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The Development and Organisational Structure of Independent Art Initiatives and Collectives in Thailand: The Case of Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture

Submitted by 33775351

in partial requirement for the MA Arts Administration and Cultural Policy

Goldsmiths, University of London, 2025

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Vasita (Pleng) Jirathiyut

Abstract

This dissertation delves into the complex relationship between alternative and independent contemporary art initiatives and institutional frameworks, with a focus on collective practices and organisational structures. Drawing on theoretical frameworks related to collectivism, self-management, and institutional critique, it investigates how such initiatives develop, operate, and sustain themselves within often challenging socio-political environments. Situated within the socio-cultural and policy context of Thailand, the study centres on Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture (Baan Noorg), an independent artist-run organisation based in Ratchaburi that possesses a unique, collective quality. The study highlights how Baan Noorg navigates tensions between autonomy and institutionalisation, offering valuable reflections on collective practice, collaborative work, and governance. Employing qualitative research methods including focus groups and interviews alongside secondary archival research, this study contributes to broader discussions on the role of alternative and independent initiatives in contemporary art, where autonomy, collaboration, and sustainability need to be constantly negotiated.

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1. Introduction

What does it mean to be alternative or independent in contemporary art? Broadly, it refers to radical or unconventional practices that introduce new, experimental, or challenging ideas. They often stand in contrast to the conventional—ideas and practices that have become part of social and institutional structures, widely accepted, standardised, canonised, and represented through institutions. Independence in art implies freedom from these established norms, creating a space for expression or action to be taken freely without being governed by institutional rules, and enabling apt response to political, societal, and community needs. In today's globalised world, many individuals or groups seek autonomy through self-organisation, whether independently or collectively, reclaiming control over their creative and critical directions.

One organic form of self-organisation is the collective: a gathering of like-minded individuals who share common practice, values, or resources. John Ploof, member of the Chicago based collaborative art group Haha, active from 1988 to 2008 described the group as a band that made projects like a series of albums, not confined to the same genre of music or configuration (Jacob et al., 2008, p. 6). In the art world, collectives go against the individualism typically associated with artistic careers by building a new body that fosters cooperation, creating something larger than the sum of its parts. A radical voice often raised in resistance to dominant narratives. The practice prioritises connectivity while remaining separated from the selves, as Klass Kuitenbrouwer notes: "A collective body's shared skin needs to be enacted, performed, for a specific purpose and context…" (Wesseling and Cramer, 2022, p. 20). All collective bodies function as networks, often participating in multiple collectives simultaneously rather than existing as fixed, isolated entities.

With these qualities, independent and alternative initiatives are seen as critical, radical, and adaptive; free from fixed roles and can shape-shift into any form needed in response to the present moment. This criticality plays a role in disrupting hegemonic consensus by opening spaces for conflicting and alternative perspectives. Chantal Mouffe (2007) calls this the agonistic space, a realm where contestation stands along a sustained democratic engagement. For this reason these spaces become crucial platforms that enable counter-hegemonic approaches. Although vocabularies like independent, alternative, artist-run, and experimental may carry nuanced differences, Charles Esche notes that they symbolise the same

drive to build new forms of practice and meaning outside established structures (C-Lab, 2025, 22:36).

In Thailand's context, David Teh (2017, p. 15) analysed the conditions that led to the rise of the alternative art scene. These include foreign travel and education, critiques of consumerism and globalisation, along with continuous economic decline. Together, these factors "reasserted the social function of art and its capacity for collective and even spiritual renovation," resulting in artists taking on streets and public spaces in contrast to the white-walled galleries. These early experimentations planted seeds that have grown into new networks and interdependencies between institutions and practitioners. It is also important to note that the term 'alternative' came to define a distinct artistic movement in Thai contemporary art history during late 1990s to early 2000s. This specific period has become a point of reference, while many later initiatives consciously moved away from the term.

This research aims to examine such structures, how they are formed, how they operate and how they sustain themselves. Focusing on the distinct history, context, and socio-cultural conditions of Thailand that shape its current cultural policy and artistic ecology, the study narrows down to a single case: Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture (Baan Noorg), an independent artist-run non profit initiative based in Ratchaburi. Starting small, this dissertation seeks to uncover insights into the organisation's collaborative and collective practices, which may then inform broader understandings of collective art-making in Thailand and beyond.

The literature review is divided into three parts. The first sets the theoretical framework on collectivism, institutionalism, and relevant management models. Next, it will delve into Thailand's arts and cultural ecology, tracing the development of cultural policy, institutional formation, and the emergence of the alternative art movement. Drawing from cultural theorists, academics, and art managers, this section lays the groundwork for the analysis of the case study, examining how different structural conditions impact independent initiatives.

Primary research was conducted through a focus group with Baan Noorg co-founders, members, and interns, and further supported by an in-depth interview with a collaborator. The data gathering process was further complemented by the examination of archival materials, publications, and project documentation. Even though on-site observation was not possible at the time of research, this outsider perspective may reduce bias and provide valuable insights not always visible from within.

The discussion and analysis are structured thematically, beginning with an overview of the organisation before diving deeper into its internal administration and working ethos. Various aspects of collective work are considered through the lens of self-management, horizontal structures, and institutional critique. As an organisation marked by its unique founding context, Baan Noorg provides rich insights into the evolving nature of collective practice.

The conclusion summarises key findings and provide recommendations based on comparative studies and practical toolkits. With acknowledgement of the inherent complexity and nuance of collective work, the intention is not to impose ideas or rigid models, but to provoke further reflection and dialogue. By raising questions, the research aims to deepen the understanding of independent structures, collective practice, and institutionalisation, offering perspectives that may benefit both readers and practitioners.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Comparative Analysis on Modes of Organising and Management

The way art organisations structure themselves reflect broader ideological, political, and historical currents. They are products of their time, shaped by the prevailing values of each era, yet, due to their position within the public sphere, they also play an active role in shaping society. In the post-World War II period, modern art institutions emerged as emblems of formalised art, marked by bureaucratic structures, national agendas, and codified cultural authority. These institutions often functioned as mediators and regulators, projecting the picture of the grand narrative in arts and culture to increasingly diverse publics.

While the Western model of art institutions stand as tools for nation-building and cultural hegemony, alternative forms of organising have simultaneously developed in response to its limitations and the evolving definition of art itself. These include the formation of independent and artist-run spaces, self-organised collectives, and hybrid institutional experiments, many of which were born out of resistance to bureaucratic rigidity and hierarchical governance. This section critically examines these divergent models of organising, tracing their roots and development, from modernist cultural institutions to grassroots, collectivist initiatives. This review of key literature on institutionalism, DIY culture, new and experimental institutional frameworks, and postcolonial organising philosophies will set the conceptual groundwork for analysing Baan Noorg's position as a hybrid organisation navigating the tensions between collectivism and institutionalism.

Modern art institutions were developed as agencies of cultural policy and have come to embody different social values depending on their cultural and geopolitical contexts. During the Cold War, they become instruments in the ideological battle between competing political systems. In the Soviet Union where the state strictly control artistic production, Socialist Realism became instrumental in reproducing "socially useful art that appealed to the masses, that educated them, inspired them, directed them" (Groys, 2008, p. 145), promoting nationalism, glorifying labour, and celebrating state power. It was implemented across cultural institutions to ensure aesthetic unity and reinforce loyalty to the regime. In contrast, democratic nation-states such as France, the United States, and the United Kingdom sought to distinguish themselves from their authoritarian counterparts by promoting art as a symbol of liberalism, emphasising individual expression and creative freedom. In

these contexts, art and culture were positioned as the pinnacle of civility and enlightenment, underscored by the establishment of museums, national galleries, and public funding bodies such as Arts Council England (ACE). Art was seen as a catalyst in improving one's inner life and as a means to civilise the public through learning and education.

Consequently, art institutions became a medium of power, drawing the public into ideological complicity by representing shared values (Bennet, 1995, p. 95). They evolved into authoritative structures in position to determine aesthetic value and differentiate what is good and what is not. As Sylvia Lahav (2023, p. 7) notes, "Institutional, rather than individual judgment became the accepted measure of worth. If a work was acquired by a museum, it was, de facto, valuable." Reflecting the social values of their time, these institutions helped to canonise what came to be defined as high culture, an exclusionary, Eurocentric, White, male-dominated narrative that, as John Carey (2005) argues, is not intrinsic but socially constructed.

As society has changed, so has the relevance and legitimacy of traditional institutions. Art is increasingly viewed as a part of everyday life, and aesthetics has becomes subjective, shaped by personal taste. The boundaries that were imposed to separate high and low art have dissolved. Art, along with design, architecture, and other creative disciplines, has become ingrained in the rhythms of daily life. The notion that anyone could be an artist, famously stated by Joseph Beuys in 1973 (cited in Bishop, 2006, p. 125), proposes that creativity is a fundamental human capacity, not reserved for the trained or elite. This idea sparked a movement on participation, which further informed socially engaged art practices.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the rise of conceptual art gave way to Institutional Critique, a movement led by theorists and artists such as Benjamin Buchloh, Hans Haacke, and Andrea Fraser. Their works questioned the authority of art institutions by interrogating what is and is not shown within the exhibition space and therefore, what qualifies as art itself. (Archey, 2022, p. 40). Later, Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) coined the term Relational Aesthetics to describe art practices based on human interaction, social relations, and participation. With these transformations in contemporary ideas, traditional art institutions, with their rigid hierarchies and slow-moving bureaucracies, became increasingly disconnected from reality. Their decline in public trust was further accelerated by the continuing crises of climate change, political instability, economic inequality, and migration. At the same time, arts and culture became heavily industrialised through the formation of the creative and cultural industries (CCI), further complicating their role by overemphasising

transactional economic value while overlooking their foundational significance and integration in everyday life (O'Connor, 2024).

As an attempt to reconnect with their publics, both state agencies and art institutions began emphasising accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion (AEDI). This was formalised in the UK through ACE's 2020–2030 Let's Create strategy, which prioritise socially engaged approaches, reaching underrepresented communities, and diversifying audiences (ACE, 2020). However, these efforts also present challenges. Institutional structures are often not equipped to decentralise or implement participatory models effectively. Many institutions have expanded teams and created new departments to manage community outreach and engagement, risking overstretching the already strained budgets. This shift has also led to confusion between the role of art institutions and that of social service providers, sometimes creating unrealistic expectations that they address broader social issues with limited resources. Current evaluation mechanisms also compel art institutions to adopt a tick-box approach, which further risk reinforcing exclusion and perpetuating the cycle of divisive categorisation. (Üstek, 2024, pp. 19–34).

In response to these institutional failures, attention turns to the periphery—non-regulated, often independent and collectivist practices that characterise alternative art organisations. These include independent spaces, artist-run initiatives, and collectives, which operate not just as physical spaces but also as alternative modes of gathering, organising, and working collaboratively. These organisations typically emerge from grassroots culture and are grounded in shared values of autonomy, cooperation, and experimentation.

These practices can be traced back to DIY culture, which originated in the United States in the 1950s as a form of home improvement and personalised home-based making. Over time this evolved into the aesthetic and political ethos of punk and zine cultures, and later, into a broader movement centred on self-production and anti-institutionalism. As Florian Cramer notes, "in DIY culture, autonomy is being actively created—and permanently negotiated—in and through the material practice of its community members" (Wesseling and Cramer, 2022, p. 268), underscoring the centrality of process, participation, and shared authorship. This ethos also resonates with the legacy of the Arts and Crafts Movement and more recent theories of Critical Making, both of which emphasise process, agency, and communal value.

Simultaneously, art collectives were reimagined as a counter-cultural force in the Cold War context. They disrupted dominant narratives by operating outside

institutional logics and turning everyday life into a space of artistic and political intervention (Stimson and Sholette, 2007). This marked a shift from institutionally prescribed cultural forms toward direct engagement with mass culture. These ideas gave rise to artist-run spaces, collectives, and self-organised initiatives which consciously resist market logic and hierarchical control.

In Asia, and particularly Southeast Asia, Western influences remain deeply embedded in the cultural and institutional frameworks. The legacy of colonialism continues to haunt many of the region's museums and art institutions, which often function like zombies; stuck with their own histories, serving as both symbols of national identity and remnants of imposed models of cultural legitimacy. These institutions were often established hastily in response to external pressures to demonstrate cultural sophistication in a Western language. They were frequently created to signal civility and modernity, aiming to avoid cultural domination or erasure by adopting the very structure that excluded them (Clark, 1993, pp. 8–9). As a result, many of these institutions suffer from inadequate maintenance, government neglect, limited financial and human resources, and a lack of relevance to contemporary cultural discourse.

The emergence of alternative spaces and practices in the region has often been driven by a lack of cultural infrastructure, a gap left unaddressed by state authorities. This vacuum has given rise to grassroots collectivism as both a cultural necessity and a practical response. In line with the rest of the Global South, distinct histories and necessities have produced alternative ways of organising that is often less rigid and more collectively oriented. Here, collectivity emerges as strategy for survival, not just an ideology. Drawing on non-Western lexicons and local concepts in Indonesian such as 'gotong royong' (communal work), 'babanton' (from bantu, meaning 'to help') and 'lumbung' (communal rice-barn), these practices offer another perspective on collective life and communal work. As Bunga Siagian and Ismal Muntaha of Jatiwangi art Factory wrote in Wesseling and Cramer (2022, pp. 59–65), such terms reflect deeply embedded values of companionship, sharing, mutual reciprocation, and regeneration. These principles suggest a form of collectivism rooted not in Western institutional critique, but in vernacular cultural logics.

While the conditions and contexts of these initiatives vary greatly and are shaped by specific localities and cultural context, the underlying logic often aligns around resisting authority and embracing collective philosophies. These practices respond to distinct material realities, yet commonly enable flexibility, personal agency, and

the potential for non-extractive relationships. They are typically supported by independent structures and horizontal models of decision-making and distribution of work.

Some of these alternative and collective practices discussed are now being adopted by institutions in an effort to de-verticalise their operations and embrace experimentation to reform from within. At the turn of the century, the concept of New Institutionalism, originally a term in political science, was introduced into contemporary curatorial discourse by Jonas Ekeberg in 2003, as a response to the limitations of the traditional, object-focused museum model. Rather than serving as static display space, institutions were reimagined as active platform for critical discourse, research, and production. They began to offer infrastructure and resources, with the ambition of dissolving the boundaries between institution, artist, and the public (Kolb and Flückiger, 2013). These ideas were particularly embraced by a number of contemporary art institutions in Western and Northern Europe, including Kunstverein München, Van Abbemuseum, Platform Garanti, and Palais de Tokyo, marking a new phase in institutional experimentation.

Building on this discourse, Charles Esche introduced the term Experimental Institutionalism, arguing that new institutions are not being built, but existing institutions are rather experimenting with the infrastructure that already exists; a structure deeply shaped by colonial legacies and the ruins of the social-democratic settlement that originally gave rise to many European cultural institutions (C-Lab, 2025, 31:45). In contrast, Guillaume Désanges (n.d.), president of Palais de Tokyo, has proposed the idea of Institutional Permaculture, which focuses on four key principles: [Bio]diversity of Forms, Ecosystem, Zoning, and Local Network. His model seeks to cultivate more cooperative and inclusive modes of institutional exchange while reducing the environmental impact of programming and operations.

These emerging models signal a shift towards radical, more fluid institutional structures that challenge the strict traditional management. Today's art and cultural workers often take on hybrid roles that defy conventional job descriptions and departmental hierarchies. Yet most institutional structures remain fixed, limiting meaningful collaboration and cross-functional strategy. Additional structural problems include a lack of Board transparency, where governance is separated from day-to-day operations, sometimes leading to top-down impositions and conflicting agendas. Directors often face the dilemma of being a single decision maker and inherit the legacy of their predecessors while navigating the demands of a rapidly

changing world. On top of this, tight budgets and bureaucratic constraints foster what Fatoş Üstek (2024) describes as a degenerative mindset within institutions.

In her book *The Art Institution of Tomorrow*, Üstek proposes two key strategies for institutional transformation: decentralisation and investment in collective responsibility and learning. She suggests dismantling hierarchical departmental structures and instead, form small, cross-skilled teams comprising both senior and junior staff. This would allow more decentralised decision-making and draw on the full range of staff expertise. Equally important is cultivating a culture where individuals are self-managed, resilient, and aligned with the institution's vision and values. While leadership remains necessary to ensure smooth collaboration and a healthy work environment, it must support rather than dominate. Üstek acknowledges that such radical restructuring may not be immediately feasible for all institutions, but the principles can still be adapted in parts. Ultimately, institutions must find an equilibrium, creating a dynamic intersection between structural reform and practical realities.

2.2. Tracing Thailand's Cultural Policy and Ecology

Before turning to the formation of independent alternative initiatives, it is important to understand the history and development of Thailand's cultural policy, as well as the broader arts and cultural ecology that shapes the current landscape. This provides a necessary framework for understanding the specific context in which independent spaces and practices have emerged.

As in many countries, the arts and cultural sector in Thailand can be understood through the lens of cultural ecology, a term that refers to the wider environment in which art and culture are embedded. This includes actors beyond artists and art institutions, encompassing art schools, policy frameworks, funders, art businesses, and the audiences. According to Ann Markussen (quoted in Holden, 2015, p. 6), cultural ecology refers to the "many networks of arts and cultural creators, producers, presenters, sponsors, participants, and supporting casts embedded in diverse communities," forming a dynamic system of relationships shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts. Instead of a linear or isolated structure, it functions as a web of influences and exchanges that together generate the cultural capital available to the public. In Thailand, understanding this ecosystem requires situating it within the complex intersections of modernisation, national identity formation, political instability, and an uneven distribution of power and resources.

2.2.1. Cultural Policy Development in Thailand: From Traditionalism to Economism

First, it is important to examine the historic development of the ingrained belief in traditionalism within Thai cultural policy, which has been directing the course of cultural and artistic activities in the country. The grand cultural narrative in Thailand emerged alongside the nation's broader modernisation efforts. In the 1940s under Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, state-led cultural reforms rooted in nationalism sought to modernise Thai identity by standardising dress codes, names, and customs. His use of culture for nation-building was the first time that culture was incorporated into national political agenda. As Kanjana Laochockchaikul (2023) analysed in her research on the genealogy of Thai cultural policy, this narrative aimed to use culture as an ideological tool to drive the country to prosperity, by using legal powers and punitive mechanisms to enforce various practices in the name of cultural preservation. This approach determined civic morals and activated behaviour based on the belief that culture would become the catalyst for national prosperity, measured against Western standards of civilisation.

Drawing on her analysis of Royal Gazette archives and the timeline of cultural policy development, Laochockchaikul observes that this idea was further reinforced in 1960s under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat with an emphasis on 'good traditional culture.' This notion framed any development or alteration to traditional culture as deteriorative and a threat to national identity. The cultural ideologies formed under these 2 military regimes became deeply embedded in the public consciousness. Even when a broader international definition of culture as a whole way of life began to be introduced during the tenure of General Prem Tinsulanonda in the 1990s, Thai cultural policy remained conflicted. Increasing exposure to global cultural discourse led to the adoption of terms such as 'local wisdom' and an emphasis on decentralisation, with a renewed focus on community-based development. This era also saw the formal establishment of the National Cultural Policy, but despite these progressive shifts, the deeply rooted 'good traditional culture' rhetoric still persisted, along with the belief that cultural development would lead to erosion rather than enrichment (Laochockchaikul, 2023, pp. 219–221). This contradiction continues to constrain Thailand's cultural policy to this day, creating a lasting tension between cultural conservation and progress. The moralised framing of culture, inherited from past regimes, continues to undermine efforts toward a more dynamic and inclusive cultural future.

Under the regime of Prayuth Chan-o-cha, who governed Thailand following the 2014 coup until 2023, the government sought to reframe culture as a soft power tool, most notably through the '5Fs' policy: Food, Film, Fashion, Festival, and Fighting (Muay Thai) (PRD, 2023). These categories further prioritise commercially viable, exportable aspects of culture aimed for tourism, often sidelining critical and experimental practices. Building on this trajectory, Thai cultural policy began to pivot around 2015 toward cultivating cultural capital and emphasising economic potential.

Modelling after UK's and Singapore's creative economy strategies which prioritise creative hubs, creative class, and entrepreneurship, Thailand saw an increasing alignment with the CCI model. Policies became framed around job creation, creative enterprises, and tradable cultural value. The Creative Economy Agency (CEA) reported in 2023 that the creative industries contributed ฿1.44 trillion, accounting for 8.1% of Thailand's GDP, risen from 6.93% in 2021, demonstrating a steady upward trajectory (CEA, 2023). The agency's strategy also highlights 15 creative industry categories as new engines of growth. This shift, part of a broader soft power meets creative economy agenda, has driven a surge in public initiatives, but risks prioritising exportable and commercial cultural forms over critical, experimental, or community-rooted practices, thus failing to integrate art and culture critically into everyday life.

This policy direction continued under the Pheu Thai Party's administration with the establishment of Thailand Creative Content Agency (THACCA) in 2023 and the launch of the National Soft Power Strategy Committee, which was further divided into 14 sub-committees tasked with driving specific areas of the creative and cultural sector. In addition, the government also introduced the One Family, One Soft Power (OFOS) policy which aimed to make up-skilling and re-skilling in the creative industry more accessible to the wider public, stimulating talent development, job creation, and market expansion (Kaewanant and Sirisunhirun, 2024). However, due to on-going political unrest and administrative challenges, the policy has yet to yield visible results. Although the committee included representatives from the cultural sector, decision-making remained top-down and largely predetermined. The incident following a scandalous phone call with Cambodia's President of the Senate, Samdech Hun Sen, which led to Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra being suspended from office and subsequently assuming the role of Minister of Culture (The Nation, 2025), further underscores how the soft and fluid character of arts and culture continues to be exploited in political power games.

These overlapping and sometimes conflicting policy frameworks have shaped not only how arts and culture are positioned in Thai society, but also how they are funded, institutionalised, and practised. The effects of these developments are most visible when examining the landscape of art institutions and the broader cultural ecology that underpins them.

2.2.2. Cultural Ecology and Institutional Development in Thailand

This section turns to the evolution of Thailand's cultural ecology, particularly its institutional infrastructures, funding mechanisms, and the rise of alternative platforms. Professor Sutee Kunavichayanont explained at an academic forum organised by the Thailand Academy of Social Science, Humanities and Arts (TASSHA) that, in the context of visual art history and the modern art movement, several developments aligned with this institutional trajectory. Professor Silpa Bhirasri (Corrado Feroci), an Italian sculptor commissioned by the Thai government to work in the Fine Arts Department, was widely regarded as the Father of Modern Art in Thailand. He was tasked with teaching and designing Western-style monuments and soon became a prominent figure who laid the foundations for formal art education by establishing Silpakorn University in 1933. His influence radically shifted the visual language employed by the ruling class, and cemented Western modernist and impressionist aesthetics which focused on form and technique, a discipline that profoundly influenced Thai artists during that period (TASSHA, 2021).

One of Professor Bhirasri's continuing legacy is the National Exhibition of Art, launched in 1949, which played a significant role in canonising particular aesthetics and legitimising artists, paving the way for professional careers in the visual arts while influencing market values and collecting practices. Initially co-organised by the Fine Arts Department and Silpakorn University in its first 15 years, then later solely managed by Silpakorn, the competition was a springboard for artists whose work align with the dominant narratives. Those who conformed often rose through the ranks, with multiple award-winners being further legitimised through earning the prestigious title of National Artist. However, the competition has long been critiqued for reinforcing institutional preferences and overlooking experimental or radical works that challenge traditional convention. As artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (2022, p. 167) observes:

> The National Exhibition of Art once stood out because it aligned with the existing discipline, but in the present it fails to highlight its unique characteristic as a 'national' event and to distinguish itself from all the other exhibitions.

These dynamics reflect the early stages of institutionalism, where art was shaped by academic and state structures, serving as an extension of prestige rather than fostering a socially engaged cultural infrastructure.

These formalised platform like art universities and national art competition gave rise to a particular group of Thai modern artists who established their careers and gained prominence in national art institutions and the art market. Following these academic anchors, institutional expansion was due to follow. Many art institutions in Thailand function primarily as museums, tasked with preserving heritage and reinforcing nationalist narratives. They are largely inactive in terms of public programming or contemporary engagement. University galleries and national art institutions such as the National Gallery on Chao Fa Road gained more prominent roles in exhibiting art to the public and encouraging education, but they still operate within bureaucratic limits and mainly respond to institutional agendas.

In the absence of strong public cultural infrastructure, art centres began to emerge. Chatvichai Promadhattavedi, former director of The Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) shared that the socio-political transformation marked by the effects of the Vietnam War created momentum for more contemporary artistic expression. BIMA, which operated from 1974 to 1988, became the first public art centre in Thailand to actively support bold and socially relevant artistic ideas (Promadhattavedi, quoted in Sarakadee Lite, 2023). BIMA played a critical role in presenting contemporary art and facilitating public engagement through exhibitions and artistic programming. Its legacy continued through the establishment of the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC), which opened in 2008 after years of advocacy by artist networks (Ground Control, 2024). Operating in a hybrid model as a foundation in collaboration with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, BACC remains underfunded but stands as the only part-publicly funded art centre in Bangkok. Its presence underscores the lack of platform for experimentation within the publicly funded landscape and reflects how contemporary art is not prioritised in national cultural agendas.

Adding to this state of neglect, the new state run National Art Gallery on Ratchadaphisek Road, completed in 2020, has been left empty due to lack of vision and planning. As Apinan Poshyananda (2023) critiques:

> Two years after completion, the National Art Gallery, which cost over 1 billion Baht for construction and interior decoration, has not been able to open to the public. The building with its deteriorating façade houses over 500 artworks stacked away in storage. It stands like a monument of emptiness and embarrassment that awaits a new lease of life.

Likewise, Ratchadamnoen Contemporary Art Center under the Ministry of Culture have remained mostly inactive. Both spaces urgently require clear strategies to unlock their full potential.

The scarcity of public support is further evident in the funding landscape. Thailand's only consistent government grant for contemporary art is the Contemporary Art Promotion Fund, offered annually by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) under the Ministry of Culture. This fund is small in scale, under-publicised, and lacks transparency and long-term strategic direction. As Gridthiya Gaweewong emphasised in her keynote presentation at C-Lab, this lack of robust state support has led many artists, collectives, and independent initiatives in Thailand to rely heavily on foreign cultural agencies such as the Japan Foundation, Asia Cultural Council (ACC), the British Council, and Goethe-Institut, for financial support, research, and mobility opportunities. (C-Lab, 2025). While these international support enables experimentation and cross-cultural dialogue, it also reflects the lack of sustainable domestic infrastructure for supporting contemporary, critical, or community-based practices in Thailand.

To fill this gap, private support systems began to grow. Private collectors and financial institutions started collecting and displaying artworks in office buildings. The competition model was adopted by businesses, such as Bangkok Bank's Bualuang Painting competition initiated in 1974 (Bangkok Bank, 2023), pushing more artists to race for shortcuts in establishing their careers. Many modern Thai artists featured in private collections, which later became private museums with public access, such as MOCA Bangkok (n.d.), established in 2012 by Boonchai Bencharongkul, and MAIIAM (2025), founded in 2016 by Jean Michel Beurdeley and his family. While these spaces expand the ecosystem, they also reflect elite consolidation and uneven distribution of access and influence.

This private dominance, paired with minimal public support, has led to an unbalanced ecology. As Ark Fongsmut notes, the current ecosystem neglects a crucial component: the audience. He argues that the discourse on Thailand's art ecosystem tends to focus on artists, institutions, and professionals, but forgets the public. He also critiques the increasing influence of the commercial sector in

shaping trends and artistic values, warning that “the overwhelming expansion of art spaces and organisations in the commercial wing will possibly create an imbalance condition in the ecosystem, as a result, it affects the general and potential audience … who are essential elements to drive a healthy art ecosystem” (Fongsmut, 2024, p. 1480). To ensure diversity and sustainability, Fongsmut advocates for greater support of nonprofit institutions and small and medium-sized art spaces (SMSs) to ensure diversity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Moments of economic instability, such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, further exposed the vulnerability of an arts ecosystem dependent on market forces (Oupkum, 2015, p. 2909). In response, artists and practitioners began forming alternative spaces and grassroots initiatives. These spaces often operate with limited resources, straddling autonomy and collaboration while engaging with state and international systems as needed. Their emergence reflects both a resistance to conventional norms and a strategy for survival. In a country where being an artist often means economic and political precarity, this hybridity has encouraged solidarity, resource-sharing, and the formation of tight-knit professional communities. This dynamic of balancing independence with interdependence forms the backdrop for the development of alternative spaces and collectives in Thailand’s contemporary art scene, and provide the basis upon which the case study of Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture is built.

2.3. Emergence of Alternative Practices and Collectives in Thailand

Building on the previous discussion of institutional limitation and policy framework, this section explores the emergence and transformation of alternative practices and artist collectives in Thailand. These developments did not occur in isolation, but were rather shaped by socio-political turbulence, insufficient cultural infrastructure, and economic regression. They reflect a sense of regional solidarity shared among Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, the rise of alternative practices, independent spaces and collective formations signal a pushback against state-sanctioned art structures. These non-conventional initiatives play a fundamental role in fostering emerging artists, offering fertile ground for experimentation, resistance, and community based practices.

The alternative movement in Southeast Asia emerged in the 1960s–90s along with the rise of conceptual art in the region. Artistic practices began taking a social turn,

increasingly looking outward to reflect political and social realities. This paved way for new narratives in contemporary art where artists drew on cultural codes, local stories, and audience involvement. As Iola Lenzi remarked in her essay for the exhibition catalogue *Context Concept Contestation: Art and the Collective in Southeast Asia*, artists in the region use art as a means to critique national institutions and systems which retained colonial residue or upheld conservative, repressive regimes, often employing implication to evade censorship (Lenzi, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, Amanda Katherine Rath and Wulan Dirgantoro (2022, pp. 4–7) have pointed out that conceptual art in the region is frequently in dialogue with Euro-American centrism and decolonial discourse. Experimentation during this formative period implies interdisciplinary practice that increasingly blur the lines, especially between visual arts and theatre. These critical attitudes are reflected in the formation of alternative spaces which are largely collective-led and operated through cooperative systems.

In Thailand, from the 1960s onwards, artists increasingly engage with social issues in their practices. This shift, informed by conceptual art and relational aesthetics, was also a response to the lack of infrastructure and exhibition spaces. As the art market became more commercialised, artists adapted by using any sites available to exhibit their work, from early galleries such as Pathumwan Gallery, Phyathai Gallery, and Bangkapi Gallery, to newly built department stores (Oupkum, 2015, p. 2908). By the 1990s, alternative practices had gained greater visibility. One significant moment that marked the evolution of Thailand's alternative art scene and collective operative was the Chiang Mai Social Installation (CMSI), a groundbreaking series of four city-wide festivals of art held between 1992–1998. Pioneered by Uthit Atimana, an artist and lecturer at the Fine Arts Faculty, Chiang Mai University, and his friends, the festivals aim to close the distance between art and the public by taking art out of traditional white cube spaces and into the streets and public sites of Chiang Mai, challenging conventional aesthetic norms. It marked a clear departure from the grand narratives of modern Thai art. As Gridthiya Gaweewong (2015, p. 150) observed:

> The artist collective created small narratives by exploring reality, everyday life and contemporary issues such as globalization, urbanization, consumerism, capitalism and poverty while still retaining Buddhist influences.

CMSI brought everyday materials into public spaces, integrating art into everyday life. It successfully redefined contemporary art in Thailand and served as an early

platform proposing the possibility of contemporaneity, and dissolving before it became institutionalised.

Apart from this, there are several key catalysts that strengthened the alternative transition and embedded it as part of the Thai arts ecosystem. One was the closure of BIMA in 1988, which created a vacuum in contemporary art infrastructure. Another was the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. As Assistant Professor Dr. Sitthitham Rohitasuk argued in his presentation *The 1997 Economic Crisis, New Alternative Art, and Art Collectors* (SAC, 2020, 1:14:15), the financial crisis destabilise the whole economic system, which created a ripple effect on the arts and culture sector. The Financial Sector Restructuring Authority auctioned off artworks previously owned by financial institutions, devaluing many Thai artists' works and disrupting the art market. This prompted young artists to seek new, independent avenues for exhibition and collaboration. Meanwhile, this same crisis gave rise to a new class of collectors who continue to shape Thailand's contemporary art scene today.

One prominent alternative space that left a lasting influence on Thai contemporary art was Project 304, founded in 1996 by Gridthiya Gaweewong together with artists Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Chatchai Puipia, Michael Shaowanasai, Prapon Kumjim, Sajeetip Nimvijit, and Kamol Paosavasdi. Located in an apartment in Samsen area, Bangkok, Project 304 became a nurturing ground for creative processes and experimentation (Oupkum, 2015). Fuelled by Gaweewong's curatorial vision, the space has accelerated the pace of experimental practices and influenced a generation of emerging artists. Gaweewong and Weerasethakul also co-founded the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival in 1997 which continued to this day.

Like CMSI, Project 304 closed in 2002. Gaweewong later became Artistic Director of Jim Thompson Art Centre, shifting her position to work within an institutional framework. Many of the artist-founders went on to gain national and international recognition. Although the space itself closed down but ripple effects were already set in motion. Many galleries and independent space grew and proliferate, some of which continue to operate today; for example, Tadu Art Centre and Baan Tuek Art Center. This raises ongoing questions: Where are the limits of alternative and independent organisations? Do they have a lifetime before becoming institutionalised or dissolving? This concern was addressed in the panel discussion *Independence as an Institutional Interstice* organised by C-Lab. Vidya Shivadas, curator and director of the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, noted that while institutions require resources and maintenance, alternative spaces offer more temporal and adaptive support systems essential to artists and the art ecosystem

(C-Lab, 2025, 1:13:30). This statement underlines the intervening nature of such initiatives, allowing these assemblies to morph according to specific situations.

These developments demonstrate the fluidity of management and collective working in Southeast Asian context, which often relies on cooperative models and self-organisation. Even though collective practice has always been the core of alternative organisations, the term 'artist collective' was not widely used until the 2010s, and especially after Ruangrupa's curatorship at Documenta 15 in 2022. Earlier initiatives like CMSI or Project 304 operated collectively in structure, but did not explicitly identify with the label.

One early artist collective in Thailand is Womanifesto, founded in 1995. As a feminist platform for dialogue between women artists in Thailand and abroad, it challenged the dominance of male-centric narratives and introduced intersectional, process-driven approaches to collaboration. As Preenun Nana (quoted in Nair et al., 2023, pp. 10–12) explained in her exhibition note for *Womanifesto: Flowing Connections*, a retrospective exhibition organised by the BACC, the collective's operations and its members were not bound by geography and time. Emerging from a shared ideology, the group members stayed connected through workshops and gatherings, drawing on a spirit of collective manifestation while resisting what Gregory Sholette described as "masculinist authority, over-centralization, and bureaucracy" (Sholette, 2016, p. 39). Womanifesto's non-hierarchical, mobile, and multi-voiced structure offers a powerful model of shared authorship and collective identity.

Despite their impact, research into the genealogy of artist collectives in Thailand is still limited. Partly because many initiatives were sporadic, often linked to specific events or artistic urgencies. In recent years, the trend gravitates toward curatorial collectives than purely artist-led ones, often acting as informal gatherings tied together by ideas and intentions. Groups like Waiting You Curator Lab, Yoonglai Collective, and àt-sà-jan! consist of young artists and curators who maintain individual practices while forming collectives that function as single, flexible organism with broader topical focus.

These developments are made possible by the fluidity of roles in arts management in Thailand—a sentiment shared across Southeast Asia. Due to limited resources and training, artists often take on management, administrative, and curatorial roles themselves. Patrick Flores points to Apinan Poshyananda as a key figure who transitioned from artist to curator and administrator. He once held governmental position in the Ministry of Culture, and continues to curate national and global

events along with a sustained writing practice (Flores, cited in Steeds, 2014, p. 204). The late development of academic programs in curating and cultural management in Thailand has also contributed to the gap between artists and the support systems they need.

Today, the landscape of independent initiatives in Thailand has become more established and gaining a distinct niche of its own. It has become a genre that holds a space and has roles to play within the art world. The development of collectives and alternative, independent spaces reflect a flexible, adaptive response to a constantly shifting landscape of cultural politics, institutional gaps, and global artistic discourse. While deeply shaped by local conditions, such as centralised cultural policy, uneven state funding, and weak infrastructure, Thai collectives are also part of a wider regional and transnational conversation. They are not static entities but dynamic formations, emerging from shared urgencies and reassembling when needed. From CMSI to Womanifesto to today's collectives, these initiatives reflect an ethos of self-organisation, resistance, and mutual care. United by a desire to create value beyond the institutional and commercial realm, they actively engage with social issues, particularly within local communities, forming specific, smaller scale narratives that speak directly to their immediate contexts, while occasionally resonating more widely and gaining momentum within the grand narrative. Centred on discourse and driven by independent motivations, these groups play a crucial role in completing the cultural ecosystem. At the same time, they underscore the pressing need for greater scholarship, archival support, and institutional recognition.

3. Methodology

The literature review has laid the groundwork for this research by framing it around management, organisational structure, and administrative practices in the arts, incorporating international references while situating the discussion within Thailand's context. This study seeks to explore how decentralised management approaches, often employed by collectives, contribute to the resilience and sustainability of independent arts organisations in Thailand. It examines how collective models function across different scales within ecosystems that involve multiple stakeholders, and how the interplay between structure and ad hoc strategies enables decentralisation. The analysis contrasts institutional hierarchies with collective philosophies, examining how leadership influences organisational values and relationships. A case study approach was selected to explore these ideas through a focused examination of one single organisation: Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture.

According to Robert K. Yin (2003), case study research is a preferred method for examining contemporary phenomena within a practical context, particularly when the boundaries are fluid. Rather than focusing on a single decision, this study analyses an organisation to understand its internal dynamics, including leadership philosophy, administrative practices, and collective ethos.

The subject of this case study is Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture (Baan Noorg), an artist-run, non-profit initiative based in Nong Pho District, Ratchaburi, Thailand. Founded in 2011 by the artist duo Jiandyin (Jiradej and Pornpilai Meemalai), the organisation is rooted in socially engaged practice and community involvement, with a mission to foster exchange, integration, and co-existence between local and global contexts. While formally registered as an ordinary partnership, its internal operations remain informal, a common characteristic among artist-run spaces and collectives. Nevertheless, in collaborating with schools, state institutions, and funders, it also adopts formal mechanisms. This hybrid model blending informal, collective values with institutional strategies makes Baan Noorg a compelling subject for analysis. Its decentralised base outside of Bangkok also adds another layer of relevance, offering a decentralised model applicable in provincial settings while maintaining national and international networks.

3.1. Data Collection

This study employs primary sources including a focus group, an in-depth interview, and secondary research into digital archives, publications, and project documentation. The aim is to capture experiences, reflections, and perspectives of those involved with the organisation.

An online focus group was conducted with Baan Noorg team members, including the co-founders: Jiradej and Pornpilai Meemalai, three members: Krittaporn Mahaweerarat, Awika Samuksaman, and Parichat Tanapiwattanakul, along with three Baan Noorg interns: Anamika Kansakul, Nutchaya Arayanuphan, and Patchayarada Sa Nguannam. The remote set up highlights the flexibility of Baan Noorg's working model. Many members are practicing artists whose involvement with the organisation began through internships, creating an overlapping space of education, work, and artistic development.

In alignment with the co-founders' commitment to implement a flatter organisational structure that emphasises transparency and equity, the focus group was framed as a collective sharing session. While the intention was for everyone to contribute equally, the nature of the discussion which leaned towards leadership and decision-making inevitably led to more input from the co-founders. This dynamic is commonly present within collective structures, where equal contribution is valued, while practical responsibilities often remain concentrated.

A separated interview was conducted with Penwadee Nophaket Manont, an independent curator and Head of Exhibition Department and Chief Curator at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC). Nophaket Manont's practice is deeply embedded in social engagement within the local Thai communities. She has collaborated closely with Jiandyin and Baan Noorg on several projects. Her position as an external collaborator offered valuable insights into the organisation's working culture and its evolution from an artist duo to a larger collective. Her reflections also highlight how curatorial and managerial strategies intersect within collaborative, community-based models.

All interviews were conducted in Thai. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and consent was obtained to record the sessions for transcription, translation, and analysis. A transcription tool was used to aid data recording and processing, along with hand-written notes to highlight key insights. A smartphone recorder was also set up as back up to record the conversations.

The researcher's prior experience working at the BACC also informs this study, While the researcher was familiar with many aspects of the local arts infrastructure and Baan Noorg's practice, further background research was conducted to enhance understanding and contextualise findings.

3.2. Data Analysis

This study employs thematic coding and interpretative qualitative methods to examine the organisational and management patterns within Baan Noorg's collective practices. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, thematic analysis provides the flexibility to engage with a range of data sources, including interviews, focus groups, and secondary materials, while allowing for the integration of theoretical insights and literature into the analytical process.

The data were coded, and key themes were identified to guide further inquiry into the organisation's management strategies, leadership dynamics, and collective ethos. These findings were interpreted through the lens of key theoretical frameworks including cultural management, organisational theory, collective governance, self-management, and alternative institutional models. This layered approach enables a nuanced understanding of how informal and hybrid structures function within the Thai arts ecosystem, considering the influence of local policies, socio-political and cultural structures, and funding mechanisms.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The analysis will be divided into thematic parts to enable a focused investigation of each topic, supporting the application of observations and findings drawn from both primary and secondary sources. It begins with an overview of Baan Noorg, examining the nature of its operations, then delving into the discourse surrounding collectivity, defining the unique characteristics and circumstances that shaped its inception and on-going practices. The analysis will explore the specific form of collectivity Baan Noorg embodies, look into the organisational structures using different theories to study its model, and comparing it with traits and operational style of other collectives and art institutions in the region. Baan Noorg's diverse scope of work which divided into distinct branches resembles a systematic organisational model that establishes a discernible pattern. This will be examined in relation to the discourse on new institutionalism. Ultimately, the aim is to understand Baan Noorg's working model, which balances structure and flexibility, combines elements of collectivity with a strong organisation framework, and draws selectively from collective practices to support long-term sustainability.

Remark: Since the co-founders Jiradej and Pornpilai Meemalai share the same last name, they will be addressed by their names throughout this analysis to prevent any confusion.

4.1. Baan Noorg's Organisational Overview

Baan Noorg is a non-profit, artist-run initiative founded in 2011 by the artist-duo Jiandyin (Jiradej and Pornpilai Meemalai), with an aim to drive cultural and artistic collaboration between artists, curators, academics, and experts from various disciplines, along with the local community. Based at Jiradej's home studio in Nong Pho District, Ratchaburi, the organisation organises creative and educational programmes that reflect local knowledge, culture and history through contemporary artistic practices. Its programmes seek to create an interdisciplinary juncture that connects art and the community, while encouraging the production of socio-cultural and economic outputs for community sustainability.

The term 'Baan Noorg' derived from the name of the village where the organisation is located, literally translates to 'rural' in Thai, a name that fits the organisation's narrative and context of decentralisation from Bangkok, implying reduced reliance on centralised government, institutional structures, and funding sources. The organisation is grounded in its local context, frequently collaborating with provincial authorities, schools, temples, local businesses, and nearby communities. However,

this locally-rooted vision does not mean that the organisation's work is restricted to its geographical scope. Quite the contrary, Baan Noorg maintains numerous international partnerships and exchange programmes, partly supported by funding provided by international cultural organisations and through a broad network of collectives and artist-run initiatives across Southeast Asia and beyond.

Although the initiative began in 2011, the organisation was only formally registered as a common partnership under Jiradej and Pornpilai's names in 2017. The founding ideas behind the initiative comes from a blend of different circumstances and inspirations that emerged around 2010, when the duo decided to move back to Baan Noorg, Jiradej's hometown. At first, their intention was to build a studio space to continue their studio-based practice. However, their vision gradually shifted due to a series of events that led them to embrace community arts and engage with local narratives.

According to an interview by the Equitable Education Fund, Jiradej and Pornpilai's decision to work collaboratively with the local community was largely influenced by their experiences participating in international artist residencies. One of the most significant was their time at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York, funded by Asian Cultural Council (ACC). During this residency, the duo travelled across the United States for research and connected with many artists who joined the same programme. It was through this experience that they began to recognise the potential of artist collectives, artist-run initiatives, and the residency model (EEF, 2024). Another key encounter that further strengthen their ideas was with Taiwanese artists Hsu Chia Wei and Lo Shih Tung, members of Open-Contemporary Art Centre (OCAC) who also worked with them in a group exhibition *ThaiTai: A Measure of Understanding*, at the BACC between 2012–2013. At that time, conversations around locality in contemporary art in Thailand were still relatively rare, and the exchange of local narratives across Southeast Asia has enabled the idea to fertilise. It could be said that this movement emerged as a form of resistance to Western capitalism and global economic systems. Later, the two Taiwanese artists also participated with Baan Noorg as committee members, alongside Thai artist Sakarin Krue-on.

The duo started reconnecting with the local community in Nong Pho through their first initiative in 2011, NongpoKIDdee, an out-of-classroom educational platform that brought together experts, teachers, professors, and youth volunteers to engage with the local dairy industry. The programme explored ways to learn from and add value to this local industry, while fostering self expression through creative processes and

building social awareness in an increasingly globalised world (Khunchamni, 2020, pp. 70-73). From this starting point, a series of projects and events began to take shape, blending their artistic expertise with local knowledge and beyond. Their studio in Nong Pho gradually transformed into a semi-public learning and workshop space for both artists and community members.

In an interview with Window Magazine (2021, pp. 235–237), Jiradej reflected that moving away from studio practice allowed for a more tangible connection with real people. Baan Noorg became an experiment in how art could impact a community, encouraging locals to value their heritage, culture, and wisdom. Since 2014, the organisation expanded to include members, often former interns or students of the duo. There are currently six active members, excluding the co-founders and committees, bringing the total to eleven. Baan Noorg's programmes have evolved into distinct categories, reflecting its expanding networks and outputs, which at times intersect with the larger national or global narratives. The organisation has come to embody the philosophy *'Baan Noorg is Future is Now,'* signifying "… possibilities for exchange, integration and co-existence within the community—locally and globally, and to build up community sustainability" (Documenta 15, 2022). Over the past 14 years, Baan Noorg has taken many forms. Its fluid structure allows it to shift and adapt, existing simultaneously as a collective, an organisation, and through some perspectives, an evolving institution.

4.2. Structure and Strategy: Between Collective Practice, Governance, and Question of Institutionality

This analysis arrives at a time when Baan Noorg is actively rethinking and redefining its organisational model. Much of this internal structuring remains in flux and may not align with what is currently presented on the website, as they continue to experiment with more organic and flexible modes of collaboration and collective working.

According to Pornpilai, following their participation in Documenta 15 in 2022 where they encountered many other collectives and learned from their working models, Baan Noorg became increasingly determined to incorporate more collaborative and collective approaches into its operations. However, these efforts have faced challenges, especially because the founding circumstances of the organisation have embedded certain hierarchies, both explicit and implicit, that continues to shape its internal relationships. Both structural and embodied hierarchies are present, since

the co-founders' positions are clearly defined and acknowledged, and with that comes a form of entitlement that is often internalised by the other members (Press Press and IER, 2020, p. 14). This inherent imbalance of power has reluctantly placed the co-founders at the centre of the organisation, while the committees and members revolve around them, each with varying degree of influence and autonomy.

When asked about the organisation's structure and self-definition, Pornpilai (2025) explained:

> Baan Noorg is a collective that operates in a way similar to organisations. It is not exactly an artist collective, and defining it as such also seems unrealistic because we do have an organisational aspect and working structure.

Meanwhile, Jiradej shared that the term 'collective' is often used by others to refer to them, perhaps because their full name is rather long, and 'Baan Noorg Collective' becomes a short, convenient nickname. He further explained that while collectives share common traits, the environments in which they operate can differ significantly. Some collectives may have rotating members (or even rotating directorship, added Mahaweerarat). In Indonesia, many new collectives are constantly forming, often by branching off from larger collectives, like a family structure of parents and children.

This idea echoes Ruangrupa member Mirwan Andan's presentation at C-Lab, where he mentioned that most Ruangrupa members have initiated new projects in different places, while continuing to support each other without competition. This ethos of mutual support reflect the spirit of collectivity where no one aspires to be a solitary marathon runner (C-Lab, 2025, 9:40). For Andan, collaboration and regeneration are key principles for sustaining a collective's longevity and relevance. People who come gather in that environment learn from each other, exchange ideas, and evolve through shared influence.

From the discussion above, it becomes apparent that Baan Noorg naturally falls into the idea of a collective. As Jiradej (2025) reflected:

> What matters is the cooperative nature of the work. Any gathering of more than one person, built on mutual 'willingness' and shared goals, particularly when shaped by geography, culture, and socio-political contexts, naturally aligns with the idea of a collective.

As co-founders who had already been working as an artist-duo, they were already employing collective philosophies. When they first founded Baan Noorg, it was treated as a sub-project by Jiandyin, established as a new community based

practice. In early years, they worked with out-sourced collaborators to fulfil projects. Pornpilai (2025) added:

> It was our deep wish to have a more committed working team, but it has always been informal, without long-term commitment. It was only in 2018 when work expanded into a much larger scale, that we began to seek more committed team members, usually former interns or our students. This is when we adopt the more formal member model, based on invitation to join the team, usually stemming from their engagement with more than one project.

This shows that their evolution into a larger-scale collective only occurred half way through the organisation's life. More members meant multiplying the collective ethos, which goes beyond working as a duo. However, with members joined later, with noticeable gap in practical and administrative knowledge as well as on-ground experience compared to the duo, it was only natural that Jiandyin remained central to decision-making and overall direction during the expansion phase. Now, those dynamics seem to have evolved. Jiandyin has embraced more decentralised mechanisms in the working processes, and applied a flatter operational framework, where members contribute more as peers rather than subordinates.

Another governing layer is the board of committee, who are long-time friends and inspirers for the co-founders, and continue to act as advisors, occasionally tuning in to offer feedback or catch up on developments. However, they are not typically involved in the day-to-day work. Pornpilai said that they are reluctant to use the term 'board' or 'committee' but have not found a more suitable term to describe their role and engagement with the organisation. Since the board does not hold any legal power and is not required by law according to the organisation's registration status, their establishment is purely symbolic. Recently, Jiandyin both agreed to drop their titles as co-directors in an attempt to diminish hierarchy within the organisation, though this is not yet reflected on their website as of August 2025. Still, when administrative documents require official representation, the co-founders must often take on that role, as they are registered owners of the partnership. This structural complexity that derived from presumed layers present challenges that further adds the implicit hierarchies within the organisation.

That does not mean hierarchies do not exist in collectives, or that they are inherently negative. Nor does horizontality necessary equate to ideal total equality. As Isabell Lorey argues, horizontality does not mean the eradication of verticality or hierarchy. It is not simply about giving everyone a voice, but about creating "a social space in which everyone feels empowered to speak and take part in common challenges as a different and similar singularity, a space in which privileges and inequalities can be

consciously dealt with, and heterogeneous ways of speaking and opinions have to be endured" (Lorey, quoted in Gielen 2013, p. 84). Horizontality, then, is a practice, an on-going process, one that requires care, maintenance, openness and mutual contribution.

Another common assumption is that horizontality must be anti-institutional (Lorey, quoted in Gielen, 2013, p. 83). In reality, institutionality exists in degrees. In political science, an institution generally refers to "a stable, recurring pattern of behaviour" (Goodin, quoted in Lowndes, 2018, p. 64). Institutions are marked by four characteristics: a specific setting, recognition by members and stakeholders, collective impact, and some form of enforcement, formal or informal. In Baan Noorg's case, its specific setting is Thailand's art ecosystem, its procedures and norms are recognised by members and collaborators, and its practices are collectively enacted, often through informal but agreed-upon mechanisms. Through their internal practices and programme branches, it becomes evident that Baan Noorg is, to a certain extent, instituting.

The organisation's annual plan is loosely structured, consisting of core programmes such as Baan Noorg Biennial, a bi-annual community based art festival which evolved from NongpoKIDdee, invited collaborative or curatorial projects such as *Churning Milk: the Ritual of Things* at Documenta 15 and *Methodology for a Tai Yuan Return* at Thailand Biennale Chiang Rai, along with various organically evolving initiatives, for example, Air Open Studio, an artist residency programme, Baan Noorg Karnchang, a practical and mechanical service unit, Baan Noorg Storage, a merchandising initiative supporting artist networks, and Baan Noorg Internship Programme, on-ground training opportunity for students. They seem to switch gears annually depending on the scale and demands of core projects, while adapting organically to different working paces.

Although it may be unintentional, Baan Noorg shows clear signs of instituting, through emerging structures and patterns of behaviour that reflect an evolving institutional logic. Institutionalisation is a process that most alternative independent initiatives fear because it may seem like they are becoming what they always try to oppose or challenge. Particularly in Thailand where institution is associated with bureaucracy, inefficiency, and corruption. Thai political and public institutions have historically failed to reflect the needs of the people, which has led to scepticism and distrust, leaving a sour aftertaste whenever referred to, especially in the contemporary art circle. As Jiradej expressed, no one working in independent

initiatives wants to be institutionalised. Even so, as Lowndes argues, institutions "tend to be self-reinforcing and remarkably enduring" (Lowndes, 2018, p. 67).

That said, instituting radical practices is also possible. As defined earlier, institutions are the result of repeated behaviours and shared values. Through continuous implementation of horizontality and collective practice, Baan Noorg may be instituting a unique and beneficial model, one that reimagines what is possible. Their visibility and reception in Thailand's art ecosystem, along with their global outreach, suggest a level of recognition as a significant actor. David Teh (2012) has described Ruangrupa as a de facto institution. While still an autonomous collective, its visibility, network, and impact reflect the function and role typically associated with institutional presence.

As discussed in the literature review, the landscape of art institutions is shifting globally, and the movement of new institutionalism has allow structural experiments to test various alternative models. While collectivity and institutionality are not the same, they can coexist at varying degrees. For Baan Noorg that possesses unique organisational timeline including its founding by an artist duo, its later adoption of collective practices, and its increasing impact on local and global platforms, the coexistence of these elements forms a productive paradox. As long as they continue to acknowledge these multiple identities and actively find mechanisms to keep their status in check, they are performing what Sonja Lavaert (in Gielen, 2013, pp. 134–135) explained as an exercise in contingency, where artistic and philosophical experimentation stretches the boundaries of what is possible.

4.3. Baan Noorg's Working Culture and Evolving Collectivity in Practice

Collective principles and organisational structure becomes most apparent through the way a group work together. For each project, different positions and roles are negotiated and assigned, revealing the internal dynamics of how organisation members work together to achieve shared goals. While direct observation was not possible, this dissertation brings in key principles and references to highlight practices that derive from collective values.

Describing Baan Noorg as a group of 'loosely connected team of independent practitioners' may hold some truth, but ultimately oversimplifies the complexity of their collaboration. While it is true that each member has their own individual artistic practice and is actively seeking personal development and opportunities, this

framing overlooks the nuanced relationships and evolving forms of collaboration within the group. This analysis will focus on three aspects of Baan Noorg's working culture: commitment, teamwork, and growth.

In terms of commitment, the notion that the collective is 'loosely connected' reflect their lack of formal work contracts or agreements. Pornpilai (2025) notes:

> We have considered that this might be something we should do, but up until now, commitment from members is organic. When members decide to get involved in a project, they engage within their capacity, according to their individual responsibility and interests. Renumeration depends on the funding for the project. The budget is managed and divided as transparently as possible, and we share the budget table with everyone.

This reliance on trust can breed precarity for both the organisation and its members, as it blurs the line between intention, expectation, and accountability. While the informality may seem functional due to long-standing personal relationships within the art circle—where words travel fast and people are careful not to break trust—clearer agreements would offer more protection and clarity for all involved. Perhaps this arrangement is believed to be more convenient in Thailand's context as it helps maintain informal working relationships while offering flexibility as trade-off for the often high-responsibility, low-paid work in the arts and cultural field.

At Baan Noorg, negotiations often take place before engagement with a project, but contracts are only formalised when required for funding, tax declaration, or visa purposes. This is a missed opportunity since contracts or shared agreements are not merely about commitment or payment, they could be useful for discussing needs, as well as setting intentions, expectations, and priorities. As Press Press and IER (2020, p. 26) argues, agreements can serve as an organisational tool to set boundaries between work and the self. It could be crafted with creativity and flexibility, while remaining rooted in the principles of care and clarity.

Another aspect drawn from the statement is teamwork. Baan Noorg members do not have a fixed job description. Their roles change fluidly according to the projects they are involve with. Each member has their own areas of expertise and sometimes assume roles according to their skills, availability, and interest. For instance, Jiradej usually leads on installation design, choosing materials and methods, while Pornpilai handles administration and budgeting. Other members shift roles based on project needs and timelines. As Jiradej (2025) explains:

> Everyone has their own power, authority and autonomy to act on behalf of the collective. But before reaching that point, the distribution of tasks must

> first be horizontal. Members discuss which roles suit whom, whether they align with individual goals and capacity. All these aspects need to be agreed upon before moving forward, otherwise it would lead to conflicts.

This sentiment is agreed by other members. Samuksaman (2025), adds:

> Depending on the project, if required, we will sit down and discuss. Once roles are assigned, each person will assume that responsibility.

Meanwhile, Tanapiwattanakul (2025) reflects:

> Even when someone is assigned a task, it doesn't mean that they have the right to decide in place of the entire collective. Discussion remains essential throughout the working process.

This flexibility prevents the formation of rigid hierarchies and utilises each member's versatility, enabling them to overcome limitations.

This fluidity is a valuable asset in collective working as it allows organisations to grow more organically through the ability to adapt and respond quickly. Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver advocates for 'adhocism', which refers to a reaction with immediacy to tackle a specific need or purpose. It is an improvisational instinct inherent in everyone and should be nurtured by organisations that aim to respond to challenges swiftly and intentionally. They argue: "The most talented organizations are those that can restructure themselves ad hoc with each new problem that arises, rather than have to strain the unique situation through the same old hierarchy" (quoted in Lauwaert and Van Westrenen, 2017, p. 237). This responsiveness is evident in Baan Noorg's dynamics. Although structural hierarchy exists, day-to-day operations often blur those lines. Yet, this reality is often overlooked when attempting to visualise the organisation through a conventional chart. It is easy to assume that Baan Noorg operates through clearly defined layers: board of committees, co-founders, members, and interns. However, this hierarchical thinking does not represent the flow of collaboration between organisational members.

Organisational theorist Frederic Laloux (2014, p. 116) observed similar patterns in self-managed organisations like Morning Star, where instead of relying on traditional top-down structures, they maintain a fluid web of commitments that better reflects how work actually gets done. Likewise, relying too much on the pyramid chart can distort this reality of collective work, which prioritises constant adaptation, shared responsibilities and flexibility. This reflects the high level of self-management, coordination, and transparency required in collectives.

Communication becomes key in Baan Noorg's working culture, and regular meetings are crucial for progress updates and planning. Tanapiwattanakul notes that the organisation holds an annual meeting to discuss future directions and allocate projects and responsibilities for the coming year. This meeting takes place on-site at the studio in Ratchaburi and is carefully scheduled to ensure all members can attend. In addition to this, recognising that members are often based in different locations, Baan Noorg also organise periodic internal activities to create opportunities for members to meet, exchange ideas, and learn from one another. All these efforts foster an environment of peer based learning and strengthen the organic relationships among organisational members.

These collective frameworks that shaped Baan Noorg into its current form are rooted in the working dynamics between Jiandyin. Penwadee Nophaket Manont, who managed the *ThaiTai* exhibition and worked with Jiandyin in Baan Noorg's early years noted that the founding duo's working style deeply informs the collective's operations, and that there are significant overlapping areas between the two entities. While the inclusion of junior members expanded the group's activities, overall direction remained with the co-founders. According to Tanapiwattanakul, many core programmes were fully developed and became standardised by the founders; however, other members also contribute to the richness of the programming by initiating additional projects and activities that were approved through group consensus. When decisions are collectively agreed upon, they must be respected. All voices along with the subtle individual nuances should be acknowledged. Mahaweerarat (2025) adds another layer to the question of horizontality and responsibility:

> No one starts from the same place. Our background differ, and so is the location where each member is based. Those who live within the community often take on more responsibility, not just out of convenience, but due to their deeper connection and stronger sense of accountability to the area.

This quote highlights the delicate balance of leadership and follower-ship within collective structures, which formed under unique circumstances.

The last aspect to discuss here is growth. Collective work should be mutually beneficial for the collective and individual members. As Press Press and IER (2020, pp. 33) argue, building a shared culture must go hand in hand with prioritising relationships as part of work. Jiradej (2025) reflects:

> Baan Noorg gives a lot to its members, who are mostly visual artists. We shape each other's practices and provide a stable ideological ground, apart from an economic one. As a group, we find new possibilities together. Baan Noorg has become a form of post-graduate operational grounds for radical, alternative learning. We facilitate exchanges and residencies, often international, helping members pursue their own artistic goals.

Many Baan Noorg members have also gone on to join or form other collectives, For example, Samuksaman and Tanapiwattanakul are part of a curatorial group Yoonglai Collective. Tanapiwattanakul recalls joining Baan Noorg in 2022 through an internship open-call. Coming from a fine arts background, her interest in collective and community-based work has gradually developed. She learned to work across contexts, both domestically and internationally, forming her own system of co-existence, while Baan Noorg continues to influence and inspire her collective practice.

Another theoretical insight that support this perspective is a research on organisational culture and knowledge management processes, which found that clan and adhocracy cultures, as opposed to market or hierarchy-driven models, are best suited for knowledge creation and application (Aichouche et al., 2022, p. 9). While there is no single final answer for all situations, being aware of the organisation's dominant culture can help inform its internal growth.

This analysis reveals how both vertical and horizontal dynamics coexist at varying degrees throughout Baan Noorg's operations. It is unhelpful to frame collectivity as opposed to institutionalism, and denying the existence of hierarchy only reinforces its power. As Nophaket Manont, reflected on her shifting position from an independent curator to a leadership role at BACC, she said that it felt like a flip of a coin—from being someone who asks for support, to someone who can offer them. She acknowledged that independent initiatives in Thailand often rely on some kind of social and cultural capital. In her new role, she aims to use the platform to redistribute those opportunities.

This sentiment also applies to Baan Noorg. As an independent organisation, despite their efforts, the precarity of funding and limited government support makes long-term planning difficult. Jiradej said that he advocates for the establishment of a national arts council, arts association, or coalition of arts organisations, to decentralise support. However, this vision is hindered by fragmentation and lack of unity among actors in Thailand's art ecosystem. In the absence of structural support, Baan Noorg turns to prioritise resource sharing and network building, both locally and internationally.

Ultimately, collective work is an on-going practice of horizontality. While local political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions often push independent initiatives into survival mode, making sustainability difficult to imagine, those committed to this path can still benefit from establishing clear working principles, in which ever form it may be. Independent and collective work remains meaningful and vital to the germination of experimental ideas, particularly within Thailand's limited cultural and artistic support structures. Investing in sustainable systems and practices not only fosters long-term resilience but also reinforces the integrity of their values-driven approaches.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has explored the formation of Thailand's art ecology, tracing the development of the current scene both through institutional perspectives and alternative lenses. Applying a range of theories and conceptual frameworks enriches the analysis of Baan Noorg as an independent organisation navigating the complex terrain of cultural policy, institutional engagement, collective practice and self-management. This research illuminates the reality of operating within the tensions between formalised institutionality and the desire to maintain independence, as well as the internal negotiations between hierarchy and horizontality. As the collective reflected in one of their zines (Baan Noorg, 2022, p. 77):

> Amid uncertainty and limitations, our accumulated knowledge helps us overcome challenges. The rewards we gain are success and greater opportunities. What follows are bigger dreams, along with higher risks. Belief and faith are essential to fostering and sustaining the collective spirit.

This reflection summarises the core of Baan Noorg's collaborative approach, highlighting the challenge in sustaining independent structures, and the trust required to build alternatives in precarious contexts.

To address the limitation posed by the absence of engagement with the organisation, further studies may benefit from observing the group in real working environment, participating in meetings, or joining activities firsthand. In this research, however, insights and analysis were primarily drawn from a focus group with the collective, an interview with a close collaborator, and secondary archival research, offering a window into the collective's operational dynamics.

The analysis concludes that Baan Noorg's structure is deeply informed by the practice of collectivity, a foundational approach put in place by its co-founders since its inception. There is no fixed model for how the organisation should operate, as its context is constantly in flux. However, Baan Noorg's collective nature has enabled the organisation to stay agile and responsive, providing the elasticity needed to remain resilient in highly adaptive conditions. Despite this realisation, the work is far from complete, as the organisation continues to evolve. The following reflections are offered as prompts for further discussion.

As the organisation grows, so does the diversity and experience of its members. If this organisational growth continues, sustaining the collective spirit may become more complex. Disagreements and internal collisions may arise more frequently. As

highlighted by Laloux (2014, p. 114): “Conflict resolution is a foundational piece in the puzzle of interlocking self-management practices.” To brace for such challenges, it may be helpful to prioritise developing conflict management strategies along with workshops or training sessions on collective and collaborative working that defined a shared working ethic. One useful resource could be the *Toolkit for Cooperative, Collective, & Collaborative Cultural Work* created by Press Press and the Institute for Expanded Research (2020), which offers strategies for building a sustaining work ethics among organisational members.

In the future when team members become more adept in internal management, it might be possible for the co-founders to step back or redistribute their roles. However, this depends entirely on how they envision the organisation’s future. If central leadership remain tied to the co-founders, issues around long-term sustainability and succession planning may arise. Mechanisms should be considered to support a gradual transfer of responsibility.

For a start, Baan Noorg may benefit from engaging with disciplines beyond the arts. For example, introducing rotating roles and inviting collaborators from different fields into the organisation could bring fresh cross-disciplinary perspectives and new skills. Since the organisation is based in Ratchaburi, involvement from local community is crucial. Having a rotating community contributor among the members beyond advisory roles might strengthen the organisation’s local root. These periodical rotations aim to generate new ideas and provide reflections that feeds its collective character.

This practice could later extend to leadership positions, introducing the possibility of rotating directorship; although this is currently unlikely, given Baan Noorg’s founding circumstance. If ultimately implemented, such structure would honour the unique capabilities of different members along with their visions. As Nophaket Manont has observed, even in collectives where consensus is valued, moments of urgency or crisis still require decisive leadership and accountability.

Depending on their long-term vision, registering as a non-profit organisation could be a viable option for Baan Noorg. However, this change may represent a step closer to institutionalisation. While this transition could help alleviate the long-term responsibilities placed on the founders, and while consensus might reflect the perspectives of other members, the final decision ultimately lies on them, as they hold the legal authority over the partnership. Becoming more formalised means

increased administrative work and the establishment of an official board of committee. It is also a long and tedious process that could take years to complete.

These considerations must be carefully weighted against the desire to preserve the group's informal and flexible working style. If the intention is to remain adaptive and autonomous. Perhaps formalisation is not necessary, and the journey may simply end when the co-founders decide to disband. But if the aim is to sustain the organisation's legacy beyond the founding members, then pursuing a new legal structure becomes a relevant possibility. As is the case with Bamboo Curtain Studio (2024), which eventually terminate its programming, but preserved its legacy through archival and rights maintenance.

To understand where Baan Noorg came from and where it is going, it is crucial to recognise that its identity depends on the perspective from which it is analysed. From within, one might describe Baan Noorg is a collective, as its workflow embodies collaborative values. An artist-in-residence, however, may view it as an institutional platform that supports research and artistic development. Meanwhile, the community or the general public may see it as a form of social enterprise, engaging with civic, educational, and cultural issues. Baan Noorg appears differently depending on who is looking and from which perspective. They are different things to different people.

Perhaps the most neutral way to describe it is as an organisation, with clear purpose, vision and structure that shifts according to context. Organisational roles evolve depending on the nature of the project. When operating on-site in Ratchaburi and engaging with the community, it performs the civic functions. When hosting an artist, it becomes an experimental platform. And when it enters institutional spaces, it takes on the institutional presence. As the context shifts, Baan Noorg flows between these roles. As Mahaweerarat (2025) concludes:

> Even if artist-initiatives don't intend to become institutionalised, time, experience, and repeated contact gradually pull them in that direction. What we can do is engage in a constant tug of war, a push and pull between institutional structures and horizontal, collective values.

This dynamic tension is at the core of Baan Noorg's evolving identity, and it is precisely this flow that defines Baan Noorg's unique position within Thailand's art ecology.

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