tourism activities: the Mot Tanoi Market, which was a thriving weekend market; and the Bang Mot Fest, which started in 2016 and helped to put Bang Mot Canal on the map as a tourist destination. However, both events were disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Variety of SMEs in Bang Mot: Pa Luck bakery and shop, SAFETist organic farm, Baan Ma Yam restaurant, and Ni Kor goat and fish farm

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Multistakeholder collaboration to develop Bang Mot

Local agencies and institutions have been supporting Bang Mot in various ways, such as financial support and survey studies. For example, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi and Thung Khru District Office have historically funded the Bang Mot Fest.

While activities and events in the area were initially driven by the Cycling Canal Community (known as “3C”) project group, the latter have more recently been encouraging more community participation by creating a Bang Mot Canal community working group with regular monthly meetings. As a result, by 2020, the community was managing 70% of the Bang Mot Fest.

In addition, the working group is continually trying to make the path running alongside the canal safer and more beautiful, for instance by installing artworks and solar-powered lights along the way. The group also pushed for the path to be connected to the Bangkok’s public transportation network. Thanks to the group’s close work with the Thung Khru District Office, the path was extended by 7 kilometers, becoming a running and cycling route for local people.

FIGURE 2 Overview of the multistakeholder efforts towards community tourism in Bang Mot, 2016–2023 (Source: KMUTT)
Shocks and Stresses
Climate shocks and economic stresses on the peri-urban community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shocks</th>
<th>Stresses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pandemic</td>
<td>Water salinization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Rapid urbanization</td>
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The Bang Mot Canal community as a sustainable and preferred destination for all

The Bang Mot area has been affected by many shocks in the past. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted every household in the community, damaging their livelihoods, businesses and social interactions, and in many cases causing loss of life. Community tourism activities were especially badly affected, with many businesses suffering economic losses.

Meanwhile, flooding is the most frequent shock that the Bang Mot canal has faced over the last 40 years. For example, a major flood in 1983 disrupted the entire city’s water systems. Flooding has also led to salt water from the sea intruding into the Bang Mot canal, deteriorating the quality of the canal water and now representing a common stress for the community.

The salinization of the water has sent the traditional local agricultural activities into rapid decline. In addition, brackish water regularly flows in from the gulf of Thailand through connected canals, further polluting the water.

The community is also facing rapid urbanization, changes in land use, and increasing demand for land, with many younger local people selling their land and moving away in search of better opportunities. This outward migration has impacted the population and market in Bang Mot, reducing business opportunities and income.

Last, the canal area is relatively inaccessible — it is inconvenient to access by road and it lacks water transportation infrastructure.

The major shocks and stresses impacting the community are summarized in Figure 1.

Furthermore, the resilience of specific infrastructure and services in the community was assessed. The analysis found that land use and cellular service and broadband accessibility were most vulnerable, followed by common space and public access, air pollution, and clean water sources.
Gaps and Opportunities for Resilient Recovery

Tapping into the trend of sustainable tourism to support community resilience

The Bang Mot Canal community as a sustainable and preferred destination for all

In January 2021, the Thai Government announced Bio-Circular-Green Economy (BCG) mode; as a strategy for national development and post-pandemic recovery, which identifies eco-tourism as a major economic industry. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the tourism landscape – emerging trends include travelling closer to home, avoiding crowded destinations, and searching for more authentic and immersive experiences.

Bang Mot is a green, urban-periphery area where the natural environment meets the traditional Thai lifestyle, offering many eco-tourism opportunities. Eco-tourism in Bang Mot can be an innovative solution to empower and improve the lives of local communities and the quality of the environment, ultimately building community resilience. To that end, the community seeks to (1) understand the requirements for sustainable, low-carbon tourism and (2) explore how to strengthen nature-based and active tourism in Bang Mot.

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2 BCG model places emphasis on applying science, technology and innovation to turn Thailand’s comparative advantage in biological and cultural diversity into competitive advantage, focusing on four strategic sectors, namely 1) agriculture and food, 2) wellness and medicine, 3) energy, materials and biochemicals, and 4) tourism and creative economy. (source: BCG).

3 Eco-tourism is “all nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas” (source: UN World Tourism Organization).