

Pollution Management and Industrial Estates: Perceptions of Residents in the Vicinity of Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate, Thailand

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Abstract: Industrial pollution has become a serious problem in most states and has been tackled by initiatives at the national and transnational levels. However, public opinion is still affected by the events of the past. This situation is explored through the case of Map Ta Phut industrial estate in Thailand, which has been bedeviled by environmental and safety issues since it was opened in 1989. Despite improvements in management systems, notwithstanding the explosion in 2012 which killed 12 workers in one factory, the opinions of nearby residents has been badly affected by the memories of the past. This has led to mistrust and suspicion of the industrial estate among those residents and so protests and dissent have been more common. This study employs a quantitative survey of 400 residents living in the vicinity of Map Ta Phut with a view to understanding their perceptions of environmental management on the estate and, hence, some indications of how better flows of information might improve confidence among these important stakeholders. There will need to be more effective long-term methods of dealing with health issues relating to pollution and conveying knowledge about what is being done in order to recapture public trust.

Keywords: *Environmental management, industrial estate, residents, Map Ta Phut, Thailand*

1. Introduction

Map Ta Phut industrial estate was founded in 1989 in the south of Thailand, near to the city of Rayong, which is a port on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand and the principal location for oil and gas extraction. The industrial estate was established to take advantage of proximity to these resources and also because of the Thai government's plan to decentralize some economic activities away from Bangkok, both to promote employment and income-earning opportunities in provincial areas and also because of the need to relieve the pressure on transportation and public services in the capital. Map Ta Phut now consists of 6,949 rai (1,111.8 hectares) of ordinary industrial zones with 60 factories, in addition to another 1,609 rai (257.4 hectares) of business industrial zones. Most of the factories are involved with some aspect of hydrocarbon processing or some other form of heavy industry. It is the largest industrial estate in the country and a significant site of economic and industrial activity. It is also an industrial estate that has been bedeviled by environmental problems through the years, from an explosion in 2000 that killed two workers to another in 2012 that killed 12 and wounded more than 100 more (*Bangkok Post*, 2012). There have also been persistent stories about abnormally high rates of cancer among people in the vicinity of the estate (Fuller, 2009) and various types of pollution and environmental degradation. Governed by the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand (IEAT), Map Ta Phut industrial estate management has taken steps to improve the quality of its environmental management and to resolve outstanding issues. Although some success has been achieved, this has been undermined by the negative publicity and, of course, the 2012 disaster. This raises the question of what is the attitude towards and perception of environmental management at Map Ta Phut industrial estate among nearby residents. For the industrial estate to have a sustainable career, it will need to reduce the transaction costs resulting from mistrust in the country as a whole and, in particular, among residents in nearby communities. This is evident from the various protests that have taken place and the calls for additional research and checking of pollution levels.

Although the existence of some protests against the estate indicates that members of communities in its proximity are unhappy, it is not known how many people blame the estate for poor health and environmental conditions and to what extent. It is also not known whether the measures taken by managers in some companies have had an impact on public opinion. There is evidence from other countries where industrial