

# THE IMPACT OF THE URBANIZATION OF RURAL AREAS OF THAILAND: STUDY OF THE COMMUNITY AROUND ROI ET RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

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## **Abstract**

*This research aims to explain the impact of urbanization in the rural areas of Thailand: the study of the community around Roi Et Rajabhat University, Thailand, includes 1) Education: this area has higher education institutions. 2) Population has increased rapidly: lifestyle has changed from a 'simple life' to become a 'modern life'. 3) City lifestyle: the villagers send their children to study abroad. 4) Comfortable lifestyle: utilities established in the community. 5) The well-being of the villagers: they have more career options. 6) Religious: the temple has been transformed from a place of reconciliation to be a place to depend on minding the elderly. 7) Community Relations: Lack of space to communicate. 8) Environment and social issues: the population in the area is growing and this creates more problems. 9) Social mobility: in both career and social status.*

**Keywords:** *urbanization, impact of the urbanization, Roi Et Rajabhat University*

## **1. Introduction**

Roi Et Rajabhat University is an education institution in Thailand's northeastern region that needs to develop human resources in order to support trade and investment, and to be a gateway to neighboring countries. These neighbors are the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam). The university was established in 1997. The establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University is aimed to develop the economic prosperity of the area. The 8th National Education Development Plan made a great contribution to the establishment of the university. However, in the fiscal year 1997, the Rajabhat Institute Council of the Ministry of Education received a budget for the establishment of five additional Rajabhat institutes. A suitable province must be able to provide not less than 1,265 acres of land for the establishment by the Ministry of Education. Roi Et was ready and set up land to establish a higher education institution.

Moreover, Roi Et province has a large population and there should be provision to provide higher education to about 1 million people. There are at least 2,500 students graduating from high school each year. (Rajabhat Institute Council Ministry of Education, 1995)

When Roi Et Rajabhat University was opened in 2000, the surrounding community was upgraded to adopt a more urban context. Consequently, the researcher wanted to study the impact of urbanization on the community after the establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University.

### **Objectives of Research**

To study the impact of urbanization of rural areas in Thailand: a study of the community around Roi Et Rajabhat University, Thailand.

### **Theory**

#### **Regionalism**

#### **History of regionalism**

Regionalism has been around since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it began to gather pace after the Cold War ended in the 1990s. Globalization has greatly contributed to regional integration and the emergence of regionalism. Furthermore, negotiations within the framework of the International Trade Organization may not gain results from most of the member countries, leading to the conclusion of bilateral trade negotiations and stimulating regional integration in order to negotiate trade deals with other countries.

However, regional integration means that member states must defer some sovereignty in order to enter into the regional integration. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007) Regionalism is a political process which is a co-operated and coordinated policy for moving countries in the same direction (Mansfield and Solingea, 2010). It can be concluded that countries in the same region, with the same historical background, perhaps being neighbors, can easily assimilate into regional integration.

The regional concept can be divided into time periods as follows: Old regionalism, influenced by the world system during the 1950s-1970s, such as the concept of liberalism in developing countries being adopted after socialism, and the change to multilateral from bilateral. That globalization and interdependence have influenced upon the region can be explained as follows: 1) Cold War cooperation was in support of their own alliances. 2) Old cooperation is often driven by external factors, such as the influence of a superpower, while new cooperation is mostly due to internal factors or the needs of the countries in the region. 3) In terms of economics, old cooperation protects and preserves a country's industry within the group. New cooperation is more interdependent and more open. 4) Older cooperation may be more specific but new partnerships will be more open.

New regionalism began in the 1980s; it was strongly influenced by the spread of globalization and the liberalization of economies. (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2006) It can be said that globalization, particularly in the fields of technology, finance, and production, has developed new international competition. When the Cold War ended, the world entered

into an age of new liberalism and economic development. The political systems in developing countries have led to 'the region' playing a more important role, while 'old regionalism' has taken a reduced role because it focuses exclusively on alliance and security issues. New regionalism is focused on the importance of state or government institutions that have the power to make decisions, particularly regarding the areas of trade and security. The policies tend to emphasize on the import and development of industries as being key to the development of the state. Regarding the economy, the protection and preservation of the industries of the country, within the group, are paramount and this leads to specific cooperation. New regionalism also requires the participation of many non-state actors who have influence in the market, leading to reduced blocking and more openness within the membership. One country may belong to several groups which emphasize on export and trade liberalization, focusing on the global market, trade investment, and economic growth (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2006).

New regionalism contains a variety of dimensions that may include; culture, security, political system, and economic policy, along with the complexity of dealing with the multiple levels of the global system. The relationships within a region may be based on, and include, state, national, ethnic and regional links. New regional co-operation is driven by the needs of countries or a region, because they are aware that they cannot handle new problems and challenges by themselves (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998).

The formation of a region is based on its regional integration. Integration is an important marketing power for driving countries or regions with unprofitable industries to be able to develop stronger marketing positions. In addition, regional integration also drives growth; trade and industry will develop the specialized expertise needed to deal with the competition that comes with liberalization. Regional integration is very beneficial, for example, it contributes to a stable regional economy, and creates a good understanding between the participants, bringing peace to the region. It also provides the capacity to counterbalance powers which may push the integrated region to become a global actor with a new regional identity, while spreading the democratization of the region (Slocum and Langenhove 2003).

## **2. Method**

The researcher used qualitative research. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 7 sample subjects. Those selected were: an abbot, an executive of Roi Et Rajabhat University, a university official, an owner of a private dormitory, a sales staff member in the store of Roi Et Rajabhat University, an owner of a food shop, and the owner of the bazaar. The collection period was from November 26, 2015 to June 20, 2017.

## **3. Results**

Community Development in the surrounding area of Roi Et Rajabhat University. This is the community around Roi Et Rajabhat University, Tambon Tha Muang and Tambon Koh Kaew, Roi Et. The area is generally agricultural and the farmers may have two rice crops, depending on the amount of rainfall. There are 14 villages with 2,535

households. Currently, there are a total of 9,370 people, (Koh Kaew municipality, 2016). In Tha Muang district with population 2,416 men, 2,257 women, with 1,103 households (Tha Muang district, 2017)

*"... Before the establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University in 1997, there had been a simple life and simple family management..."* (Deputy Chief Administrator of the Sub-district Administrative Organization Council). Interviewed on June 20, 2017)

In 1997, it was considered as a small community surrounded by a forest area where people would live with their natural resources. It was a community of people who had received education according to the compulsory primary education standard set by the government at that time.

In the past, when the people in the area needed to visit the centre of Roi Et province they could use two routes, 1) by the Chi River, using a car ferry, one service per day. 2) regular trip by road to the area of Selaphum, this route requires a longer travelling time.

### **Lifestyle of the community around Roi Et Rajabhat University.**

#### **Career**

Before 1997, the community was mostly agricultural. In addition some people earned their profit from the products that they sales, sales on credit. Most people in this profession became wealthy. Currently, the people who own land, a dormitory business, or a bazaar in the area of Koh Kaew are the group of people who had been selling goods on credit. Credit sales began going down because of oil prices. (Owner of a private dormitory, interviewed on January 14, 2016), and most of them quit due to big discount sales promotions offered by merchants. (Abbot. Interviewed on January 10, 2016), some people around Roi Et Rajabhat University continue to be workers outside the area while some remain farmers. (sales staff in the store of Roi Et Rajabhat University. Interview on February 12, 2016), while some of them continue farming, but life is not difficult because of the perfect living conditions such as their natural way of life, neighbours are like kin, so they support each other all the time. (University cleaning staff Interview on January 9, 2016)

#### **Society and Culture**

The community around the campus focused on the education of children, and these children grew up and took a great role in the establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University.

The villagers have a strong attachment to the importance of Buddhism. The people who attend the important Buddhist days are of all ages. Especially teenagers who are consistently first in obeying and assisting in the affairs of the temple. As in the past, temples remain the centre of herbal medicine and it is a place to mediate conflict in the community. (Abbot, interviewed on January 10, 2016)

### **The impact of the urban community around Roi Et Rajabhat University.**

The establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University had the effect of increasing the population in the area. The numbers of students and faculty staff, especially the students

that are from different areas, they move to stay in the university dormitories and private residences around the campus. With the founding of Roi Et Rajabhat University, the surrounding area has adapted to be a "City" but this condition is located within a 2 kilometre radius. It has had a great impact on the way of life of the community which we can be summarized as follows:

### **Social including:**

#### **Education**

When Roi Et Rajabhat University was founded in the area, it provided an opportunity for people in the area to enter higher education and to improve their knowledge and social mobility by bringing knowledge for self-development in order to obtain a better job. They have become people who can work in local government or have a private job.

"... the children learn near home, save money ... "(cleaning staff of Roi Et Rajabhat University. Interviewed on February 12, 2016)

#### **Population and lifestyle**

##### **The population**

Roi Et Rajabhat University succeeded in establishing its first group of students in 1999, at that time there were few students but by 2009, the number of students had increased. The driving force of government policies in support of the expansion of educational opportunities, budget support, and the promotion of teaching staff to study at doctoral level opened the door to more courses. These factors encouraged the increase of the population of the university, especially students and the groups of people who provide support services to the students, including, those who migrated to work in another area, and began to return to their home town. The community must accommodate an increasing population by providing dormitory accommodation, commercial buildings, markets, etc.

**Lifestyle:** the lifestyle changed greatly after the establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat University .

##### **City life style**

There are two major groups of villagers, ones who sold their land, and those who didn't sell their land. They have different views. The people who sold their land or did not want to sell their land explained that since the Rajabhat University came to the area, some villagers had become more distant. In the past, there were no fences, they lived together but since the land was sold, the villagers have built homes with high fences. The ways of life where they were helpful to each other has changed, their relatives are far away and they spend more money in their daily life. (Cleaning staff, Roi Et Rajabhat University. Interviewed on February 12, 2016)

However, a former leader of the local administration, who used to trade in sale on credit, and currently owns a private dorm, said that the feeling is of being far away and this

sometimes comes from having no chance to talk with friends due to having a lot of work. It is very different from in the past.

The surrounding area is now more prosperous. The lifestyle of the surrounding villagers is more hi-society, such as, building modern homes, buying new cars, the quality of food, ready meals, and teenagers living together before marriage.

*"... cannot deny that there are both positive and negative effects. There's a theft problem, they're not caught because the people have come from outside, then we cannot take good care about that. The increase in transportation, employment, tourism, community shops, and barber shops around the university is very beneficial to the community..."* (Acting Chief Executive of Sub-district Administrative Organization November 29, 2016)

The villagers have a way of living in the city, in terms of food consumption and eating, also many lifestyle changes, such as exercise, people ride bikes and run around the pool on the campus.

### **Comfortable lifestyle**

The community around campus has seen progress. The road has been developed into Siemens road, which has been supported by the local government with lights on the road and a water system, also there is a hospital in the community and a post office.

*"...building roads or infrastructure makes the community comfortable. These things came on a lot in that time ... "* (private dorm owner. Retired teacher. Interviewed on November 26, 2016)

The market in the community has expanded. The occupations of the villagers are more flexible; however, sustainability cannot be guaranteed as it depends on the number of students, on Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday, they cannot sell because most of the students come from farmer families. At the weekend they need to return home to help their parents with farming or other agricultural activities such as cutting sugar-cane, etc. Farmers cannot leave their own agricultural activity and at the end of the semester, there are no students so many businesses cannot generate revenue. Finally, the villagers turn to agricultural occupations during the holidays (The owner of a food shop. Interviewed on January 14, 2016). In the case of two convenience stores in front of Roi Et Rajabhat University, it was found that, during the holidays, there is no replenishment of many products.

### **Well-being of the villagers**

The economy of the community around the campus depends on the opening and closing of each semester and the number of students, each year, is uncertain though some of the surrounding villagers have invested in large enterprises, such as dormitories, that require a lot of money. It may take some time to get their money back; however, it was found that most of the villagers had invested in dormitories with the capital repayable over only 2-3 years. And if students do not stay, the old dormitories may be abandoned and the

owner will leave and wait for new investors to buy or open a new dormitory or to make another business investment.

However, it was found that the community has a better quality of life, young people in the area can easily access higher education and they do not have to travel far, or face high costs.

*"... education of youth in this area, they have education near home, after graduating, they will have a job ... "* (private dormitory owner, retired teacher. Interviewed on November 26, 2016)

### **Religious affiliation**

The community around Roi Et Rajabhat University has religion in their daily life, and it was found that there is still an attachment, such as activities between the temple, community and Roi Et Rajabhat University. There is still mutual cooperation. (The owner of the bazaar. Former leader of the local government organization January 8, 2016), and it depends on the mind. It is very evident that in the group of ageing people, some are in depression.

*"... the ageing people are abandoned. Their children don't have time to visit the old people, which made them so depressed..."* (Abbot. Interviewed on January 10, 2016)

In the past, there might have been a lot of ageing people going to the temple. But nowadays, working people who went to work in different areas have started to return home because they have more job opportunities for a career. They have become a powerful group to support the activities of the temple. And their former employers, who still keep in touch, like to make merit, then this area receives mutual merit from outsiders and insiders in the area.

### **Community Relations**

Regarding cooperation between the people and support agencies in the area, sometimes there is a lack of communication, so they don't understand each other. Especially when they request for cooperation in the activities of the area, some groups think that there are not enough announcements by the agencies, then they cannot give good cooperation. The government officials think that people do not cooperate as in the past, because now most people have more money and they seem to have drifted apart from each other.

The relationship between the university and local government sometimes depends on informal, personal relationships. The relationship between a dormitory owner and student could be like family when the student graduated and became a staff member at Roi Et Rajabhat University. The relationship between the university and the community is full of mutual understanding. (Senior Officer, Planning and Policy Department On November 25, 2016), some private dormitories have a generous commitment to their students and have a sense of responsibility, like their parents.

*"... I love students like grandchildren, sometimes, students have problems with the education fee, they will come to talk, parents will call to solve this problem, even if I have*

*to pay the bank, I will always be flexible with them, however. they must pay all debts to me within the end of the semester... "* (private dormitory owner, retired teacher. Interviewed on November 26, 2016)

Some dormitory owners thought their relationship with the students was not the same. Not based on the idea of a tight relationship because many students regularly moved to new dormitories, they did not engage with the owner of the dormitory, as in the past.

### **Environment and Social problems**

Due to the increasing population in the area there has been a rise in problems such as floods, garbage, traffic, dust, criminal acts, etc. The flooding results from poor urban planning and also a lack of urban planning experts to educate the local or relevant officials. Non-compliance with the rules is an issue as those who are involved failed to realise that the area would grow so fast, so they did not undertake systematic urban planning.

In the past, many people were farmers or had a non-agricultural occupation. Some careers, such as selling on credit, made them a lot of money so they were able to accumulate land in the past. They stopped that career because of the rising price of oil and were unable to break even; the expansion of department stores in many areas, with low prices, meant that the public could access more products without the need to buy on instalments. For the group of people who were farmers around the campus from their grandparents' generation, they sold land when Roi Et Rajabhat University was founded and so became wealthy. Their social status changed from being a farmer to become an entrepreneur, such as the owner of a dormitory, owner of a mobile phone repair shop, or by the accumulation of wealth from the sale of land; some may enter local politics. Some villagers, who live some distance away from the campus, may be involved in support services such as being a security officer or doing housework for the university.

However, we found that some people studied at undergraduate level (education for all, studying on Saturday and Sunday). From the beginning of the establishment of the university, some of them are now working in the local administrative organizations, as general workers, or have become staff members at Roi Et Rajabhat University. For bachelor degree graduates, these people can get many different jobs, although many choose to pursue a private business career, and it was found that they are able to create their own, standout careers.

At the beginning of the establishment of Roi Et Rajabhat Institute, some villagers, who had land around the campus, sold it allowing them to send their children to study in Australia. In 2009, there were six members of the community studying in Australia.

### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The impact on the community around Roi Et Rajabhat University, can be seen in both positive and negative aspects, especially regarding social, economic, cultural, and environmental. The problems faced are similar to the problems in large cities, such as social issues. We must consider that the students have decided upon entry into higher education, which will effect upon their social mobility. The people who migrated away, to

work in the city, began to return to their hometown. People from outside the area come to work in the community around the university. The way to life has changed, there is distance between relatives, this occurred because the people who sold their land created a new identity and status; they may think that relationships with their neighbouring kinship are the same, but between the groups of people who chose to sell their land, or did not, the relationships are no longer as strong. People who live behind fences may not help each other as they did before, they prefer live separately. Meanwhile, some changed their career and focused more on service. These people still occupy the land but it is far away from the campus, so they must turn themselves into service providers such as housekeepers or security guards on the campus; some people sold a certain amount of their land to buy more land, further away. The price would be cheaper than the area around Roi Et Rajabhat University and they would still continue to be farmers.

For religion , today's priests may need to devote themselves more because the community has a way of life and, as people have to work, they cannot dedicate themselves as much as in the past. But, regarding this issue, some villagers are still attending the temple and the ages of the people who go to the temple are varied. The way of life of the community has been affected by urbanization, especially the area of around two kilometres, close to Roi Et Rajabhat University, which has changed a lot.

### **Suggestion**

The suggestion is to deliver knowledge regarding urban planning to the local government officials in a systematic manner.

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