

[Home](#)

[About CODI](#)

[About Baan Mankong](#)

[Results](#)

[Strategic Plans](#)

[Participatory Approach](#)

[Types of Development](#)

[Community Architects](#)

[Housing Prototypes](#)

[Self-Build Network](#)

[Humanitarian Relief Projects](#)

[Contact](#)

A Treasure behind Closed Walls



"Where's the best place for Pad Thai noodle in Bangkok?" asks John as he places his sprawling backpack on the sidewalk. An old hat merchant in the famous Kaosan road whispers softly, "If you don't mind the chaos, walk over to the Pom Mahakarn fort on Sunday!"

Every Sunday at the ancient Pom Mahakarn fort, there's a large bazaar that sells everything from bird cages to Pad Thai noodle.

The community behind Mahakarn fort is similar to the Chinese Hutong courtyard houses; they were the Royal guards and craftsmen who had settled around the palace some 200 years ago. As a "community," the fort has been here since the 18th century; the residents help maintained the royal fort and largely kept its condition intact. But unlike the Chinese Hutong, the Thai government has no plan to preserve the cultural tradition of this aging fort.

Build 1783 during King Rama 1, it was one of 14 historic forts that survived to this day. Like the Chinese Hutong, it's beginning to gain the status of a "hot" spot for tourism. It was the place where the modern play Li Kae was originated.

Situated next to the famous Kaosan road - the backpackers' heaven - the Mahakarn Fort is known for its weekend market, festivals, handicraft, and spicy food. During the weekdays, a large sprawling bazaar could be seen around it; the bazaar grew around a nearby river dock for speed-boats.



There are approximately 50 households inside the fort. Most of the current residents have lived in old dilapidated wooden houses; they have lived here for over 30 years. There were plans to preserve the old houses as the site is managed by the Fine Art Department (FAD). However, little was done to preserve the residents who reside in this ancient fort. This could result in a lost of a very valuable cultural asset.

In 2009, the government proposed a plan to evict the entire community in order to build a "park" inside the fort. But a few observers quickly note that the "park" could also serve as a very convenient parking lot.



Architects and professors from various universities in Thailand came to give support to the community against the imminent eviction. Professor Chatri Prakritontakam from

Silpakorn University did a very extensive research study on the site and has recommended "preservation through people" as the most sustainable solution. Professor Chatri has been working closely with CODI in trying to implement a preservation scheme that involves several housing prototypes. Community members were invited to the discussion and to provide feedback.

The fort is starting to become a booming tourist spot that could generate large income to the city. Still, there's no certainty as to what would happen to the community and the fort. The Bangkok Metropolitan government still insists on building a new park on the site - with no residents in it.



"We will fight to the end," says an old Pad Thai seller with a thin swarthy face. He stares at the mud floor for a few seconds. "I'll go up the high wall of the fort and do Japanese-style Harakiri if needed!"