

**CITIZEN DIALOGUE AS ANEW INNOVATION FOR POLITICAL
CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF THAILAND:
CASE STUDY IN SATTAHIP MUNICIPALITY**

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ABSTRACT

This research article is concentrated on deliberative process for political conflict resolution in local governance. Especially, the output from addressing citizen dialogue process can reveal latent conflicts and citizen dialogue is an effective communication way for different ideal stakeholders in political conflict situation. This research show up to find the approach that create the strong base of politics in Thailand especially in Sattahip Municipality. The study explores the opinions and thoughts of local politicians, the interested groups, NGOs and local people through citizen dialogue process or public deliberation. Moreover, the impact of this study will affect local politics in Thailand because it will generate a civil-based politics.

Keyword: Citizen Dialogue, Political conflict, Local Governance, Sattahip Municipality

Introduction

King Prajadhipok stated that *"It is my opinion that the beginning of suffrage should be in the municipalities, I believe that the people should have a voice in local affairs. We are trying to educate them up to it. "I think it would be a mistake for us to have parliamentary government until the people have learned to exercise the franchise through experience in local government".* (Batson, 1974)

The above quotation explained that King Prajadhipok was concerned about the local government in Thailand because he believed that sustainable political development is happened from people- based participation and civic engagement. However, the local governance will be controlled with influential person and power from central governance and political parties. Moreover, in the local governance area, political conflict is established from group polarization and alienation.

This research attends to find the ways or methods that create the strong base of politics in Thailand especially in Sattahip Municipality. Furthermore, the research will

be a model for the local leaders and people who live in Sattahip Municipality to generate and encourage the participatory democracy in this area. Moreover, this research will use the “citizen dialogue” and “public participation process” to understand the various perceptions and find the ways to reach the common goals of the whole of Sattahip Municipality. The study will also evaluate the mechanisms used in promoting people’s accountability and participation to take part to decide together in the conflicting issues.

Objective of research

The research study needs to know that the citizen dialogue process can reduce political conflict in Sattahip Municipality effectively. The study will explore the opinions and thoughts of local politicians, the interested groups, NGOs and local people through citizen dialogue process or public deliberation.

“Public Dialogue is critical in forming policy because the public requires time to digest the issues. Or, you might say the public needs a gestation period in order to make up its mind. This crucial step is the least understood in the policy process.” (Mathews,1999,p.41)

The research objective need to resolve political conflict in the case of Sattahip Municipality to effectively promote local and community unity. The research inquiries are:

- What is the best way to resolve the political conflict in Sattahip Municipality?
- Citizen dialogue and public deliberation be applied to use effectively in the political conflict in Sattahip Municipality?
- Public participation process can urge the positive outcome for resolving the political conflict management in Sattahip Municipality?

In order to achieve a political conflict resolution in Sattahip Municipality, and this research will use the **“citizen dialogue”** and **“public participation process”** to understand the various perceptions and find the ways to reach the common goals of the whole of Sattahip Municipality. The study will also evaluate the mechanisms used in promoting people’s accountability and participation to take part to decide together in this conflict issues.

Causes of political conflict in Sattahip Municipality

Sattahip is a district in the province Chonburi, Thailand in the eastern part of Thailand. It is located at the southern tip of the province, close to the tourism center Pattaya. Moreover, Sattahip is rich in natural resources and Sattahip is an important Royal Navy Base. The political conflict happening in Sattahip Municipality is that the local people do not coexist harmoniously and especially during election time the local people feel that they are not neighbors. They do not work and talk together and they quarrel always, because they think that they are not neighbors nor friends. Furthermore, they think that when the politicians reach their political goals they do not come back to help the people and also they very often try to exploit Sattahip's natural resources. Consequently, people in Sattahip Municipality would like their local politicians to have the political ethics and awareness.

The Ex -Deputy Chief Officer of Sattahip Municipality, (Mr. Pheng Buahom) said that conflict was severe during the election season because the people who support their political parties would like to achieve their goal. In political conflict, the conflict between the parties is complex and dynamic. Political conflict situation is not "static" but, it can alter and evolves. There are historical, political and social factors that difficult and complicated the dispute within which change naturally occurs.

Citizen Dialogue as an innovation for Political Conflict Resolution in Local Governance

Political conflict management normally aims at the settlement in rule of disputes about conflicting politically relevant values, interests or preferences; and about the general access to resources at governmental level in society. Political conflict management can consist of four approaches: conflict suppression, prevention, regulation or resolution. The approach to political conflict resolution conceptualizes the phenomenon as a comprehensive and rational social engineering exercise, especially in cases of intractable or protracted conflict with deep-seated, multiple and complex.

Citizen Dialogue and Deliberation: a set of increasingly sophisticated techniques to increase participation in the political process by fostering dialogue combining both the collective intelligence of the general population and specially selected groups with more intensive access to high-grade information. (Atlee, 2003)

Citizen Dialogue impacts an important process for helping community's

members shape their common vision and resolve their common problems by providing an opportunity for them to come together to share their views, learn from each other, and prepare themselves to be able to make more informed decisions and choices

Especially, in this research framework is composed in 5 stages for citizen dialogue in Sattahip Municipality

Stage One: Deciding to Engage

Stage Two: Mapping the Relationship Together

Stage Three: Probing the Dynamics of the Relationship Together

Stage Four: Experiencing the Relationship by Thinking Together

Stage Five: Acting Together

These five stages for creating public spaces and participatory process in the local area. The participatory process of the people who can participate to think, to plan and to decide on political conflict management in Sattahip Municipality. Public participation is the best tool and administration to yield more desirable practice and outcomes of collective decision making and consensus action.

From research study, Sattahip Municipality must build collaborative strength through understanding, specifically with respect to different political ideals by managing the citizen dialogue process in many parts of communities in Sattahip Municipality. Citizen Dialogue training must be available on consistent basis in community. Citizen dialogue training will create new paradigm for the parties to conflict. Then the citizen dialogue trainee team must support and develop their conflict resolution skills.

Why citizen dialogue is as an innovation for Political conflict resolution in Local government?

1. Citizen dialogue demonstrates the intelligent management of contradictory motives and forces, it also resolve delicate political relationship.
2. Citizen dialogue is an open space for sharing their political problem, political accountability and social life.
3. During a citizen dialogue, all participants treat one another as equals, even though there may be status differences among them outside the dialogue. Citizen dialogue can make new relationship
4. Citizen dialogue is considered to be a fundamental aspect of collaboration,

stakeholder collaboration and collaborative leadership.

5. Citizen dialogue produces “citizen empowerment,” “civic engagement,” “citizen/community governance,” and “public deliberation” in local government.

Citizen dialogue process training in Sattahip Municipality could be offered yearly. Building stronger community relationship will provide greater understanding. Citizen Dialogue and discussion are key to breaking down the barriers that exist in the political implementation of Sattahip Municipality. It is recommended that political conflict resolution training be available to all participations so as to gain an understanding of how conflict can be viewed as positive and a way to increase the strength of relationships within the Sattahip Municipality. Individuals and groups will feel more empowered when they have the tools to resolve their own conflicts in positive ways.

Conclusion

The results of this research are citizen dialogue process generates the deliberative democracy the political scenario in Sattahip Municipality. We can assume that deliberative democracy happens from the public participation process. Democracy requires deliberation for the reasons: to enable citizens to discuss public issues and form opinions and to give democratic leaders much better insight into public issues than elections are able to do.

The finding of this research is the participants express that “the participation process generate opening dialogue, accessing to information, spacing to understand and reframing issues, respecting, and moving toward consensus.”

We found that the variety of political strategies in Sattahip Municipality were developed to encourage open dialogue, respect, access to information, and space to understand and reframe issues, and movement toward consensus. One of the most important of these was to encourage open and free discussion through small-group dialogue between diverse participants. Each group was supported by a trained facilitator, with the task of encouraging in-depth discussion and respect for others’ views. The small group interaction provided the effective participation to input views, learn from others and reach a collective view.

However, there are some limitations of research: Some people who participate in the citizen dialogue program could not answer truthfully in political conflict situation.

It is because if they tell the truth, they will be in danger and the limitation of time to train the people is not adequate because the formation of the participatory democracy by citizen dialogue need for long time.

In conclusion, the theme of the political conflict resolution is a major component of the research project. Moreover, the study will be designed to support the people's process for changing their society. The impact of this study will affect local politics in Thailand because it will generate a civil-based politics. The research project is a model example of the political conflict management in local organizations and local communities such as Sattahip Municipality.

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