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Understanding Public Sphere and Attitudes towards Public Services: Perceptions from Selected Rural Philippine and Thai Residents*

Maria Faina L. Diola**
Sida Sonsri***

Abstract

This is an exploratory study that aims to contribute to the understanding of the public sphere in the context of democracy and active citizenship and to apply the concept in public administration and governance. The New Public Sphere model serves as theoretical guide for the community-centeredness ideal of public agencies and the concomitant significance of active citizenship. Habermas's theory of communicative action also serves to buttress the study's theoretical underpinning within the deliberative democracy continuum. The study points the enhancement of public services as its development goal, thereby exploring how the complex concept of public sphere and its novel application in public administration field may be examined further. Public sphere in this study is therefore initially regarded as a means to an end (i.e. how knowledge on the sphere may be used for the improvement of public services) and the psychological conditions on the part of the rural respondents in which it thrives are made to surface. The results and analysis are mostly descriptive, extracting from perceptions of respondents from rural geographical and political adjacent locations in Thailand and the Philippines.

Keywords: Public Sphere/ Public Services/ Democracy

Introduction

The relationship between democracy and public services implementation is a significant dimension when doing evaluation of government services. However, an understanding of the milieu in which decisions with regard to public services are contemplated and implemented by public officials and leaders, given the political, economic and social context, is extremely important.

Vital too is an understanding of the temporal dimension in which public services are implemented. Whether occurring in stable or unstable democracies under shifting regimes, public administration systems are pulled to different directions and are often in a quandary as to how to respond efficiently, effectively, economically, yet equitably.

Public administration systems globally have morphed with each wave of democracy. Scholars refer to the recent trends of major shifts to democracy as the "Third Wave". According to Huntington (1991), the First *Wave* was from 1828, during the American and French revolutions, with at least minimal democratic institutions, followed by a reverse wave

* *A collaborative research between the College of Politics and Governance (COPAG), Mahasarakham University, Thailand and the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.*
** *Assistant Professor and Director, Publications Office, National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City; Visiting Professor at COPAG-MSU, May-July 2013, with assistance of Mr. Bhen Aguihon, research assistant for the joint research, and data encoders Ms. Catherine Gigantone (MS Environmental Science student) and Mr. Michael Jayson Mozo (BS Chemical Engineering student), students from University of the Philippines at Los Baños (UPLB).*
*** *Professor and Dean, College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University*
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and re-emergence of authoritarian rule. The *Second Wave* was from 1943 to 1962, when many of the countries were liberated at the end of World War II, followed again by a reverse wave in 1958-1975.

The collapse of totalitarian states during the "third wave" of democratization, especially in Europe in the 1980s saw an end to military regimes in Latin America andthe dictatorships in Asia, including the Philippines. Perhaps we may also count within the "third wave" path the political unrest in Thailand of late, where. Non-state actors have acted as pressure groups, believed to have catapulted the ouster of top officials, figuring in the recent military coup d'état in the country.

In the more comprehensive frameworks for Comparative Public Administration by Pierre (1995, cited by Brans, 2003), the relationship between public administration and civil society in fact is considered one major set of variables, along with the intra-organizational dynamics of bureaucracy comprised of actors, structures and behavior; and politico-administrative relations (Brans, 2003).

Hence, the discourse on democracy and democratic transitions of states replete with arguments that the development of civil society forces is a factor for the transition to democracy. According to a scholar, Gill, civil society is "a society wherein there are autonomous groups which aggregate the views and activities of individuals and which act to promote and defend the interests of those people..." Gill adds that civil society could even act against the state when defending the interests of the people (Gill 2000). In such case, it is not that the role of government is diminished. What is brought to fore is the need to pursue public interest. The above definition says Gill, implies *public discussion* of issues, which necessitates among others that public policy is to be debated widely within the community rather than decided only by an elite few. Advocating for popular participation by different groups and the pressing of the interests of such groups are an important role that civil society and its institutions -- including voluntary groups -- play in democracy promotion. This role is significant to the functioning of an effective democracy.

Because the pressing of interests of the people is a major function of civil society as a vehicle for democracy promotion, in other words, civil society's role in activism is that significant, three other concepts come to the fore in the discourse regarding civil society: *vision of the good or ideal society; a life lived with some form of association, and a* ***public sphere***. Civil society groups are usually guided by a vision that sets the direction of its activism and binds together its members' action, which is their *raison d' etre* or reason for being[1]. This vision may be the common aspiration for a better life for everyone, also presumed embodied in a country's official development goals. Pressing for the interest of the people further implies a life for civil society groups lived in communion with others, sharing time, material or financial resources, or skills. Lastly, playing the role of acting in behalf of the people connotes the upholding of a forum by which the members of the civil society are able to communicate with each other and act together.

This study takes the last concept, ***public sphere,*** deemed important in the functioning of civil society, as an important take-off point for a discourse on improving ***public services delivery***, with citizens taking part or assuming responsibility in finding solutions to the problems they face with regard to public services. This implies acting as citizens or engaging in ***active citizenship*** in the pursuit of democracy.

In this study, the concept of a "common good" will also be used as an element of "public sphere" in trying to explore its meaning (**See Annex 2** for the research instrument).

The importance of public spheres has been cited by Michael Edwards (2004):

1. A functioning public sphere is vital to associational life and the goals of a good society.

2. Public spheres allow potential solutions to good society problems to surface.

3. It is in public spheres where constituencies can be mobilized for social change.

4. Public spheres provide the spaces within which associations articulate their interests and objectives, enabling groups to sort through their differences and legitimize a consensus that is just and democratic (Edwards, 2004).

In the 1990s, the non-government organization sector was put to prominence globally, especially immediately preceding the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Development organizations have considered the active involvement of nongovernment organization on international issues at the UNCED as, the cradle of birth of a global civil society. In public administration, from the idea that civil society is an "alternative delivery mechanism", current discussion by governance scholars has shifted back to the concept of ***public*** in governance, cognizant of the need to engage ordinary citizens or the public, especially civil society, to complement mainstream government mechanisms for delivery of public goods and services. Examining the importance of public spheres above, we note that the coming together of the different parties to engage in discussions and debate and in solving common issues occupies space -- a conceptual public sphere where the other major actors in governance, i.e., government and the private sector are able to act together in a collaborative mode.

At the same time, assessments of the state of democracy have used ***citizen satisfaction in government services*** as a parameter for measuring democracy, especially the democracy studies conducted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) worldwide (IDEA Local Democracy Assessment Guide, 2011) [1].

This paper takes off from Habermas's (1984) theory of *communicative action*, which necessitates shared meanings as fundamental to action. The conduct of this study dwelt on ***public*** sphere, which the authors conceive to have a cognitive structurally constructed and discernible in communicative action. This research looks into meanings the respondents in the locale of the study attached to the proxy indicators used for public sphere. Public sphere as a concept and variable is treated in the study as nexus for democracy, public services, and citizenship.

In this exploratory collaborative research[2] towards finding possible commonalities and differences between selected Thai and Philippine rural residents' perceptions on the "public sphere", we assume that before joint action and meaningful active citizenship can take place, the different stakeholders enter into a joint "public sphere", either conceptually or physically within a physical arena where public dialogues may take place.

[1] *Dr. Diola was part of the research team that conducted a local democracy assessment of the State of Local Democracy in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (SoLD-ARMM) using the IDEA Democracy Assessment Guide, which included citizens' assessment of the public officials' performance.*

[2] *A Memorandum of Agreement was signed between COPAG and NCPAG in 2012 to conduct joint undertakings. This collaborative research is part of that Agreement.*

Perceptions of rural residents in both Thailand and the Philippines in this study were analyzed and compared using a political-administrative lens, which combines the frameworks of democracy, active citizenship promotion, and improvement of public services. The chosen places of study had to have a similar nature, i.e., rural areas near a public university -- in the case of Thailand, very recent happening of a military take-over, i.e. martial law declared in the country, and in the Philippines, having returned to democracy years after the reign of a constitutional authoritarianism regime. Since this study is also anchored on the theory of communicative action, the academic setting near the rural areas is an important context when assuming that the academe is a source for ideas on what and how to communicate when advocating for change in the delivery of public services.

The study was conducted among 70 respondents. For Thailand, 30 respondents were purposively selected from the villages in Tambon (Subdistrict)Thakhonyang and Tambon (Subsdistrict) Khamrieng in Kantaravichair Province which is adjacent to Mahasarakham University (See Annex 1 for the location of the study). In the same manner, for the Philippines, 40 respondents were selected purposively from Barangay (Village) Maitim in Bay, a town in Laguna Province, and from Barangay (Village) Daniw, from the town of Victoria, also in Laguna Province.

Research Problem, Goals, and Objectives

This collaborative research project explores the possibility of applying the concept of public sphere in public administration. The study aims to describe and analyze the general perceptions of selected rural citizens in Thailand and the Philippines on indications of a "public sphere", deemed as a platform for active citizenship towards upholding and sustaining democracy. The enhancement of public services delivery is specifically used as context for demonstrating active citizenship.

The study also aims to understand the respondents' perceptions on government performance in the delivery of public services and the former's willingness to interact and assume joint responsibility with their local government within a public sphere. When there is co-sharing of responsibility in the delivery of public services and in problem solving to improve the quality of life in the community, we assume that "public sphere" is taking shape.

For this study, the working definition for public sphere is: a dimension, conceptually or physically constructed, where public administrators engage citizens and where both parties express their citizenship, consciously or unconsciously, in trying to solve common problems. In this study, the common problems being focused relate to public services. The public sphere assumes that there is access to public goods and services in the space where both public administrators and citizens engage themselves in a dialogue, debate, or in a simple discussion of issues. It may not necessarily entail a physical territory but can also include a psychological space where citizens have opportunities to engage in an enlightened debate or dialogue and negotiate with the government, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector.

The study attempts to answer: "Can a public sphere be discerned in the local communities studied? If so, how may a public sphere be co-created and co-managed such that the administration of public goods and services is aligned with democratic ideals and responsive to development aspirations as of a particular community? What are the principles and meanings that possibly shape the public sphere in the selected local communities?

Corollary to this, the study also seeks to find out the following: (1) In what way can these two cases (from Philippines and Thailand) help to form the bases for assuming active citizenship towards improving public services in the local areas? (2) How can this understanding of the public sphere in the local areas inform better the relationships between democracy, active citizenship, and public administration?

To answer the above questions, it was deemed necessary to describe what the structures and processes would be like to co-create such a public sphere and to explore prospects for designing its co-management among different sectors of a local community, if not of society. At the same time, the study also attempts to assess rural citizens' perceptions of their well-being and how they think they can contribute to improve their socio-economic condition acting within a public space.

The specific objectives of the research in trying to make sense of what public sphere means for public administration are to:

1. Trace the existence of a public sphere in a specific public administration milieu by (a) documenting and analyzing the perceptions of rural residents in Thailand and the Philippines on the concept of a "common good" considered in the study as an element of a "public sphere".
2. Document and analyze perceptions of different sectors in a rural community on the benefits, principles, values of democracy and democratic institutions, mechanisms and processes in Thailand and Philippine political culture.
3. Document and analyze perceptions on the state of local democracy, the performance of local public officials, and the citizens' willingness to engage with their local governments.
4. Document and analyze perceptions on happiness and well-being of the community to have a sense of rural residents' vision of a 'good life'.
5. Document ideas by rural community residents on how to enable democracy to flourish and improve public services.
6. Define possible basic norms and organizational management structures of a co-created public sphere.

Significance of the Study

Findings of the study will hopefully serve as bases for defining shared meanings and forging a framework which outlines a set of principles that can serve as foundation for a "public sphere" within the context of democracy, active citizenship promotion, and improvement of public services. From the point of view of public administration, defining these shared meanings among the rural respondents will be useful in co-creating public spheres, possibly starting with dialogues on common issues and possibilities related to the promotion of democracy.

In the Philippines, a new Volunteer and Citizenship Program (VCP) was launched in 2012 by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) through the Local Government Academy (LGA)[3], where the concept of active citizenship will be a guiding tenet, and the VCP, a testing ground for its praxis. The concept of a public sphere will also prove significant as the local government units are expected carry on the task of promoting

[3] *Dr. Diola was engaged by the LGA-DILG through a technical assistance funded by the European Union to design the Volunteer and Citizenship Program in 2012. A memorandum circular (No. 2013-17) was issued by the LGA-DILG mandating LGUs to establish Volunteer and Citizenship Desks.*

active citizenship and establishing partnerships, engaging in dialogues and joint activities with different sectors of society.

Results of this study are expected to contribute to the current discourse of a community-driven and citizen-oriented model of the New Public Service more popularly espoused by Denhardt and Denhardt (2007).

Review of Related Literature

Democracy and Citizenship, Public Sphere and Public Services: Theoretical Underpinnings

Since there are no empirical studies, if not only a handful of studies linking democracy, public sphere, citizenship and public services, the literature reviewed in this research are on conceptual and theoretical underpinnings and etymologies of the concepts, especially of *public sphere*, under study.

First, we review the link between democracy and public services. The strong relationship between democracy and public service has been prominently argued by Frederick Mosher in the 1970s in his book "Democracy and the Public Service" when it first came out in 1968. The simplicity of Mosher's logic to the intrinsic link between democracy and public service is similarly pointed out by Perry (2006, p.5) as one of the premises of such argument, "Government decisions and behaviour are tremendously influential in our society" and the kinds of "decisions and behaviors are heavily influenced by non-elected administrative officials". Still, Mosher is cited to have argued that, "the kinds of decisions and behaviors taken depend upon the officials' capabilities, orientations, and values."

Illustrating the intrinsic link between democracy and public services, public administration scholars now have shifted to a new paradigm, the New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt (2007), in contrast to the New Public Management model and the Old Public Administration paradigm which are conceived to have a dependence on and a commitment to models of rational choice, where the relationship between public executives and those who report to them are stressed. In the newer model, the concept of *citizenship i*s given prominence.

This research uses heavily the New Public Service (NPS) model for its theoretical underpinnings, because of its integrative power linking democracy, citizenship, and public service. The NPS though does not include explicitly the concept of a *public sphere*, which this research attempts to probe as it believes that in order to improve its process of engaging citizens, public administration systems need to understand the scope, limits, and potential of that *space* of their engagement. The concept of a public sphere is central to this study. The concept is used extensively in communication and media studies, and is deemed implicit in the discourse argued by Denhardt and Denhardt in their 2007 book on the New Public Service. The possible application of the public sphere in public administration is explored in this research.

The concept of a "**public sphere"** offered in this study refers to a dimension, conceptually or physically, where public administrators engage citizens and where both parties express their citizenship, consciously or unconsciously, in trying to solve common problems. In this study, the common problems being focused are related to public services. The public sphere assumes that there is access to public goods and services also in the space where both public administrators and citizens engage themselves in a dialogue, debate, or in a

simple discussion of issues. It may not necessarily entail a physical territory but the public sphere can also include a psychological space where citizens have opportunities to engage in an enlightened debate or dialogue with the government, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector.

The New Public Service model of Denhardt and Denhardt (2007, p. 27) focuses on more contemporary precursors, such as: (1) theories of democratic citizenship, (2) models of community and civil society, (3) organizational humanism and the new public administration, and (4) postmodern public administration.

In number two above, the concept of citizenship is seen to be linked to the idea of community and its significance to public administrators. In its new role, espoused by the New Public Service model, the two Denhardt scholars point out that public administrators have a responsibility in building social capital and community -- the latter, as advocated by some scholars such as Nalbandian (1999)[4]. Other scholars argue that the new roles for local public managers is that of helping enhance social capital by encouraging citizen involvement in public decision making, which then "leads to understanding and enriches both government and the community" (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007, p. 35).

Public Service: an Extension of Citizenship

Second, the link between public service and citizenship is for the most part discussed by Denhardt and Denhardt (2007)'s New Public Service model. The model looks at the ethical dimension of citizenship and defines it as "citizenship concerned with the nature of one's membership in a political community, including such issues as the rights and responsibilities of citizens." The authors cite Aristotle's *Politics* as that which gives a classical account, an expression of an "ideal" view of citizenship[5] (Pocock, 1995, p.42 cited by Denhardt and Denhardt, p. 46). As explained by the two authors mentioned above, following this view, citizens engage in the work of the *polis* because that is the means by which they can attain their fullest humanity.

Participation in democracy is conceived by Barber (1984) as moving towards thecreation of active, interested communities of citizens "who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions" (Barber, 1984, p. 117). With this, Barber further envisions a transformed citizenry, from being private individuals with self-interests to having a regard for the public good.

Mutual responsibility has also been recognized by Pranger as a direction to which citizen action can direct itself. Pranger (1968, p. 53)[6] , cite Denhardt and Denhardt (2007, p. 51) contends that the more virtuous conduct of citizens is when they veer away from the culture of power, rather, they act responsibly as an agent "for common participation based on independent points of view, eventually fostering that *mutual responsibility*, which alone enriches the commonwealth's life" (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007, p. 51). The mutuality aspect of citizenship is also explored in this study, which is considered a key variable that may unlock gray areas in action-oriented and participatory types of public service programs.

[4] *Original citation: John Nalbandian. 1999. Facilitating Community, Enabling Democracy: New Roles of Local Government Managers." Public Administration Review 59(3): 187-98.*
[5] *Denhardt and Denhardt cite Pocock for this view: Pocock, J.G.A. 1995 (p. 42). "The ideal of citizenship since classical times". In Theorizing Citizenship, ed. Ronald Beiner, 29-52. Albany: State University of New York.*
[6] *Original source: Pranger, Robert J. (1968). The eclipse of citizenship. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.*

Based on Cooper's (1991, p. 139)[7] *An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration*, Walzer notably describes the ethical identity of public administrators as "citizens in lieu of the rest of us; the common good is, so to speak, their specialty."

Reviewing Models of Public Sphere

The conceptual notion of a public sphere can be traced to the time of Aristotle, when political philosophers reflected on various configurations of relationships – i.e., between citizens, between citizens and the political society, and between citizens and the state. Artistotle was the first to distinguish between public and private, distinguishing "the *private* as spheres of a particular being such as individual, slave, woman and family, and the *public* as a sphere of citizens and polis, *without separating these completely"* (cited by Kocan, 2008). With that view, it was deemed that a medium would have to allow the means of access between the public and the private sphere, where the "public forum" became required by the *polis*. The public forum was also where a large variety of social experiences would be discussed and exchanged rationally towards critically examining the state's policies, an important first step into democratic governance.

However, Kocan (2008, p. 2) says that there is no fixed and hence absolute definition of public sphere. He explains, "What we have are rather broad and vague definitions of it, which theorists use in order to reflect upon different values and reveal basic elements of democratic societal association."

Kocan generally categorizes thoughts on public sphere as either *descriptive* or *normative*, the latter aimed at being an end in itself. What *descriptive* analyses of public spheres have in common according to Kocan is that they are intended to explain what the public sphere is and how public spheres have an effect on the social and political way of life of a people. With this type of public sphere, it can either be "fact-based", simply seeking to explore the main character of existing public space as a "principle that can contribute to development of democracies" (Kocan, 2008, p. 3); "explanatory", or that which attempts to explain the way the public is the way it is, sometimes simply explaining the structure of communicative communication; or public sphere analyses can be "descriptive", seeking to answer, " what effect does a public sphere have on democratic outcomes"

On the other hand *normative* studies on public spheres are evaluative, because these types of studies have to make a stand on the question whether active participation in the public sphere will be better than regulation.

This research is meant as an initial step towards lodging further *descriptive* studies on the public sphere, exploring if public spheres can be discerned and what the bounds and limits are of a typical public sphere that can be traced in local governing units. In the future, an understanding of the basic elements of a public sphere may lead to further studies on what their effects are on the social and political life of local communities.

Communicative Action and Democracy

From the above point of view, Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action and reflections on democracy, and more fundamentally, on the essence of political life are essentially situated in an ethical perspective. The concepts of a deliberative democracy and of the public sphere entailed from such an "ethics of communication" linked with a theory of

[7]*Original source: Cooper, Terry L. (1991). An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.*

"universal pragmatics" and enlightened by the concept of "communicative action", is what Gueye (2005, pp.120-121) puts forth as the essence of political activity.

This research argues that for governance, the three actors, government, civil society, and the private sector can all engage in communicative action in a ***public sphere*** towards mutual understanding. In a democracy, this is essential to bring about political change in a country or to address local community needs. In effecting political change, global experience has shown that civil society or civil society forces are major sources that would initiate public action or civic action. Nevertheless, the public sphere is considered important for any negotiated action and consensus to happen in a democracy.

Deliberative Democracy

Further extending his theory of communicative action and linking it to democracy, Habermas uses deliberative democracy as a concept. Deliberative democracy is connected to the "public political sphere", defined by Habermas as the "quintessence of those conditions of communication by which a discursive formation of opinion and of the will of the public (the citizens) can be realized." Habermas considers the concept of public political sphere as the "fundamental concept of a normative theory of democracy". It is this "normative theory of democracy" which Gueye (2005, p.124) points as Habermas's "deliberative democracy".

The Principle of Co-Responsibility in Deliberative Democracy

The principle of *co-responsibility* implies that people accept for themselves and apply effectively in their daily political behaviour, rules which are able to keep political contradictions and conflict within limits, which at the same time do not threaten their freedom and security. The discussion on co-responsibility can happen among the three sectors, government, civil society, and the private sector. Co-responsibility is a requirement for deliberative democracy, without which according to Gueye, the latter could not work, as it requires a "shared feeling of common responsibility of the actors in building its necessary prerequisites" (Gueye, 2005, p. 127).

However, civil society alone may not be able to achieve the conditions needed to attain the principles of equality, diversity, independence, and a supportive context for citizen. The government will have to play a major role in helping achieve a *good society*, thereby producing good citizens. In other words, good government should be able to produce good citizens.

Government action is thus deemed vital if associational life and the public sphere are to generate both equal opportunities for private interest to be represented and a genuine sense of the public interest too. Otherwise only certain voices, interests and associations will be heard. Several studies worldwide have been conducted using citizen perception surveys linking democracy to both citizen satisfaction, trust and transparency in government institutions or public services and people's involvement or participation in public activities (National Democratic Institute 2010; NCPAG-PCID 2013; Institute of Public Administration 2006; Hachhethu 2004; Diamond 2001; DeBartolo 2008; Moreno 2001).

This research takes the first step towards forging mutual understanding between and among different actors in society adopting the "communicative" approach of Habermas. This is to be done initially by searching for consensus points on what could be considered "common good", acceptable by all actors in society, which hopefully could be a future bases for a free and fair discussion of democratic issues within the "public sphere", in either the Philippines or in Thailand, as people begin to assume co-responsibility.

We begin this search for consensus points by simply gathering perceptions from different sectors (i.e., the respondents in this study) on what they consider as democratic values, principles, and actions, as bases for future discussions and debates on solutions to problems in public services in their locality and weave a pattern of perceptions from these responses.

Theoretical Framework

The figure below shows the possible application of public sphere in the field of public administration. The relationships between and among the concepts used to study the public sphere in this research is shown in **Fig. 3** below. The public sphere is conceived as a black box in the study, which is assumed to be a space where the different actors in development engage with each other through dialogue, joint activities and discussion. This space is where transformative activities are expected to happen when the actors engage in acts of citizenship, which may ultimately lead to multiple development goals, including improvement of public services. The size and shape of the public space is variable, and dependent on the "participation" of the different actors. The structure of public sphere is also assumed to be variable, which this study aims to trace. Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald (2000)[8] as cited by Castells (2008, p.80) contend that the public sphere "exists within the political/institutional space that is not subject to any particular sovereign power but, instead, is shaped by the variable geometry of relationships between states and nonstate actors."

The principle of co-responsibility or shared responsibility is derived from Habermas' deliberative democracy and his idea of "universal pragmatics". The latter's aim is to discover the formal conditions of mutual understanding. Co-responsibility is also an important new dimension implied by Denhardt and Denhardt's New Public Service. They cite Barber's (1984, p. 117) emphasis on the aim of participation, which is to create communities of interested citizens made capable of forging a common purpose and mutual action, by virtue of their civic attitude and participatory institutions. Co-responsibility is explored in this study as one principle of democracy that is a required condition among citizens acting in a public sphere. **Fig. 3** below is the constructed tentative theoretical framework for this study.

[8] *Original source cited was: Guidry, John A., Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald. (2000). Globalization and social movements: Culture, power, and the transnational public sphere. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press*.

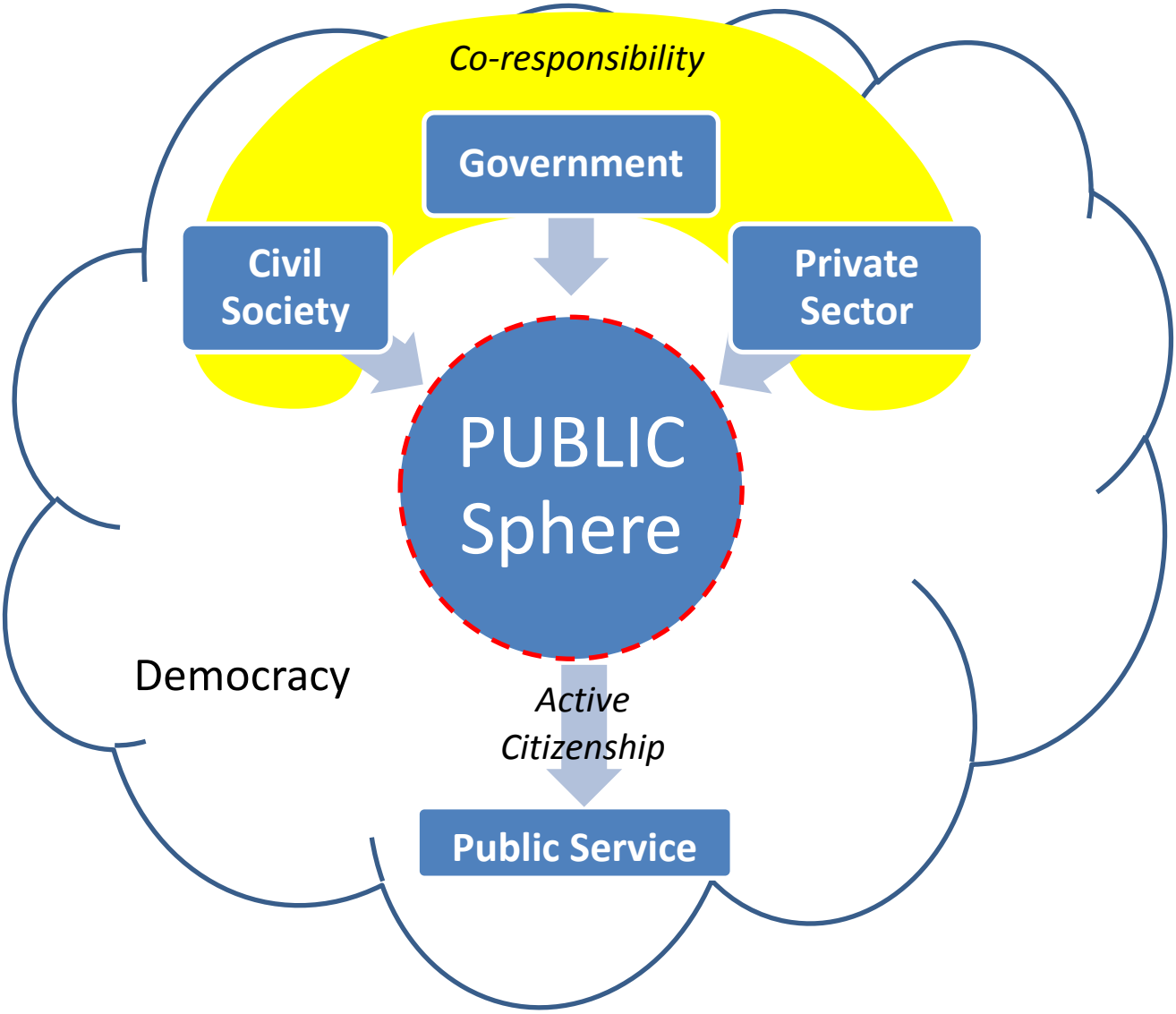

Figure1. Application of Public Sphere in Public Administration

Methodology

The study was conducted simultaneously among 70 respondents in selected villages in Thailand (30 respondents) and in the Philippines (40 respondents). In Thailand data collection was conducted in February to March, 2014, while in the Philippines it was conducted in April to May. 2014. The case study design was adopted, making use of surveys, key interviews, and focus group discussion in the case of the Philippines. The study made use of the following data.

Using purposive sampling in choosing the respondents, the research had to select respondents who had the capacity and were willing to respond to questions that were both philosophical in nature and politically inclined. In the case of Thailand, it was difficult to get respondents who would be able to spend more time in answering the questions in the

survey/research instrument. In the case of the Philippines, the time to conduct the interview was also limited; hence the field data collectors relied partly added the snowball type of sampling, wherein the last interviewee or respondent referred to the researchers the next possible respondents.

In describing the results of the research, descriptive statistics was used to show averages in percentages. The use of bar graphs was also employed to depict general trends comparing the results between Thailand and the Philippines.

The Respondents

Most of the respondents from the Philippines were employees, while the Thai respondents were mostly students, who were of course quite young, belonging mostly to the 22-30 bracket; with some in the 16-21 and 31-35 brackets. The Filipino respondents had a good age distribution.

Most of the Filipino respondents were members of organizations, whereas in Thailand, only less than a quarter belonged to organizations. There were mostly female respondents from the Philippine, while for Thailand, an almost equal number of male and female respondents were picked for the study.

Buddhism was the religion for all the Thai respondents while in the Philippines all respondents were Catholics, except for two who belonged to other Christian denominations. Most of the respondents from both nationalities were educated as already implied in the choice of respondents, either having some college education in Thailand or gaining vocational/technical education and college degrees in the Philippines. No political affiliations were indicated by the respondents.

As for their recent involvement in public activities, the respondents were mostly involved in voting and election activities. A few respondents from both Thailand and the Philippines were involved in signing a petition, in wearing a badge or a T-shirt, and in going to see an elected official regarding an issue. For Thai respondents, some public meeting was organized and about three respondents ran for elective office. In the Philippines putting up of posters was done, just as a respondent from Thailand also did.

Perceptions on Democracy and the Public Sphere

The Common Good and the Public Sphere

Initially, the interviews sought what citizens in a community generally consider as "common good". At the same time, it also aimed to identify possible elements of a "public sphere" in a democracy. During the interview, it was explained that the "public sphere" refers to a space where there is free access to goods and services. It may not necessarily be a physical territory but can also include a psychological space where citizens have opportunities to engage in an enlightened debate or dialogue with the government, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector.

Common goods and services. This sub-section explores the awareness level or perception of the respondents of what common goods or services may be shared in a public domain. By having a sense of the respondents' awareness, the starting point for discerning how a public sphere may take shape – i.e., what may possibly be shared in the public space and where it may be found, is hopefully unleashed. The results show that there seems to be a

similar higher preference by both the Philippine and Thai respondents for educational facilities to be in a common area, such as a library, high school and elementary education. This is probably to be expected as the respondents from the two countries reside near a major academic institution and therefore are accustomed to having educational facilities within the vicinity. This is also a good indication that physically, a public space, such as any of the educational facilities considered to be a common good or common service, can be considered for use as a common venue where the community residents can hold their discussion and perhaps also problem-solving sessions.

The Philippine residents consider places of worship and emergency and disaster centers as top common goods or services that should be in the public domain. For Thai respondents, places for community gardening and communication centers earned higher preferences compared with the Filipino respondents. The preferences for common goods and services by Thai residents are interesting and reveal that the Thai residents may value communication activities, which is along Habermas' concept of *communicative action* in a democracy. At the same time, the Thai respondents put value on community gardening as a public good or service, which may also be a starting point for any joint endeavor between the local government and the community residents. In addition, places for community assemblies and meetings are also given importance by the Philippine respondents, along with police and security and legal counsel desks, implying that there probably are more incidences of threats to security in the areas where the study was conducted. By recognizing the importance of places for community assemblies, the likes of what might be considered a physical public sphere may be discerned.

Co-responsibility. As discussed above in the Review of Literature, the principle of co-responsibility is important principle that this study wants to offer in the discourse on deliberative democracy and the public sphere that this study wants to explore among the respondents. Gueye (2005, p. 127) asserts that deliberative democracy "cannot work without a shared feeling of common responsibility of the actors in building its necessary prerequisites". In a related study, Diola (2009) in her grounded theory approach to the study of social capital found that aside from "mutually beneficial collective action" as an indicator of social capital, a collective sense of responsibility is also needed in the formation of social capital, a product of the convergence of different actors in the local area.

This sense of consensual agreement is based on Habermas' concept of deliberative democracy. Habermas assigns to "universal pragmatics" the task of identifying and reconstructing the universal condition of a possible mutual understanding (Habermas, 1985, cited by Gueye, 2005, p. 120)[9]. Habermas aims to define the norms of a communicative action as a human activity aimed at mutual understanding (Habermas, 1987, cited by Gueye, 2005, p. 121). This section investigates the respondents' sense of co-responsibility or mutual responsibility on activities to be undertaken in the community.

If local public administrators in Thailand and the Philippines wish to initiate co-creation of public spheres starting with what the local people think they can do together, the results of this study are indicative. Based on the list of responses, both Philippine and Thai respondents seem to have a common perception that environmental concerns, such as cleanup drives and garbage collection, and land-use planning concerns are joint responsibilities between and among different sectors of society. Planning for the beautification and other community development projects is also perceived by respondents from both countries as

[9] *Original source cited by Gueye: Habermas, Questions and counterquestions. (1985). In R.K. Bernstein (Ed). Habermas, in Habermas and Modernity (p. 196). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).*

joint responsibility to be undertaken by the different sectors of the community. But more interesting is the result that respondents from both Thailand and the Philippines

However, as shown in **Table 1,** Thai respondents have higher preference for choice of leaders (96.67%) and choice of beneficiaries (90.00%) as joint responsibilities with other sectors of society more than the Filipino respondents (65.00%) and (77.5%), respectively. The Thai respondents also prefer that income-generating projects (90.00%), fixing of broken fixtures and lights (76.67%), as well as peace and security (83.33%) be a joint responsibility by different actors in the community. For the Filipinos, planning for infrastructure projects (92.5%) is a perceived joint responsibility, but the fixing of fixtures and painting of walls and fences (52.5%) should be a responsibility by a special group and not necessarily a joint venture.

If one examines the activities which are considered as joint responsibilities by respondents of this study by both nationalities, we may say that such activities as land-use planning and environmental concerns are good starting points for assuming shared responsibilities in the community itself since planning for common natural resources management has been traditionally managed by the public administrators for the citizens. Involvement by ordinary citizens in such local planning processes may imply that local development councils have to reform their structures to allow the local citizens to also assume and share responsibility for land-use planning and involvement in environmental concerns.

Also, such types of discussion may be politically neutral at the onset and may be a strategic entry point for discussion among different sectors of the community. Dissipating tension at the start of engagement or any joint endeavour may open up and invite discussion from all sectors, which may then progress into more in-depth discussion and even debates, which are some of the signposts of discursive democracy at work. At the same time, the willingness of the respondents to be involved in planning for the community is also a positive sign towards the likelihood of getting support for community projects.

As for the Thai respondents, the perception that the choice of leaders (96.67%) as well as project beneficiaries (90.00%) should be a mutual responsibility shows possible topics that are political in nature and may therefore be negotiated and debated upon by different sectors in a community. This aspect of democracy, i.e., representative democracy, in particular, the choice of leaders through electoral processes, can be a possible subject of debate in a public sphere. In a democracy, such topics fall within what Habermas calls the "public political sphere" mentioned in the Review of Literature section, which he considers as the "quintessence of those conditions of communication by which a discursive formation of opinion and of the will of the public (citizens) can be realized" (cited by Gueye, 2005, p. 124). This is also what forms the foundation of deliberative democracy according to Habermas.

It is worth noting that the Filipino respondents prefer infrastructure projects as shared responsibility, while for them, the fixing of fixtures and painting of walls and fences are a responsibility of special groups. By wanting to assume mutual responsibility for infrastructure projects, the respondents are taking a positive direction towards democratizing processes such as planning, in an inclusive sphere -- instead of just of focusing on making technology available; this attitude makes the creation of a public sphere off to a good start towards realizing genuine democracy.

Nevertheless, respondents from both nationalities have chosen activities that they think should be joint responsibilities, which are worth noting when considering what can be called "public sphere".

Table 1 below shows the respondents' perception of the aspect in community life /society/country which they consider as areas of cooperation that must be conducted jointly by different sectors of society towards a public consequence or a public goal or end.

Table 1. Perceptions on Co-Responsibility

1	Should be done jointly by different sectors in the community
2	Should be done by a specific individual or group

	PHILIPPINES		THAILAND		PH-TH, if -, PH < TH	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Clean-up drive (river, public places)	70.00%	15.00%	83.33%	16.67%	-13.33%	-1.67%
Planning for beautification and other community development projects	87.50%	10.00%	76.67%	20.00%	10.83%	-10.00%
Garbage collection	80.00%	20.00%	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Fixing lights in dangerous places/street lighting	87.50%	5.00%	33.33%	63.33%	54.17%	-58.33%
Emergency and disaster / evacuation activities	82.50%	7.50%	63.33%	43.33%	19.17%	-35.83%
Repair of broken fixtures (chairs, tables, windows, etc.) in public places	42.50%	52.50%	76.67%	26.67%	-34.17%	25.83%
Painting walls, fences	47.50%	50.00%	63.33%	40.00%	-15.83%	10.00%
Income-generating projects	57.50%	37.50%	90.00%	13.33%	-32.50%	24.17%
Identifying priority projects	80.00%	2.50%	63.33%	36.67%	16.67%	-34.17%
Planning for infrastructure projects	92.50%	2.50%	56.67%	46.67%	35.83%	-44.17%
Land-use planning (residential, agriculture, public place, etc.)	80.00%	12.50%	76.67%	26.67%	3.33%	-14.17%
Local budgeting	67.50%	22.50%	60.00%	40.00%	7.50%	-17.50%
Drafting local laws/policies	82.50%	7.50%	80.00%	23.33%	2.50%	-15.83%
Choosing the local leaders	65.00%	27.50%	96.67%	23.33%	-31.67%	4.17%
Choosing beneficiaries of projects	77.50%	12.50%	90.00%	10.00%	-12.50%	2.50%
Peace and security	75.00%	15.00%	83.33%	20.00%	-8.33%	-5.00%
Others						

Common agenda. The respondents also reveal their preferences for talking points or recurring issues of the community/country that they wish could be discussed openly or regularly with their local leaders to find solutions, with the rest of the members of the community, or with leaders of the country.

Table 2 below generally shows that the Thai respondents are more open to discussion of common agendas than their Filipino counterparts, with either their local leaders, other community members, or with their national leaders. However, as can be gleaned more closely from the same Table**,** trends show that in general both Thai and Philippine respondents have more agenda to discuss with either the other members of the community or their national leaders, than with their local leaders (except for problems on farming and unresponsive leaders for Thailand).

In particular, the Philippine respondents list more items that they prefer to discuss with other members of their community than with their community leaders or with leaders of the country as a whole. Also, worth noting is that the Filipino respondents had the least number of issues that they want to discuss only with their community leaders. For both Thai and Filipino respondents, a question that may be further probed is: could this reveal less trust by the respondents on their local leaders? As Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) argued, trust is an important ingredient for a public sphere to flourish. The study of Diola (2009) on social capital reveals that trust is an important factor in the formation of social capital for local governance towards peace building. It may be worth investigating further if trust is felt by the residents towards their community leaders and even with their national leaders before any program or activity to enlarge or develop the public sphere is to be conceived. The co-creation of a public sphere between citizens and local public administrators may need to begin with the building of trust between the two sectors in such case.

As for forging a common agenda with national leaders, this tendency is revealed more among the Thai respondents. Interestingly, the trend shows that these respondents perceive more of self-help and development programs or activities as common agenda that they can forge with other sectors of the community. These common agenda include farming and development projects to improve the life of the community. Health problems and issues of unresponsive leaders are also perceived by the Thai respondents as a shared agenda that they may discuss with other members of their community.

Issues related to education and communication are those that the Filipino respondents prefer to discuss with the national leaders of the country. It seems but fitting that these two main topics are chosen as preferred national agendas. Education and communication are two important and fundamental processes or themes relevant to the functioning of a society that need to be discussed in a “public sphere” in a country professing to have a democratic setting. The other two talking points that the Filipino respondents wish to discuss with their national leaders are related to social issues, such as corruption and bribery and problems that generally confront the youth, such as drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, etc.

Similarly, for the Thai respondents, education and communication, two important processes of a well-functioning society, are also topics that they prefer to discuss with national leaders. So are social issues such as corruption and bribery and drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and others. Aside from the above, other agenda that the Thai respondents prefer to discuss with their national leaders are environmental-, infrastructure- and transportation-related concerns. We infer that such topics mentioned above are of national concern and are perceived by the respondents as more appropriately taken up with their national leaders.

Marketing or products promotion-related concerns as well as issues of corruption and bribery are topics the Thai respondents prefer to discuss with their community leaders. We note that such topics pertain to principles of equity and justice, which the concept of a public sphere could be a forum for their negotiation.

Table 2. Perceptions on Common Agenda to be Discussed between Community Leaders and Members of the Community

1	Discuss with local leaders
2	Discuss with other community members
3	Discuss with leaders of the country
4	Discuss regularly

	PHILIPPINES				THAILAND				PH-TH, if -, PH < TH			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Health problems	27.50%	30.00%	10.00%	7.50%	23.33%	36.67%	20.00%	16.67%	4.17%	-6.67%	-10.00%	-9.17%
School /education of children	10.00%	22.50%	35.00%	12.50%	23.33%	33.33%	36.67%	3.33%	-13.33%	-10.83%	-1.67%	9.17%
Farming and means of livelihoods (inputs)	12.50%	30.00%	25.00%	10.00%	23.33%	66.67%	16.67%	6.67%	-10.83%	-36.67%	8.33%	3.33%
Marketing or selling of products /promotion	15.00%	32.50%	15.00%	10.00%	40.00%	30.00%	26.67%	6.67%	-25.00%	2.50%	-11.67%	3.33%
Low or no income of community members	25.00%	25.00%	22.50%	10.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	3.33%	-8.33%	-8.33%	-10.83%	6.67%
Environmental issues (specify)	7.50%	35.00%	25.00%	10.00%	26.67%	20.00%	40.00%	0.00%	-19.17%	15.00%	-15.00%	10.00%
Infrastructure issues (specify)	5.00%	32.50%	27.50%	7.50%	30.00%	20.00%	53.33%	0.00%	-25.00%	12.50%	-25.83%	7.50%
Issues (specify)	0.00%	7.50%	2.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	7.50%	2.50%	0.00%
Transportation issues	17.50%	32.50%	25.00%	0.00%	3.33%	16.67%	80.00%	0.00%	14.17%	15.83%	-55.00%	0.00%
Communication issues	25.00%	22.50%	37.50%	0.00%	13.33%	13.33%	66.67%	3.33%	11.67%	9.17%	-29.17%	-3.33%
Unresponsive local leaders	20.00%	27.50%	25.00%	10.00%	40.00%	40.00%	13.33%	10.00%	-20.00%	-12.50%	11.67%	0.00%
Corruption, bribery	12.50%	20.00%	35.00%	0.00%	20.00%	30.00%	70.00%	0.00%	-7.50%	-10.00%	-35.00%	0.00%
Peace and security (crime,etc.)	22.50%	10.00%	37.50%	10.00%	13.33%	36.67%	46.67%	10.00%	9.17%	-26.67%	-9.17%	0.00%

Family problems	15.00%	27.50%	12.50%	20.00%	23.33%	33.33%	16.67%	26.67%	-8.33%	-5.83%	-4.17%	-6.67%
Development Projects to improve community life	25.00%	27.50%	20.00%	0.00%	26.67%	36.67%	30.00%	6.67%	-1.67%	-9.17%	-10.00%	-6.67%
Social problems (specify, such as drug addiction, internet addiction, other youth problems, drop-outs, teen-age pregnancy, etc)	20.00%	22.50%	32.50%	0.00%	26.67%	20.00%	53.33%	3.33%	-6.67%	2.50%	-20.83%	-3.33%
Other problems	0.00%	5.00%	5.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	3.33%	0.00%	5.00%	1.67%	-3.33%

Democratic arrangements (norms). The next set of tables below show the responses only from Philippine respondents regarding their perceptions of ideal arrangements or principles to be followed, assuming that there is a regular consultation and dialogue (to be) conducted in their community.

Table 3a below appears to show that currently half of the listed **ideal preferred arrangements that must be adopted for engaging in a dialogue are somehow currently being followed** (those with more than 50% rate of response from the Philippine respondents in the particular item). These principles are:

1. Participants try to share all pertinent information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as are relevant to the problem/issue discussed (62.50%).

2. Participants come together so they can discuss and find solutions to an issue or common problem or agenda that was set (60.00%)

3. Every participant is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion (57.50%).

4. Respect for and implement decision(s) made during the meeting (52.50%).

For **ideal arrangements** in conducting dialogues but currently **not yet being adopted**, we take note of the responses which got at least one fourth (25%) of the total number of respondents. The responses reveal the following ideal arrangements, as listed in **Table 5-A** below:

1. Participants formulate their own agenda, rather than being influenced by money or power from outside (50.00%).

2. Participants respect each one's opinion and try to understand the argument from the other person's perspective (37.50%).

3. Discussion is based on reason and critical judgment by participants rather than from an imposed dogma or moral position (37.50%)

It is significant to note that such ideal arrangements, especially no. 1 above, which implies "ownership" of the agenda for dialogue, are recognized by some of the respondents, although such arrangements are not yet currently practiced. Perhaps more awareness-raising activities need to be done for the respondents so that their ideal arrangements for dialogue can be realized.

Table 3a. Results for Philippine Respondents' Perceptions on Ideal Democratic Arrangements in Dialogues

Y	if currently being adopted in your community
X	if not yet adopted but which you consider an "ideal" democratic arrangement

	X		Y	
Participants respect each one's opinion and try to understand the argument from the other person's perspective.	15	37.50%	19	47.50%
Participants come together so they can discuss and find solutions to a common issue or problem or agenda that was set.	13	32.50%	24	60.00%
Every participant is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion.	12	30.00%	23	57.50%
Participants discuss their cultural values in relation to the larger society.	9	22.50%	18	45.00%
Participants formulate their own agenda, rather than being influenced by money or power from outside.	20	50.00%	11	27.50%
Discussion is based on reason and critical judgment by participants rather than from an imposed dogma or moral position.	15	37.50%	12	30.00%
Respect for and implement decision(s) made during the meeting.	11	27.50%	21	52.50%
Participants try to share all pertinent information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as are relevant to the problem/issue discussed.	10	25.00%	25	62.50%

Rules for Dialogue. The study reveals a need to train more good facilitators to handle dialogues. The Philippine respondents indicated that generally speaking only two of the listed **ideal rules for democratic dialogue are currently being practiced. Table 3b** below shows that in general, these two rules (rating of more than 50.00%) that ideally should be adopted when conducting dialogues, but which are not yet done, are the following:

1. Wait for someone to finish speaking before asking questions or giving comments (62.50%) and

2. Facilitator should encourage everyone to speak up (52.50%)

On the other hand, **Table 3b** also shows that the more significant **ideal rule for conducting dialogue** which they say are **not yet being practiced** is that **"**only leaders should talk (62.50%): Although, in a democratic practice, both leader and members should be free to talk, the study showed that Philippine respondents had the tendency to prefer that only the leaders should do the talking. Somehow ideally, the facilitator should also be rotated for each meeting, and for some respondents, this is already being done as well in their area. In addition, the respondents also want to follow the majority-rule rule and to invite observers to the meeting, which is also already being practiced to some extent. Other details of the preferred rules for dialogue are shown in the **Table 5-B** below.

Table 3b. Rules for Democratic Consultation and Dialogue

Y	if currently being adopted in your community
X	if not yet adopted but which you consider an "ideal" rule

	X		Y	
Meeting should proceed whoever is there.	18	45.00%	15	37.50%
Fine/penalty for those who will violate rules (tardiness, frequent absences).	14	35.00%	16	40.00%
Always come on time.	17	42.50%	10	25.00%
Attend meetings regularly.	12	30.00%	16	40.00%
Facilitator should explain the meaning of each argument / issue presented.	16	40.00%	18	45.00%
Wait for someone to finish speaking before asking questions or giving comments.	11	27.50%	25	62.50%
Facilitator should encourage everyone to speak up.	16	40.00%	21	52.50%
Only leaders should talk.	27	67.50%	6	15.00%
Rotate facilitator for each meeting.	19	47.50%	5	12.50%
Majority rule.	16	40.00%	13	32.50%
Council members /leaders should always attend.	13	32.50%	18	45.00%
Invite observers to the meeting.	18	45.00%	14	35.00%

Consensus and conflict. When asked if they think it is important to always reach a consensus in decision-making among the participants in a dialogue/consultation, the Philippine and Thai respondents answer in the affirmative. **Table 3c** below shows this trend.

If consensus is not reached, but majority voted in favor of some action or idea, how should the participants in the consultation/dialogue show agreement to the action or idea? **Table 3d** below shows a major difference between the views of respondents from both countries. Philippine respondents say they prefer to follow the majority rule show their agreement, followed by open balloting. The Thai respondents however would rather have a secret balloting to show agreement if consensus is not reached.

Table 3e below also shows an interesting way of resolving conflict from the point of view of the Thai and Philippine respondents. The Thai prefer that everybody tolerates the conflict, but the Philippine respondents prefer to settle the conflict amicably or allow a third-party to mediate. The latter also allow for the opposing parties to negotiate. Some Filipino respondents also interestingly indicate that to suppress the opposing party or parties would be one option to resolve the conflict.

Table 3c. Perceptions on Need for Consensus among Participants in a Dialogue

PHILIPPINES			THAILAND	
1-yes	2-no		1-yes	2-no
27	4		28	0

Table 3d. Perceptions on how to show agreement to an idea, if consensus is not reached

PHILIPPINES				THAILAND		
open balloting	**secret balloting**	**majority**		**open balloting**	**secret balloting**	**majority**
16	1	18		7	14	11

Table 3e. Perceptions on How Conflicts Should be Resolved

	PHILIPPINES		THAILAND		PH-TH, if -, PH < TH
Suppress the opposing party(ies).	12	30.00%	5	16.67%	13.33%
Everybody tolerates the conflict.	1	2.50%	13	43.33%	-40.83%
Let the majority decide whose party should be followed.	3	7.50%	5	16.67%	-9.17%
Conduct a contest through debate; losing party should concede.	7	17.50%	3	10.00%	7.50%
Authority decides / interprets what decision to take.	1	2.50%	1	3.33%	-0.83%
Allow negotiation until opposing or conflicting parties agree.	12	30.00%	6	20.00%	10.00%
Give chance to the minority (party with lesser votes) to implement their alternative when the next chance comes.	4	10.00%	2	6.67%	3.33%
Allow a third party to mediate.	14	35.00%	4	13.33%	21.67%
Settle conflict by amicable agreement.	18	45.00%	10	33.33%	11.67%

Recognizing people's voice. The respondents were also asked if they agreed that each one should have a voice or make his/her opinion heard ***before*** a public activity/project or program in the community is *designed*. Respondents from both countries generally replied "yes", except for two respondents from the Philippines who did not think it is necessary to have each individual have his or her voice heard before the public activity or program is designed.

Table 4a. Should people's voice/opinion be heard before a public activity is designed?

PHILIPPINES			THAILAND	
YES	NO		YES	NO
36	2		30	0

Giving voice before a public activity/program/project is implemented. When asked if they agree that each one should have a voice or make his/her opinion heard ***before*** a public activity/project or program in the community is *implemented*, this time 100% of the respondents from both countries replied in the affirmative.

Table 4b. Should people's voice be heard before a project is implemented?

PHILIPPINES			THAILAND	
YES	NO		YES	NO
40	0		30	0

Ways to make people's opinion known. When asked how the people's opinion could be heard, there were more responses from the Thai respondents than from the Philippine respondents on the venues for publicizing this. **Figure 2** shows that except for writing in the community newspaper and posting in the social media, it should be noted that all the other forms of media garnered higher scores from the Thai participants compared with the respondents from the Philippines. Results obtained from the respondents' views are an indication of how public spheres may be designed and in what form. For instance, it is highly possible to co-create a public sphere for public administration activities through the social media, where the same purpose of debate, discussion and negotiation social media may serve. In this case public administration may extract a relevant body of knowledge from the communication field regarding social media as a form of public sphere. This can be dovetailed in the nascent discourse on e-governance.

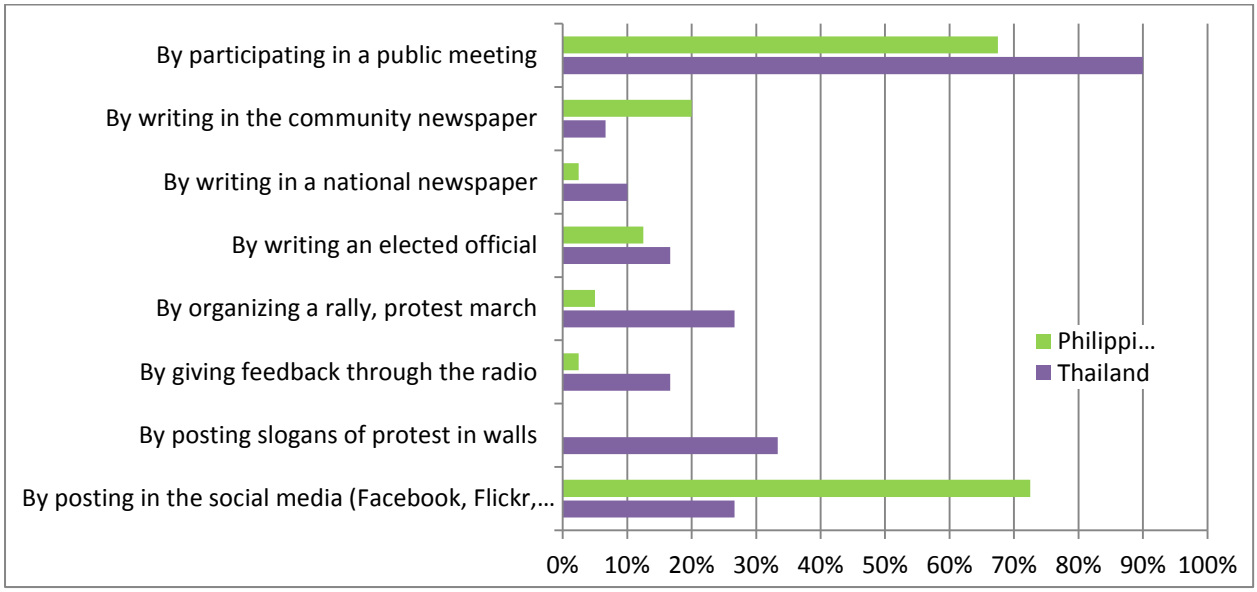

Figure 2. Perceptions on How to Make People's Opinion Publicly Known

Perceptions of the Meaning, Values, and Principles of Democracy

While traces of the scope and form of a public sphere could be discerned from the results, it was important to get a sense of how the respondents upheld democracy in general. Theoretically and philosophically, discussions on public spheres belong to the discursive or deliberative type of democracy, as espoused by Habermas. It is also important to keep in check whether the respondents' perceptions on principles identified with public sphere in this study are aligned with their perceptions on broader principles identified with democracy, especially that of *shared responsibility*.

Meaning of democracy. Based on preliminary and informal data collection in Thailand, it was gathered that Thai people were not too comfortable discussing the topic of democracy. Hence it was no surprise that for this section only the respondents from the Philippines gave their answers. Their responses can be gleaned in **Annex 2.** Most of the responses had to do with relating democracy to freedom of expression, election, equality and protection of human rights. Some of the responses also show the dilemmas the respondents think the current state of democracy in the country is faced with – i.e., knowing what is right or wrong.

Democracy values. The respondents from the Philippines felt more strongly than the respondents from Thailand on the values that should be present for democracy to happen. In terms of the **general democracy values**, the Philippine respondents gave higher premium for the values of an ideal democracy, compared with their Thai counterparts. "Responsiveness" got 100.00% rating for the Philippines respondents, followed by "fairness" (97.5%), "respect for norms" (97.5%), "openness" (95%), "shared responsibility" (92.5%), and "transparency" (87.5%). Surprisingly there were still some respondents from the Philippines who did not indicate that transparency was a prerequisite for democracy. Although the rates are lower for the perception on values as requirements for democracy to happen on the part of the Thai respondents, nevertheless they hold important those values to have democracy flourish. Both Thai and Filipino respondents put the lowest premium on **shared responsibility as a prerequisite for democracy.** This means that more educational efforts to augment a sense of

shared responsibility among the respondents be undertaken in the future, if public spheres have to be ideally co-created.

To recall, in the *Review of Literature* section in this study**, the principle or value of co-responsibility,** is being explored, making sense out of the respondents' perceptions regarding 'assuming a shared responsibility' with other sectors of the community or society. Since this value got the lowest scores among the principles, it is implicit that awareness-raising or education-related activities be initiated or augmented towards introducing and explaining such concept in order to realize the essence of democracy and the co-creation or even enlarging public spheres.

In terms of **specific democratic values**, assessed separately, for Thai respondents, either the full existence or traces of most values pertaining to democracy had higher rating than for the Filipino respondents, especially those values that relate to 'mutual respect', 'tolerance and acceptance', 'openness to other's religion and opinion', and 'respect for minorities'. On the other hand, the Philippines had higher perception rating for important democratic values than Thailand only as regards the 'pursuit of the common good', and had an equal rating with the Thais for 'self-reliance', 'shared or co-responsibility' 'cooperation' and 'honesty'.

Democracy principles. What fundamental truths, laws or doctrines, or practical action reflect the democracy values mentioned above? Both the Thai and Philippine respondents think that "accountability" is an important principle, but this is weakest in their country. Specifically, Philippine respondents consider the following top 5 principles as the weakest in the country: "accountability" as weakest (72.5%), "participatory government" (65.00%), "constitutional government" (62.5%), "right to be heard and to express grievance" (60.00%), and "good governance" (52.5%). The principles which the Philippine respondents consider as the strongest (with ratings of more than 50.00% of the responses) are "right to appeal" (65.00%) and "rule of law" (60.00%).

For the Thai respondents, the following principles are rated important but currently are weak in the country: "accountability" (66.67%), "good governance" (66.67%), and "transparency" (66.67%). It is important to strive to strengthen these principles as they are principles that generate trust. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, trust is important to promote dialogues and partnerships. On the other hand, the following principles were rated weaker by more Philippine respondents than by Thai respondents: "accountability", "constitutional government", "participatory government", "right to be heard", "equality for all."

Democracy benefits. For this portion of the study, the question asked was: "If people in your community had more involvement in the decision-making and implementation of public activities/programs/projects/services and the above values adopted, what do you think would be the benefits or results in the community? Do you think these benefits of democracy are present in your community?" The Philippine respondents were ambiguous about their responses, replying "somewhat" almost always in their responses. Except for some responses that tended to affirm that in democracy, the benefits are: "active citizens that are involved in public activities"; "lesser gap between the rich and poor"; and "equality in access to resources", all other benefits are perceived with uncertainty by the respondents from the Philippines. As a result, when compared with the responses of Thai respondents, higher rates were shown for both those who replied "yes" and those who said "no" to almost all the benefits listed.

Perceptions on State of Local Democracy, Performance of Local Public officials, and Citizens Willingness to Interact with their Local Government

This portion of the study aimed to analyze how citizens perceive the performance of their local officials and gauge citizens' willingness to interact with their local government in a face-to-face activity. For the perceptions about their local governments, the study reveals that both the Thai and Philippines respondents in general took the middle ground in rating their local officials and the citizens' willingness to engage with their government. Still, there were more respondents from Thailand who had positive ratings about their local officials than the respondents from the Philippines. Compared with their Thai counterparts, the Filipino respondents rated more negatively their perception that public services are better than the private sector; that public servants learn from their mistakes and always try to make their services better; that in general local officials have genuine concern and care for the local people; and that the local residents can be proud of their local government. On the other hand, the Filipino respondents appeared to slightly have a more positive outlook about the local people's willingness to cooperate with the local and vice- government and vice-versa, although this is counter intuitive to the earlier result which showed that Filipinos' had fewer common agendas to pursue with community leaders. In other words, there may be better chances to engage in joint discussion, joint activities and other joint engagements in the areas where the Filipino respondents resided; only, there may be fewer agendas to take up with the community leaders.

Promoting Active Citizenship in Public Activities

The objective of this section of the study was to find out what activities citizens are willing to get involved in public local development activities.

Willingness to participate in local development. As there was no data from the Thai respondents, only information from the Philippine respondents was collected. First, data shows the respondents' rating of the level of citizen involvement in public activities (activities outside the family, home), generally revealing only a fair level of involvement of citizens in local development, in general.

Hindrances and Facilitating / Success Factors for Active Citizenship. Next, we ask what will **facilitate** or **hinder** citizens' active involvement in public activities. Then we ask the respondents to give examples or comments if they agree with the specific ***facilitating*** and ***hindering*** factors below.

Most of the factors that foster or facilitate citizens' involvement in local development activities for the Philippine respondents have been due to personal factors and are attributable to positive emotions, while also recognizing their duty towards their community and also in their value for cooperation. The hindering factors could be overcome since these have to do with peace and order, distance of the meeting place, and no money and time. However a revealing hindering factor in the citizens' active involvement in local development activities is their perception that the same local government officials sit in their position over and over again.

Is there room for improvement of public services? The study also aimed to answer the following question: Do you think there is room for improvement in public services if the following democratic principles are maintained: Openness, Fairness, Transparency, Respect for norms/laws, Responsiveness, Shared Responsibility? All of the respondents from the

Philippines are notably optimistic (for all responses, they gave 100.00% or perfect ratings) that there is hope that public services can be improved if the values and principles are maintained. On the other hand, glaringly, the respondents from Thailand are pessimistic and perceive that public services have no chance of improving even if the democratic principles mentioned are maintained. This attitude could this be based on the recent political crisis or situation in the country.

Perceptions on Well-Being of the Community

This part of the study aimed to find out what people consider as an ideal community. The results are expected to serve as overall vision for a good society, to which discussions and deliberations in public sphere shall be directed. Questions on well-being were asked as follows: What do you consider as an ideal community? Is your community one?

Perceptions on level of well-being. We assume that where the respondents marked responses to particular indicators, this was an important indicator for well-being for them. For the Philippine respondents, more perceived their level of well-being in general is so-so (responses indicated as "fair"). Looking more closely, when compared with their Thai counterparts, there were more economic indicators that had ratings of more than 50% among the Philippine respondents compared with the Thai respondents. With regard to **social well-being indicators**, again the Philippine respondents gave higher ratings for their perceptions that their social well-being is "fair". The Thai respondents however had the tendency to rate their social well-being as "good", and such ratings are higher than their Philippine counterparts. For example, the Thai informants tended to perceive their neighbours as friendly (70.00%); their neighbourhood as peaceful (63.33%); and their participation in civic activities/celebrations/festivals (56.67%).

Environmental indicators have the lowest ratings (clean environment: 52.50%; regular garbage collection: 37.5%), when considering the mid-range ("fair") responses for indicators of level of well-being used in the study for the Philippine respondents. In terms of **political factors**, among the responses indicated as "fair", it was interesting to note that the Thai respondents gave higher ratings for "people are consulted in matters affecting their lives". Could this mean that the respondents have a good perception of their political leaders? This might be a good start for engaging in a public sphere.

Level of well-being of the community compared with other areas in the Province. The next question that was asked was: Compared with other areas in the Province, is your community worse, the same, or better, using the same indicators? The Philippine respondents tended to rate as "fair" their well being in almost all aspects of their lives compared with other areas in the Province, except for the environmental indicator, garbage collection, and regular sources of income. However, the Thai respondents tended to rate as "good" their social well-being when compared with areas in the Province. These ratings are higher than their Philippine counterparts.

CONCLUSION

This is an exploratory study that aims to contribute to the understanding of the public sphere in the context of democracy and active citizenship. The goal is to improve public services, thereby exploring how the complex concept of public sphere and its novel application in public administration field may be examined further. The results and analysis are mostly descriptive. Hence, public sphere in this study is initially regarded as a means to an

end (i.e. how knowledge on the sphere may be used for the improvement of public services) and the conditions in which it thrives are examined.

The study sought to document and analyze perceptions of rural residents in Thailand and the Philippines on the concept of a "common good"; the benefits, principles, values of democracy and democratic institutions, mechanisms and processes in Thailand and Philippine political culture; the state of local democracy and the performance of local public officials; citizens' willingness to engage with their local governments; perceptions on happiness and well-being of the community; and to document ideas by rural community residents on how to enable democracy to flourish and improve public services.

In terms of the common agenda and common activities to pursue, there are more similarities than differences between the two countries, although the results are generally indicative that the Thai respondents are more open to discussing common agendas with either their local leaders, other members of the community, or with their national leaders. The Thai respondents also perceive infrastructure projects to be a specialization, which implies that perhaps for them it is better left to experts. However, the tendency to perceive mutuality in showing respect among the members of the community seems to be more pronounced in Thailand.

For active citizenship, when asked about their perception on whether there is more involvement and participation of community members, the rates of perception are slightly higher on the part of the Philippine respondents. Hence we can infer that active citizenship level may be higher in the Philippines than in Thailand at the moment, although the willingness to enter into dialogues or discussion with other members of the community is higher among the Thai respondents. Also, there seems to be more optimism for improvement in public services in the Philippines if democratic principles are maintained than in Thailand.

The principle of co-responsibility or the willingness to assume mutual responsibility among the respondents from both nationalities is still low, implying the need for more education and awareness-raising on the philosophical significance of achieving a shared meaning to find possible solutions to challenges confronting each one in the community. The educative role towards this is a role that public administrators are to play, as espoused by Denhardt and Denhardt in their New Public Service.

The different country situations in both the Philippine and Thailand are simply used as context, to be able to examine similarities and differences of perceptions of the respondents, and in the process, though sinuously, to find a so-called universal and shared meaning of public sphere and its conditions. The brief descriptions are to be used as bases to identify basic formal conditions for attaining mutual understanding and social interaction in the political and economic milieu in which the interaction is expected to occur. Simply put, it is recommended that the purpose for future endeavors on co-creating a public sphere shall follow Habermas's aim to simply define the norms of human activity directed towards mutual understanding to coordinate the action between members in a public sphere.

This pursuit towards defining what the respondents' concept of a common good is and finding out their sense of co-responsibility are in line with Habermas's discursive or deliberative democracy. Habermas argues that deliberative democracy occurs in a "public political sphere" or the conditions of communication where a discursive formation of opinion and the will of the public or citizens can be realized. The motivation to co-create public spheres may be more pronounced when common agendas regarding allocation of resources, such as management of local resources, land-use planning, and other concerns such as corruption of local issues, with concomitant issues of equity and justice are taken up.

Habermas believes that it is possible to achieve a justified agreement between concerned peoples. This condition is very important when applied to policymaking in public administration. Therefore the rules for entering into argumentation and discussion by all concerned in public activities should be given premium attention if consensus and mutual agreement is to be attained especially in planning and implementation of activities. The results of the study on how the respondents perceive the rules for dialogue can serve as bases, although the results need further probing and refinement.

Habermas emphasizes the institutionalization of judicial procedures insuring the realization of a communication process for equitable debate and argumentation. This entails that the actors must agree on rules and procedures for entering into such process of argumentation, communication or discussion. Again the results of this study can help serve as foundation for formulating such rules – with the aid of respondents from more respondents and in different settings.

Democratic governance relies on the opportunity and capacity of citizens (the public) to engage in enlightened argumentation. It is therefore important to identify in the future how information is actually deliberated in the public sphere and ultimately, how public sphere can have influence on society, such as the improvement of public services delivery.

Following the identification of such conditions and rules that may bound participants in a public sphere, future researches shall thus aim to identify variables and indicators to find out possible causal relationships between and among variables and indicators of public sphere in future studies in the field of public administration.

Lastly, adopting the New Public Service model to propel this attempt to use public sphere as an accounting unit for expressing citizenship, we recognize and advocate for public administrators to seriously encourage more citizen involvement in the policy process. Public administrators should increase citizens' trust by assuming virtuous attitudes of caring, service and involvement. In the case of the Philippine respondents, there was low willingness to forge common agendas with their national leaders and even with their local leaders than with their fellow community members.

This points to the importance of having public administrators that shall assume responsibility to help educate citizens, helping them broaden their interests, outside their comfort zones, and making them understand the challenges and complexities of governance processes.

With greater participation of citizens in the future through public activities, the process of public policymaking cab also be improved, which can then aid implementation of projects and programs since the citizens shall be willing to put their stakes in the policymaking. By opening up discussions and inviting citizens to debates and discussions, the public administrators can help check whether their policies are unclear or have inherent contradictions. This helps improve trust and confidence in them by the citizens.

One of the lessons learned by a government project that have involved citizens in performance measurement, the Iowa Citizen-Initiated Performance Assessment (CIPA), as compiled by Denhardt and Denhardt (2007), is that the process of involving citizens along with the city elected and appointed officials has been very feasible, which has led to good working relationships and joint understanding about what constitutes quality service delivery.

This study has shown that we can start co-creating public spheres by deciphering common agendas that citizens can identify for engaging their local governments and other

sectors of the community. Second, the citizens and local governments alike should recognize that assuming co-responsibility for community development activities is an important principle of democracy. Third, citizens must believe that public services can still be improved with the co-assumption of the responsibility for such public service through active involvement in community development activities. This study also shows that at the moment, good facilitators for the communities covered in the study, are needed either to advocate for co-creating public spheres or to start facilitating dialogues between the local governments and citizens. Lastly, it is important that norms that govern the management of public spheres to maintain open communication among the different sectors be formulated, and participants in the public sphere should adhere to these norms.

In sum, public administrators are reminded in this study to play a facilitating role in entering into dialogues about what constitutes the public interest and in acting to realize values held important by citizens with regard to democracy. They shall, as in the words of Frederickson, "continually strive, with elected representatives and citizens, to find and articulate a general or common interest and to cause the government to pursue that interest" (Frederickson, 1991, 415-16).

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Annex 1

Geographical Location of the Respondents for the Study

Mahasarakham, Thailand

Mahasarakham is one of the provinces (Changwat) of Thailand, located in the northeast (Isan) region. Neighboring provinces are Kalasin, RoiEt, Surin, Buririam and Khonkaen. The province's capital is the town of Mahasarakham. It is the home of Mahasarakham University, the largest University in the Northeast of Thailand in terms of students.

The province is mostly a plain covered with rice fields,only in the north and east are small hills. It is between 130 and 230 m above sea level. The main river in the province is the River Chi. The province is subdivided into 13 districts (Amphoe). The districts are further subdivided into 133 subdistrics (Tambon) and 1808 villages (Muban).

The areas of this study in Mahasarakham are Villages in Tambon Thakhonyang and Tambon Khamrieng which are located in Kantaravichai Province near the University. Most of the population here are working in their rice fields but there are some who are working as government officials in the villages and some doing their business, like condominiums, student dormitories and Sari-sari stores. The focus groups in this study are the leaders of the villages, the people who work in the rice fields and students who are living around the University.

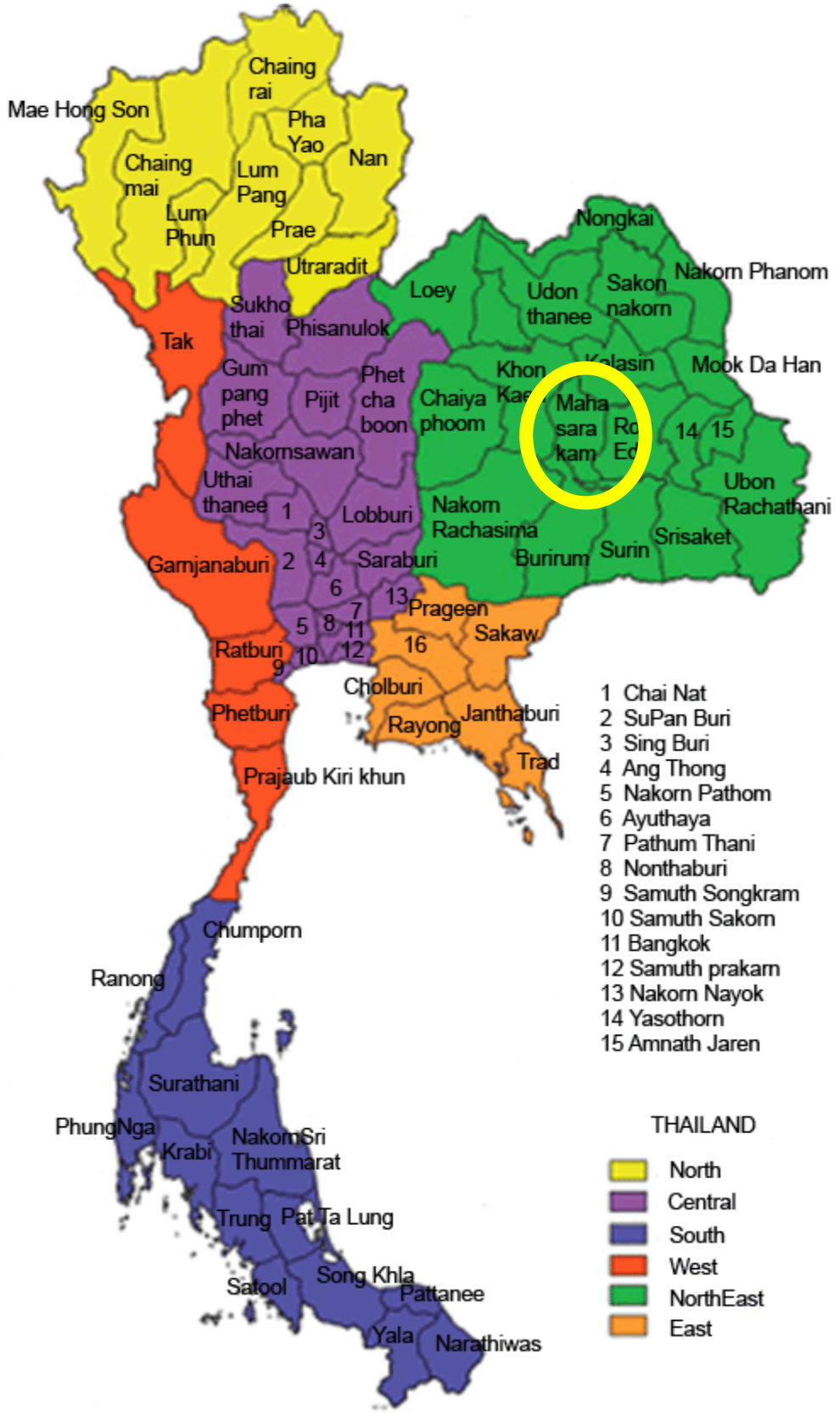
Mae Hong Son
Chaing rai
Pha Yao
Nan
Chaing mai
Lum Pang
Lum Phun
Prae
Utraradit
Nongkai
Nakorn Phanom
Loey
Udon thanee
Sakon nakorn
Sukho thai
Phisanulok
Tak
Khon Kaen
Kalasin
Mook Da Han
Gum pang phet
Pijit
Phet cha boon
Chaiya phoom
Maha sara kam
Nakornsawan
14
15
Uthai thanee
Ubon Rachathani
1
Lobburi
Nakorn Rachasima
3
Srisaket
Garnjanaburi
2
4
Saraburi
Burirum
Surin
6
13
Prageen
7
5
8
11
Sakaw
16
Ratburi
10
12
9
Cholburi
Phetburi
Rayong
Janthaburi
Trad
Prajaub Kiri khun
Chumporn
Ranong
Surathani
PhungNga
Krabi
NakomSri Thummarat
Trung
Pat Ta Lung
Satool
Song Khla
Pattanee
Yala
Narathiwas
1 Chai Nat
2 SuPan Buri
3 Sing Buri
4 Ang Thong
5 Nakorn Pathom
6 Ayuthaya
7 Pathum Thani
8 Nonthaburi
9 Samuth Songkram
10 Samuth Sakorn
11 Bangkok
12 Samuth prakarn
13 Nakorn Nayok
14 Yasothorn
15 Amnath Jaren
THAILAND
North
Central
South
West
NorthEast
East

Fig. 2 Map of the Study's Location in Thailand

Bay, Laguna, Philippines

Bay is a small second class municipality located 67 kilometres from Metro Manila, Philippines central region. It is a total of 4, 160.76 ha of land highly used for agricultural activities (68% is allotted for production). Due to its adjacency to advanced municipalities (Los Banos, Calamba and Calauan) and accessibility to provincial centers (Sta. Cruz and San Pablo), its inhabitants also took part on service and other form of industries, commercial and production, operating on these areas. This ironically left the municipality under developed on its commercial and business industries. Historically, it took the seat as the provincial capital in the colonial era, which translated to strong Filipino social culture of traditional politics and conservative Roman Catholicism up to these days. It also serves as a catchment of transients being pulled off by UP Los Banos and the International Rice Research Institute. Its population is accounted to 55, 698 as of 2010 Census of Population and Household. Total voters population is 30, 700. It is adjacent to UPLB, which is 6.7 kilometers away to the municipal center.

The study focuses on Barangay Maitim. It has a population of 4, 002. Total land area is 198.20 ha or 4.76% of total municipal land area. There is 1 public elementary school and a day care center.

Victoria, Laguna

Victoria is 90 kilometers away from Metro Manila, and 18.7 kilometers from UP Los Banos. It has a population, as of 2010 Census, of 34, 604, and classified a third class municipality. Voters population is 22, 443. It is well known for its duck industry, making livestock as secondary form of livelihood next to agriculture.

Daniw, Victoria is the least populated barangay with 1, 148 inhabitants

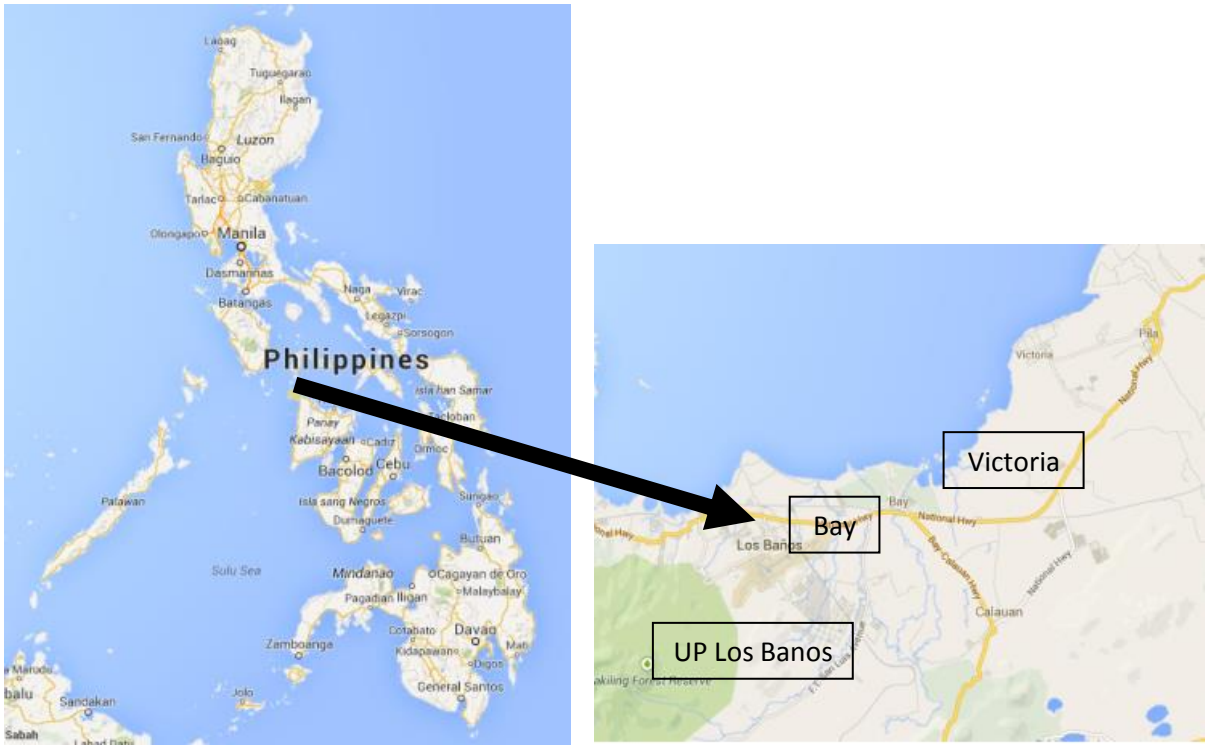

Fig. 1. Map of the Philippines and Location of the Study Area in the Philippines

Annex 2 Meanings and Manifestations of Democracy From the Point of View of the Respondents

Meaning of democracy	Manifestation of democracy
1. *Malaya. Puede mong ilahad ang anong gusto mong sabihin.* **(Free. You can express what you want to say.)** 2. *Isang paniniwala na ang tao ay mabibili mo sa pera at ang demokrasya ay humaharap sa hamon ng kung alin ang dapat.* **(A kind of belief wherein the people can be bought; democracy is faced with the dilemma of what is right.)** **3.** *Kalayan***. (Freedom)** **4.** *Nakakapagboto.* **(Freedom to vote)** **5.** *Kalayaan ng mga mamayan na makapagpahayag, makamit ang karapatang panatao***.(Freedom of citizens to express, achievement of human rights)** **6.** *Isang malayang bansa***.(A free country)** 7. *Pagkakaroon ng pantay-pantay na karapatan ang mga mamamayan.* **(Equality of rights of citizens)** **8.** Form of government *kung saan ang mamamayan ang napili ng pinuno na karapatdapat mamahala* **(Form of government wherein an ordinary citizen who is fit to govern is appointed by the government.)** **9. Giving or distributing political power in the hands of the public, thus giving the citizens to participate equally protected by the constitution.** **10. Democracy means freedom of everyone.** 11. *Magtanong. Malaman ang kaban ng bayan***.(Freedom to ask about the public money)**	1. *Kapag di ka pinagbabawalang magsabi ng opinion, kahit anu pang sabihin mo.* **(When saying one's opinion is not curtailed – no matter what one wants to say.)** 2. *Ang masigasig na pagtatannggol ng mga mamamayan sa demokrasya na nagging daan sa pagwawakas ng rehimeng awtoritaryan.* **(Persistence of people's defense of democracy paved the way to end authoritarian regime.)** 3. *Ramdam ang kalayaan.* **(Freedom if felt.)** 4. *Pagpupulong sa mga komunidad. Pagkakaroon ng pagkakataon magrehistro ng opinion. Pagkakaroon ng mga proyekto para sa mga mamamayan ng populasyon.* **(Freedom of community assembly; opportunity to have one's opinion registered; having projects for majority of the population)** **5.** *Malayang pagpapahayag ng gusting sabihin***.(There is freedom of speech.)** 6. *Pakinggan ang bawat isa.* **(People listening to each one)** **7.** *Wala. Dahil sa pangingibabaw ng mga opisyal sa botohan. Hindi ang mga mamamayan ang nasusunod.* **(None. The incumbent officers prevail. Ordinary citizens are not the ones heard.)** **8. Freedom of speech. Election. Due process.** **9. Freedom of speech.** 10. *Magkaroon ng lugar talaan ng pondi ng bayan at gastos.* **(Transparency)**