

# Negotiating Common Areas in Low-income Flat Complexes: Tensions and Compromises between Idealistic Authorities and Residential Realities

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## Abstract

The common areas of low-income housing complexes are generally used for the everyday needs of residents, and regulating common areas according to legal standards and middle-class values often causes conflicts between housing authorities and residents. The present study explored the necessary compromises between authorities' ideals for purified common space and the realities of low-income residential practices in three flat complexes in Bangkok, Thailand. Purified space means that common areas are free of personal belongings and residents' activities. The study comprised eight in-depth interviews with housing authorities, observation of everyday use of common areas, and document analysis. The study found that the management style based on land ownership and purified space was inconsistent with the unbounded use of common areas in the context of Thai culture and practices of lower-income people, resulting in confrontations between housing authorities and some residents. Three forms of disagreement were identified: ignoring rules, forceful arguing about rules, and protesting rule enforcement. Nevertheless, housing authority employees were able to resolve some issues by developing 'negotiated outcomes' — overlooking rule infractions, redefining the flat complex's rules, compromising on rule enforcement, and giving friendly warnings to disruptive residents. Consequently, negotiated outcomes should be recognized as part of the formal processes of low-income flat management.

**Keywords:** low-income housing, everyday practices, purified space, negotiated outcomes, Thailand

## Introduction

Development programs for low-income people generally apply the same management regulations to manage every targeted site. In affordable housing developments, living environments tend to be improved with standardized rules, focusing on orderliness in common areas. This top-down approach often results in confrontations between housing authorities and residents if the latter are disruptive when they use common areas for their everyday needs (Hee, 2009; King and Natakun, 2017; Lao-on, 2017).

Previous research has largely explored the tensions between housing authorities and low-income residents from the latter's perspective (Hee, 2009; Lao-on, 2017). However, strategies for coping with such tensions have only been examined from a legal perspective that led to changing the complexes' rules to better serve resident needs (Lao-on, 2017). This study aimed to fill a gap in the research by describing the tensions and coping strategies regarding hierarchical common area management from the perspective of the authorities working in and under Thailand's Housing and Community Development Organization (HCDO).<sup>1</sup> The sources of tensions between HCDO authorities and residents of the Baan Keua-Kun (BKK)<sup>2</sup> flat complexes in Bangkok were investigated via the intersection of social class and cultural roots.

Prior research suggests that middle-class people, who tend to associate a tidy house with high social status, are less likely to use the common areas of housing developments for their personal activities or to use their belongings in them (Askew, 2002). By contrast, lower-income residents use common areas more frequently than middle-class people (Robben, 1989) to serve their needs (Bourdieu, 1990).

The common areas in social housing in the United Kingdom and the United States are reported to be underused by residents. However, in low-income housing in Thailand and Singapore these areas are commonly used for household chores and leisure activities (Hee, 2009;

<sup>1</sup> The acronym of the state enterprise responsible for providing affordable housing in Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> The acronym of the Thai government's low-income accommodation.

Mekintharangur, 2004) because in Thai and Singaporean cultures there are no fixed living space boundaries (Hee, 2009; Noparatnaraporn, 2004).

Most prior studies employed a single perspective to analyze tensions between idealistic authorities and the residential realities of hierarchical low-income flat management. This study employed a multi-disciplinary approach using sociological focusing on social class and architectural theories emphasizing the Thai perspective of space to better understand such tensions and the necessary compromises.

The article compares the standard of low-income flat complexes' common areas from the perspective of housing authorities with the realities of residents' everyday common area use. It then discusses the contradictory perspectives of the authorities and the residents and the resulting tensions between the two parties. Finally, it suggests strategies for the compromise that housing authorities can adopt.

### **Baan Keua-Kun (BKK) and its Common Area Management**

In 2003, the BKK program, a government-built housing complex, was initiated under the operational control of Thailand's HCDO (Sintusingha, Dhabhalabutrang and Natakun, 2010). The HCDO was also responsible for the sale of low-priced units and the management of several housing developments (Thailand Housing and Community Development Organization Committee, 2003; PLC1, 2019).

During the first five years, HCDO hired private companies to manage their separate developments, using HCDO-imposed standards comprising physicality, environment, and residents' quality of life and cultural values (Thailand Housing and Community Development Organization, n.d., a.; PLC1; MNG1, 2019). The HCDO then transferred management control, in compliance with the Thailand Condominium Act (MNG1; MNG3, 2019), to a registered legal entity known as the 'juristic person.'<sup>3</sup> Under this standard arrangement, each housing complex hires a management company and pays monthly residential

<sup>3</sup> Although the juristic person at each complex can select any management company, the author found that one management company was being run by a retired HCDO staff member, while others were HCDO subsidiary companies (PLC4; MNG1, 2019). Therefore, the HCDO management style and policies were invariably adopted by the BKK complexes selected for this study.

fees for management services (250 baht per unit, approximately 9 USD) and profits from residents' water bills. In every BKK complex, management companies use their expertise to regularly advise the complex's committee members, who are elected by the owners of the units (PLC1; MNG1; MNG2, 2019). Therefore, the use of the common areas is regulated by the committee members and the employees of management companies.

Rules for common areas are designed and enforced to maintain a purified space free of personal belongings and/or activities. BKK rules prohibit equipment, instruments, construction materials, unused objects, and shoes in common areas. Additionally, posting advertisements on walls or balconies in common areas and drying clothes or rugs is strictly prohibited (Suburbville Management, n.d.: 4-5).

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Goffman (1956) proposed the 'front region' and the 'back region' in his study of middle-class housing in which the expectations of residents and guests' manners are applied to different areas in a house. He suggested that the front tends to be relatively well repaired, decorated, and tidy. In contrast, the back region is unattractive and allows users to perform activities that are not appropriate for the front region. In addition, Goffman (1956) argues that a clear division between the front and the back regions is not usually present in working-class accommodations.

In the present study, the concept of the front region is used to explain the order and clean appearance of the common area as it represents and adheres to the middle-class expectations of the BKK authorities. In contrast, the concept of the back region is used to describe the untidy appearance of the common area in opposition to the authorities' expectations. The blurred boundary between the two regions highlights how low-income residents use the BKK common areas. The back and front region concepts help to reveal differences between the authorities' and residents' views on the common area, as well as the tensions between the authorities' intentions and the realities of the residents' common area usage.

The architectural notion of ‘unbounded space’ was introduced by Noparatnaraporn and King (2007) to describe the way in which Thai people use space without determining boundaries for different activities. Unbounded is defined as the ‘uncontrolled, disordered’ physicality of space. This physicality is a consequence of ‘unboundedness reigning’ whereby ‘any activity might go anywhere, [because] there is no zoning in the Western sense’ (Noparatnaraporn and King, 2007). Unbounded nature has been investigated as the cultural root of Thai societies, since it was historically common and continues in rural villages and remote parts of Thailand, as well as alley dwellings in Bangkok’s residential areas (Noparatnaraporn, 2004; Noparatnaraporn and King, 2007).

In this study, the unbounded space concept enables an understanding of BKK common areas and how they accommodate residents’ activities that cut across common area and personal unit boundaries. The use of BKK common areas for residents’ everyday activities is rooted in an unbounded engagement with space. To apply Goffman’s terms, the unclear boundaries of common areas and resident units overlap the BKK complexes’ front and back regions. Consequently, residents’ expansion of their everyday activities and possessions into common areas blurs the division between the front and back regions, resulting in untidy common areas.

Sociological and architectural notions were used in the present study to consider how the BKK authorities’ understanding of unbounded space, the acceptable use of back and front regions, and subsequent rule enforcement result in confrontations with residents. The residents’ everyday use of common areas and the compromises made by the authorities were investigated through a conceptual lens of the blurring of front and back regions and the concept of unbounded space.

## Methods

Qualitative research methods were used to understand the differences in acceptable common area use as perceived by housing authorities and residents that lead to confrontations, as well as how the authorities coped

with confrontations. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Macquarie University Research Ethics Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Low-income flat complexes were selected based on the criteria of population density and willingness to participate. The study’s main assumption was that the intensity of space sharing forces residents to use common areas to conduct everyday activities. The research sites were three BKK flat complexes, formally known as 85, 120, and 134 flat buildings.<sup>5</sup> They accommodated approximately 3,700, 5,900, and 4,500 units, respectively, with a total population of approximately 18,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The flat complexes were in the Bangkok metropolitan area’s east and northeast (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2019) and are commonly referred to as Suburbville, Busy-town, and Outskirt-village.

Eight semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with housing authorities from 24 June to 3 July 2019. With the permission of the HCDO governor, participants were recruited from a list of potential interviewees provided by the executive staff and contacted for an interview by his secretary and the author. Half of the participants held executive positions in the HCDO community management segment (coded as PLC1, PLC2, PLC3, and PLC4), while the other half worked in executive and administrative positions in two management companies (coded as MNG1, MNG2, MNG3, and MNG4). Interview sessions lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and were held at the HCDO head, branch, and management offices in the BKK complexes. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants; their responses to questions were de-identified to protect their privacy, and any refusal to participate was not reported to their supervisors.

Unobtrusive observation combined with photographs was utilized to analyze ‘what really happens’ (Emmison and Smith, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> This article is based on the author’s master’s thesis, submitted to Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia.

<sup>5</sup> Each building contains around 45 units, mostly one-bedroom apartments of 33 square meters.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the unavailability of the exact figures, the approximate number of units and population size were based on the Suburbville and Busy-town complexes’ management documents and a photo of the Outskirt-village complex on Google Earth.

in the BKK common areas as used by residents, specifically in cases where residents extended domestic activities beyond the legal boundaries of their units. The study focused on rule enforcement, disruptive activities, and violation of rules, which were recorded by note-taking and photographs, while walking along the common area of the three BKK complexes during five site visits. To prevent possible harm to any rule-breaking residents, no residents appear in the photographs used in this study.

BKK documents were also analyzed to gain insight into sources of BKK rules, rule enforcement policies, and the authority of HCDO and management company employees. Documents included the Thailand Condominium Act, the minutes of the HCDO committee and BKK resident meetings, the guidelines issued by BKK management for the HCDO staff and management companies, and the corporate by-laws and rules for each BKK complex.

## Results and Discussion

### Perceived Purified Space: A Legal and Middle-Class Standard

The head of the HCDO branch office relayed his experience of implementing the BKK management guidelines, saying,

I made an effort to explain to [the residents] what a common area is and what personal space is. [I told them,] “You cannot put your stuff in corridors” (PLC1, 2019).

The manager of the management company shared his approach regarding Outskirt-village management.

Our goal is to make Outskirt-village better, cleaner, [and] tidier. Residents cannot claim communal space (MNG4, 2019).

The above statements reflect BKK authorities’ expectations that common areas should be free of personal possessions and domestic activities, referred to as ‘purified space,’ as mentioned earlier.

BKK management believed that personal belongings should not be in the common areas either temporarily or permanently. Moreover, long-term claims on common areas, such as a fenced area for a garden or a bamboo pavilion in the common yard, were not acceptable. A manager stated, ‘I am not happy when residents fence the common backyard to claim land’ (MNG1, 2019). Additionally, large everyday objects that are clearly visible, such as washing machines, water dispensers, chicken coops, and vehicles, were not permitted in corridors and courtyards (MNG1; PLC3, 2019). These objects included unwanted belongings such as crates, unused mattresses, and furniture and discarded plants, such as unkempt trees, which created an overall untidy appearance in common areas (PLC3; PLC4; MNG4, 2019). In addition, smaller objects, such as shoe shelves, cabinets, and benches, were not consistent with management’s vision for common areas (PLC4; MNG2, 2019).

The concept of purified space was not only applied to residents’ material possessions but also to their personal activities, such as family dining, drinking, street kitchens, clothes washing, and carpentry work (PLC1; PLC2; MNG1; MNG4, 2019). This was reflected in the successful action by management staff to ban one resident from selling food on a BKK footpath and another from sawing wood to build a window in common courtyard between the buildings (MNG1; MNG3, 2019).

The concept of purified common areas is consistent with the written legal documents of the Thai Condominium Act and the body corporate by-laws for each BKK development. BKK developments are all registered under the Thai Condominium Act (B.E.2522–B.E.2551) (Aoumpuang, 2009; Lao-on, 2017), which applies to all high-rise accommodations developed for commercial sale in Thailand. The BKK authorities treated the Act as their bible (PLC2; MNG1, 2019) for dealing with the properties. Consequently, any BKK common area, in the authorities’ view, was a common property governed by the law as suggested in Section 33 of the Act (Aoumpuang, 2009) and not a space that was available to serve residents’ everyday activities (Lao-on, 2017).

Legal action was used to counter the use of vertical space in a flat complex, as a management staff member explained,

Our lawyer normally sent the notice letters to the residents who placed their air condensers outside their unit. If they did not remove them, the juristic authority would prosecute the residents (MNG2, 2019).

The corporate by-laws comprise another legal document, and they are written by management and submitted to the Department of Land (Legal Entity of Suburbville, 2014). There are specific documents for each BKK site; however, the contents are mostly the same because they are all adopted from the Thai Condominium Act. For example, common areas are called common property as specified in Section 4 of the Act (Aoumpuang, 2009), and they include the free space between buildings, the roads, parking spaces, common courtyards, and the fire exit stairwells (Legal Entity of Suburbville, 2014).

In addition to official legal documents, the HCDO's (n.d.) concept of the purified common area establishes guidelines for making policy to regulate common areas through management companies. These guidelines not only rely on the Act but also apply middle-class residential values to BKK management. They direct management companies to maintain the cleanliness of the common areas, decorate the common courtyards, trim trees, and monitor and prevent common area invasion (such as objects in corridors and motorcycles parked in building entrances). These management tasks are considered a way to maintain a suitable appearance in the front region of BKK common areas, which in middle-class housing '...tends to be relatively well decorated, well repaired and tidy' (Goffman, 1956).

Moreover, in the guidelines, the word 'invasion' is used to describe the act of placing belongings and pursuing domestic activities in common areas (Thailand Housing and Community Development Organization, n.d., b.), emphasizing the clear division between the front and the back regions of commonly-held middle-class residential expectations. According to these guidelines, the BKK authorities

generally expect to see empty BKK common areas and believe that personal activities are only acceptable inside residents' units (PLC1, 2019). The separation of regions is expressed in an HCDO employee statement on the use of balcony space (PLC, 2019), 'we design the balcony [in a personal unit] to provide open-air space, [and] we expect that residents will dry their laundry there.'

The BKK rules provide specific examples of what is and is not allowed, based on middle-class values. These rules were developed to help management regulate common area use when the HCDO ran the BKK complexes at the beginning of the BKK program (PLC4, MNG1; MNG4, 2019). In recent times, Suburbville, Busy-town, and Outskirt-village have operated according to rules written by their management companies (MNG2; MNG4, 2019); however, these rules are similar to the previous ones. For example, all complexes prohibit any structural addition on building exteriors and the placement of any personal items in the common areas. In this way, the middle-class values of purified common areas are embedded in the HCDO guidelines that have been passed down. For example, the management of Outskirt-village prohibited the installation of satellite dishes that extended beyond the unit; further, in Suburbville, residents were not allowed to store recycling waste in the nooks of the building (MNG3; MNG4, 2019).

### **Realities of Common Area Usage: Unbounded Space, the Back Region, and Residents' Everyday Practices**

Although a BKK common area is expected to be kept in a purified state, it is usually filled with residents' belongings and generally accommodates their domestic activities. BKK residents use the common area as an unbounded space, enhancing the physicality of the uncontrolled and disorderly areas. Residents' possessions and domestic activities usually extended beyond their private units to the public realm due to 'unboundedness reign[ing]' (Noparatnaraporn and King, 2007) in domestic space and common areas.

Similarly, many residents used the BKK common areas as the back region (Goffman, 1956) because the placement of personal

belongings and the conduct of activities in the common areas gave them an unappealing appearance. These practices illustrate the blurred common area boundaries and unit regions vis-a-vis the front and back regions in low-income flat complexes.

Unbounded space and back regions generally existed in the common areas close or adjacent to personal units including corridors, building entrances, and common backyards. Most residents used corridors for permanently storing everyday objects, such as shoes, shoe cabinets, umbrellas, clothes racks, and unused items (Figure 1). Interestingly, the dead-end area at the beginning and the end of the corridor was often fully occupied to facilitate personal activities, such as lounging on personal couches, toddler care on spread-out mats with toys (Figure 2), and shoe cabinets. Sometimes, a vinyl board was erected to block neighbors from entering these areas. This everyday use of corridors reflects the unboundedness of the residents' units and common areas, as well as the blurred line dividing the front and the back regions in residents' perceptions of BKK spaces.

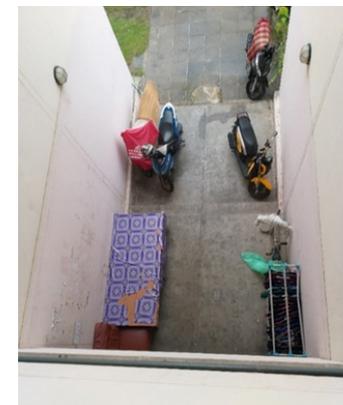


**Figure 1** The middle of a corridor space used for laundry racks and shoes.



**Figure 2** Taking care of a toddler in a corridor.

Compared to the corridor area, building entrances were used as spaces for storing larger objects. Some BKK residents placed laundry racks and benches in building entrances, although they were expected to keep their belongings inside their units. They also parked motorcycles and bicycles in these areas, even though vehicles were assigned to parking spots in designated outdoor locations (Figure 3). The use of the entrance in this uncontrolled manner rendered it a state of no-zoning, as parking and domestic activities were conducted in the space for passage.



**Figure 3** The entrance to a building used to store seats, a laundry rack, and vehicles.

The untidy appearance of common areas indicated that they were used as back regions. Therefore, they were unlike the well-kept front regions prescribed by middle-class and legal standards.

The courtyards surrounding the buildings were often occupied because some residents extended their domestic activities and personal belongings to them. BKK residents used the space in a disordered way and for domestic activities, such as storing recyclable waste, broken furniture, miscellaneous equipment (e.g., ladders, bowls, unused doors, and scaffolding; Figure 4), and drying their laundry. Some residents temporarily adjusted the common courtyard to serve their needs, attaching sticks and ropes to electricity posts to dry their laundry (Figure 5). In fact, the residents used this outdoor space as the rear of the house – the back region (Goffman, 1956) – which indicated a state of unboundedness. This state allowed several BKK residents to conduct domestic activities in the common courtyards which were supposed to be empty and ready for shared use with other residents.



**Figure 4** Storing broken furniture and old equipment in the common courtyard between buildings.



**Figure 5** Using the common courtyard area to dry laundry.

### **Tension between the Concept of Purified Space and the Realities of Residents' Practices**

The concepts of a clean and orderly space and residents' everyday practices were often incompatible. In these situations, confrontations between management expectations and reality were revealed when rules were enforced by BKK authorities and residents responded negatively. There were three types of negative responses: ignoring the rules, forceful arguments, and protesting rule enforcement.

The BKK rules, despite being posted prominently at building entrances and in management offices, were generally ignored. Several residents carried out prohibited practices, such as drying their laundry (MNG2, 2019) and putting up posters to advertise their businesses on a common balcony. Additionally, residents sometimes defied rule enforcement by conducting activities exactly where the notices were posted, such as parking motorcycles in front of the 'No Parking in the Building' sign (Figure 6; MNG1, 2019). Although these reactions did not provoke direct or serious confrontations, they often caused discomfort for the housing authorities who viewed them as 'careless'

and ‘ignorant’ on the residents’ part (PLC1, 2019). As the management officer expressed, ‘Most residents know what is right [and] what is wrong, but they don’t care’ (MNG3, 2019).



**Figure 6** Motorcycles parked in front of a sign saying, ‘No Parking in the Building.’

Forceful arguments between management and residents sometimes occurred when management enforced the rules by targeting residents’ unruly activities in common areas with a warning or by forbidding them. Warnings consisted of notices posted in common areas ordering residents to remove belongings from the building entrance, especially when the front of the water pump room was blocked, and this often encouraged residents to defend their reasons for putting their possessions in common areas to management office staff. Residents were sometimes rude in such situations, and to respond to such behavior, employees often showed residents the BKK rules and the negative consequences of rule-breaking, such as accidents or fires. Typically, verbal warnings issued to prohibit residents from growing personal plants in a common courtyard prompted fierce responses from residents, ‘Why can’t I do that? Growing vegetables is better than leaving lots empty. The soil won’t get dry’ (MNG3, 2019).

Stopping residents’ activities also led to forceful arguments, especially when the activity was prevented rather than simply warning the resident. For example, felling a resident’s tree in the common

backyard that was next to a neighbor’s unit resulted in the tree owner’s displeasure who then demanded of the manager, ‘How dare you cut my tree down. Bring it back!’ (MNG3, 2019). Similarly, disposing of an unused and stained mattress being used for beehives and kept in the fire exit stairwell, angered its owner. The management and the resident then engaged in a verbal argument about the rationale of their actions, as the management argued that they were protecting other residents from being stung, while the resident claimed that the mattress was still usable and could be used by her ill mother (MNG3, 2019).

Management members experienced stress and were faced with unpleasant consequences after issuing warnings and stopping unruly behavior, as reported by one employee, ‘Issuing warnings upsets the [rule-breaking] residents. Of course, they are hostile to us [the management]’ (MNG3, 2019).

A protest of rule enforcement was organized when many residents strongly disagreed with the prohibition of their unruly activities. This rare incident constituted the most serious conflict between BKK authorities and residents. A large protest was triggered by the felling of unauthorized trees growing near underground water pipes and building walls in many complex areas. Moreover, up to 100 BKK residents approached the management office to protest, yelling abuse and posting rude messages on office property, while the trees were being chopped down. The protesters even carried pieces of the chopped trees to the supervisor’s office, which was located outside the flat complex because the residents knew that the supervisor oversaw the tree-felling scheme. Consequently, the supervisor was transferred to another department as a disciplinary move, and residents took out their anger on management staff (MNG2, 2019).

### **Negotiated Outcomes: Compromise Between Housing Authorities’ Expectations and the Reality of Residents’ Practices**

The BKK authorities have adapted to the inevitable conflicts by creating an informal process of ‘negotiated outcomes.’ As one Outskirt-village

management employee stated, 'I use many techniques to manage complex situations; otherwise, management fails' (MNG4, 2019). The four main negotiated outcomes to achieve a compromise between middle-class legal aspects and low-income everyday practices are: overlooking rule infractions, redefining BKK rules, compromising on rule enforcement, and giving friendly warnings.

Overlooking rule infraction was the most common negotiated outcome used when there were no neighbor complaints. BKK management stated that they usually 'turn a blind eye' (PLC1; MNG2; MNG3, 2019) on BKK rule-breaking activities in common areas and act only when there is a formal written complaint (MNG2; MNG3, 2019). This management strategy was noted by one staff member, 'To be honest, I can't remember the BKK rules listed on the poster; what I do is solve problems when residents are troubled by their neighbors' behavior' (MNG3, 2019). Activities often overlooked by management that took up common areas so that they had the appearance of back regions were drying laundry in common courtyards, selling food, and running grocery shops. The reason for this negotiated outcome was that prohibiting every rule-breaking activity would upset the BKK living environment where residents accepted their neighbors' minor rule-breaking (MNG4, 2019). Another reason was that precedence was given to residents who had been among the first to arrive in the complexes, as some residents had moved into BKK sites and were using common areas prior to management by the current company. Prohibiting residents from what they were already used to doing often led to the confrontation between management and residents (MNG2; MNG3; MNG4, 2019).

Relaxing the rules was a typical practice employed by BKK housing authorities, as it contributed to a 'good and long-term relationship between management and residents' (MNG1, 2009) and prevented the development of antagonistic relationships (PLC1, 2009). Some forms of unbounded use of common areas were acceptable under certain conditions stated by the authorities themselves. To maintain tidy conditions, seen as the front region, shoes could be placed in common areas when clean, and a shop could be run in a residential unit if it did

not extend outside of the unit. The back region (untidy area) condition was not prohibited when it served the community's interest and was a temporary activity. Homegrown vegetables were allowed if any neighbor could harvest them, and drying laundry for a short period in common courtyards was permitted (PLC3; MNG1; MNG2 2019). To allow such activities, authorities attempted to understand the reasons from the perspective of the BKK residents, such as a rural village background and limited income (MNG1; PLC3, 2019).

Redefining the rules was another way that BKK housing authorities changed their views of BKK generalized guidelines to more practical rules. Instead of viewing rules as principles governing human activities, the authorities perceived BKK rules in terms of another function—invoking the jurisdiction to penalize and reprimand rule-breaking residents such as by disconnecting water service, giving a notice letter, or disposing of residents' belongings. (PLC3; MNG3, 2019). The housing authorities agreed that 'rules cannot stop them from doing wrong things or exhibiting defiant behavior' (PLC3; MNG3, 2019). However, the BKK rules meant that residents had to accept the consequences for rule infractions (MNG2; MNG3, 2019). This compelled residents to strictly comply with rules, which helped maintain the front region, and the appearance of the whole common area became less of a priority. Therefore, conflicts arising from discrepancies between rules and practices rarely occurred.

Compromising on enforcement of the rules was a technique that BKK management used to persuade residents to follow the rules, and this led to a minimization of back region appearance and unbounded engagement of common areas. This technique encouraged the gradual and sensible emergence of rule-abiding practices, such as postponing disciplinary measures and offering alternatives. For example, management asked residents to remove their belongings from common areas by letting them propose a removal time as per their convenience (MNG3, 2019). Thus, finding an alternative to the rule-breaking activity was used to prohibit the installation of satellite dishes that extended beyond unit boundaries and spoiled the visual appearance of the

complexes. Management researched alternative television signal providers who offered a lower price and then asked the residents to remove the dishes. This negotiated outcome was effective, as a management staff member reflected, 'if we prohibit things and do not give them any solutions, they resist our prohibition' (MNG4, 2019).

Finally, a friendly warning was the negotiated outcome employed to enforce the BKK rules that prohibited low-income residents' practices of unbounded space in cases where issuing a direct and straightforward warning would have posed a risk to management employees. As an employee explained, 'If I suddenly stop [the residents from] drinking liquor, they may throw a bottle at me' (MNG4, 2019). The management officer interacted with the residents and developed a personal relationship with them before giving them a warning for inappropriate activities in the common area. The Busy-town manager shared how he successfully issued a warning to alcohol drinkers who were playing loud music in a common backyard by giving them a big smile and speaking cordially with them; sometimes he even accepted the liquor and cigarettes they offered to show that he was their friend (MNG1, 2019). After that, he said to them, 'There are elderly people and babies in units near you, they are quite sensitive to noise' (MNG1, 2019), which was an indirect way of warning them about their annoying behavior.

The key findings of this study are that negotiated outcomes were created by redefining functionality and carefully enforcing the rules of common area use. This informal process helped to lessen conflicts when BKK authorities performed common area management duties.

### Recommendations on Negotiated Outcomes

Despite the four widely employed negotiated outcomes, management frequently felt reluctant to apply them, especially infraction and redefining of rules. Several management employees revealed that situations regarding BKK common area use and residents forced them to ignore rule infractions (MNG1; MNG2; MNG4, 2019) via conversations such as, 'I don't want to turn a blind eye, [but] I have no choice when

most of the residents do not follow the rules' (MNG3, 2019). Moreover, an unwillingness to define the BKK rules as tools to support their right to discipline and reprimand residents was observed in their desire and fervent hope that they would be able to use the rules as a tool to prohibit residents' defiance. Examples of this included the unrealistic alternative of fining residents whose sale activities invaded corridors and common backyards, the general desire to increase the enforcement of rules, and the popular preference for retaining all current BKK rules (MNG1; MNG2; MNG3; MNG4, 2019).

BKK authorities were unwilling to overlook rule infractions or redefine the rules because the negotiated outcomes could be considered failures to perform their duties, as specified in the legal documents and BKK management guidelines for the HCDO and management staff. The duties of management companies specified in the legal documents state that the manager should be responsible for maintaining peace and order within the residential development and for managing the common properties.

This study recommends that these negotiated outcomes be accepted as a solution for dealing with conflicts over common area use that arise from the inherent tension between middle-class values and the everyday activities of residents. Using such an approach, the HCDO and the management companies should understand the role of negotiated outcomes and include them in the formal process of BKK management.

### Conclusions

BKK authorities perceived common areas as purified spaces and expected them to be free from residents' personal items and domestic activities. In line with the front region concept, this perception was developed under the legal standards for common property as regulated by the Thai Condominium Act and middle-class residential values for suitable appearance and clear division between personal units and common areas. These standards are outlined in the management

guidelines and the complexes' rules. However, numerous BKK residents claimed areas beyond their unit boundaries for everyday activities, such as toddler care, drying laundry, and gardening, which are seen as back region activities in unbounded spaces. This incompatibility between idealistic authorities and residential realities was expressed via residents' responses to authorities, such as ignoring complex rules, arguing when receiving a warning or having unruly activities stopped, and protesting management. Negotiated outcomes that overlook rule infractions, relax complex rules, gradually and sensibly enforce rules, and give friendly warnings for inappropriate behaviors were utilized by BKK authorities to alleviate tension. Negotiated outcomes should be included in the formal BKK management process and further applied to low-income housing complexes in Thailand to lessen tensions.

The limitations of this study are that there were no interviews with BKK residents due to difficulties in arranging interviews from overseas when the author was studying abroad, as well as obtaining ethics approval for extensive fieldwork with residents within the short timeframe of a master's research program (10 January to 20 October 2019). Future research should include the BKK residents' and committees' viewpoints, which would assist in developing more practical and effective conflict-lessening recommendations for improving the management of BKK common areas.

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