

Understanding the Dynamic Creative Clustering in the Phra Athit Road Area of Bangkok

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ABSTRACT

This article examines changes along Phra Athit Road in Rattanakosin's historic center. With the support of the state, a former commercial street became a "cultural quarter" and eventually a "cultural-creative cluster," with creative activities infiltrating the neighborhoods. For this study, the researcher conducted a field survey and interviewed creative entrepreneurs in four sub-districts. The Phra Athit Road social and cultural resources reflect the qualities or potential resources of traditional neighbourhoods that have fostered the development of creative clusters. "Urban culture" is one of the district's key cultural resources that is properly understood and utilized, and its complex network of creative people is a crucial social resource. These creative people are "outsiders" with strong relationships to "insiders"; some of them advocate a new way of living, while others comprise groups of intellectuals with creative economy talents and tasks. Cultural-creative clusters comprise more than people; they are typified by cafés and bars, exhibition spaces, and the production of creative products. These clusters may vary from one another in function and location, and newer clusters, less dense than the original, are less harmful to traditional communities and businesses. What they have in common is that they have enabled participants to gain real-life experiences and join distinctive activities customized by entrepreneurs. Still, those who use external resources to create goods and develop a creative cluster may endanger the very neighbourhoods where they take root.

The Phra Athit Road area provides a deep understanding of "creative clustering," which refers to a dynamic process that has taken place in some traditional neighbourhoods, based on the positive exploitation of their rich traditional, artistic, and cultural resources. Entrepreneurs are producing unique products that fit into complex systems, which is good for the area, but may also disrupt established patterns in the community. Transforming the historic area gradually could help locals adjust to the change. This study proposes the following approaches to promote both the protection of traditional structures and the acceptance of change: (1) The design or planning of the area should allow for development that is consistent with the rhythm of life in the area. Proper pacing of changes and the growth of well-sized creative clusters create an ecosystem that is good for both the residents and creative entrepreneurs. (2) The neighbourhood's values should be enhanced by integrating local and external resources. The wide range of creative production and consumption activities that are created from these resources will be unique and endlessly adaptable. (3) The adaptability of cultural-creative clusters should be optimized through programs provide good services and offer support to the urban regeneration. However, such programs and support should not limit the creativity and flexibility of these clusters.

Keywords: Bangkok historic center, traditional neighbourhood, cultural-creative cluster, urban transformation, urban heritage

INTRODUCTION

Around two decades ago, “traditional neighbourhoods” began to be acknowledged as part of urban heritage. These days, conservation research and practices for historic areas place more focus on the vernacular urban landscape and the cultural legacy of the inhabitants, including the activities and authentic lifestyles of the locals. Additionally, conservation and regeneration efforts in many countries have also started to focus on an area’s gradual transformation, most notably the process of changing the “cultural quarter” into a “cultural-creative cluster.”

Several studies have been conducted to collect data on the dynamic life cycle, cultural ecosystem, and bottom-up regeneration process of such areas through the creation of cultural products that are intimately connected to the structure and social development process (Dovey, 2012; Zukin, 2012) Data about the gradual transformation of an area is necessary because it can be used to create a database that academics and operators can access in order to help them make accurate decisions and plan for proper site management schemes.

This study is part of an effort to better understand this issue. It investigates how the area around Phra Athit Road in Rattanakosin’s historic center in Bangkok, Thailand has changed over time. This area shows how state-led projects and unplanned development turned a traditional neighbourhood commercial street, first, into a “cultural quarter,” and then into a “cultural-creative cluster” with various creative activities. The purpose of this study is to explore the process of change in this traditional neighbourhood, which has been driven by individuals and local groups, particularly small manufacturers, and enterprises, resulting in the creation of a variety of creative activities in the area.

The research questions are:

- 1) How did this creative cluster form, develop, and change?
- 2) What are the factors that contribute to the area’s preservation and rehabilitation?

3) What changes have been made to traditional structures to allow for more creative activities?

The objectives of the research are:

- 1) To understand the changes that have occurred in the Phra Athit Road area, as well as the factors that have contributed to these changes;
- 2) To comprehend the components of the cultural and creative clusters, as well as the cultural resources available in traditional communities to support creative clusters;
- 3) To understand the effects of the changes in the area, and to learn how cultural resources are used to give the area new meanings and images; and
- 4) To construct a “model” defining the process by which neighbourhoods are transformed.

The study’s framework and research methodologies are as follows:

The first step is to conduct a literature review about the definitions of cultural quarters, creative clustering, and unplanned change in traditional neighbourhoods. Simultaneously, basic information and relevant studies regarding the areas are collected.

The second step is to conduct surveys, develop maps, and compile a database of activity groupings.

The third step is to look at case studies of creative entrepreneurs who have demonstrated how to innovate within existing constrained systems. The information was gathered by observing creative activities that have taken place in specific environments, and interviewing the selected creative entrepreneurs.

The fourth step is to analyze the data using the following framework: (a) A timeline of creative cluster formation and evolution; (b) Factors influencing creative group formation and adaptation at various stages; (c) All the components of a cultural-creative cluster, including the forms and physical features, the network of creative entrepreneurs, and the meaning of the place as a creative district; and (d) Creative entrepreneurs’ perspectives on how they are adaptable, and how they have used

social and cultural capital to do things in a novel way.

The fifth step is to address the results, which are as follows: (a) Increasing our knowledge of the spontaneous clustering of cultural and creative activities that takes place within cultural quarters; (b) The factors that influence the formation of spontaneous creative clusters, and their impact on traditional neighbourhoods; (c) Strategies for revitalizing the Phra Athit Road area, as well as other traditional communities that have transformed into creative clusters.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF A CULTURAL-CREATIVE CLUSTER

Definition of the Cultural-Creative Cluster

The definitions of “cultural quarter” and “cultural-creative cluster” have been established since the 1980s. The term “cultural-creative cluster” is used in this study because it allows us to analyze the ambiguous urban transitional processes that comprise traditional crafts producer clusters, and cultural and artistic quarters, as well as creative producer, consumer, and service clusters (Evans, 2009; Mommaas, 2009)

This research sometimes uses the term “creative clusters” to describe creative places that blend cultural districts with old neighbourhoods or artisan areas. The important thing to consider is the overall transition process, which includes numerous cultural forms and creative strategies as well as the conditions that have connected and differentiated culture quarters and cultural-creative clusters.

With these considerations in mind, it is noticeable that the notion of creative clustering has been applied to a variety of urban settings. A cultural quarter with historical structures and cultural production-related activities is one type of area that might be developed into a creative quarter.

Evans discussed the process of cultural quarter transmigration; he highlighted how traditional

industrial or commercial areas have been turned into venues for cultural and creative activities, saying that each cluster will have its own distinct characteristics. For example, a conventional manufacturing base has been turned into a production base with sophisticated technology, while an old neighbourhood has been turned into work and studio space for artists, creative classes, and so on (Evans, 2009, pp. 36-38).

The formation and management of cultural-creative clusters are different from those of cultural quarters. Cultural quarters are often managed by setting up the area's boundaries, finding new uses for historic buildings, and preserving the existing urban structures — the materials, patterns, and colors — allowing these cultural quarters to maintain their distinct images and characters. The management of a cultural quarter is usually concerned with safeguarding the intrinsic values that define the area's identity and instilling a sense of belonging in the residents. The redevelopment of these areas is usually planned with an eye towards the consumption of commodities and cultural activities as well as serving as leisure areas or tourist attractions.

In a different way, the cultural-creative clusters are managed through the clustering of enterprises and institutions that contribute to the development of creative products. These businesses can work together, help each other, link up, and stimulate activities amongst themselves, making them more competitive and helping the economy to grow. Also, the management of cultural-creative clusters considers what the local community wants or needs. In this sense, the area of consideration extends beyond the economic dimension; it also addresses the cultural dimension, focusing on “people” who have feelings and who want to maintain local traditions.

Moreover, this management focuses on the change of the area, led by both outsiders and insiders. This is different from the management of cultural clusters, which commonly focuses on the needs or desires of outsiders who use the area for a specific purpose.

To use the idea of “creative clustering” in places with different economic, social, and cultural situations, the following issues should be considered:

Defining the project without adhering to the conceptual framework of the cultural-creative cluster

By defining the project outside the usual creative clustering framework, the researcher should focus on and enhance creativity that does not fit into the framework or norms of creative definition. Rodwell (2014) defines creativity in this sense as the application of one's imagination, which is limitless. The conditions under which creativity occurs cannot be restricted, foreseen, or planned, so strict definitions and strategies for cultural resources might stifle creativity rather than fostering and utilizing it (Rodwell, 2014).

Several academics have pointed out that most attempts to create creative clusters have left out key elements of the area that do not fit the typical definition of a creative cluster and excluded people who were not thought to be working creatively. Creating creative spaces with such restricted thoughts and methodologies may result in each cluster being too similar. Additionally, this type of thinking and process will result in each district competing with the others for the same user groups. As a result, the creative clusters may seem to be effective for a short time, but their long-term performance may be restricted since crucial features that could make each one unique have been eliminated at the start of the process. Consequently, the areas may lack the flexibility to adjust to change.

Consideration of authenticity and innovation

Authenticity and values in the cultural-creative clusters should be safeguarded and encouraged. However, an area should be adaptable and innovative in order to accommodate changes brought about by the deployment of new ideas and methods of functioning. In fact, a creative cluster may be described as an area with a highly adaptable system (Bagwell, 2008). That said, if the clusters are unable to sustain their values and authenticity while adapting to rapid changes, they may lose their attractiveness.

Focusing on the residents of the neighbourhood and those who have contributed to the characteristics of the neighbourhood as it is

When examining the main characteristics of creative clusters, geographical typologies and human conditions should be considered (Rodwell, 2014, p.14). According to the creative cluster concept, "people", including both residents and performers in the area, are seen as the area's core resources. Consequently, the area's creativity should be prioritized along with the people's needs, goals, and usage of the place.

Understanding the area's characteristics and cultural resources as expressed by locals

Nowadays, the development of creative spaces is a highly competitive endeavor. It is critical to identify the benefits and qualities of a location that are distinct from others since imitating other creative environments will not lead to long-term success. So, what kind of cultural resources should be thought of as supportive to the making of a creative space? To begin, we should consider "tangible cultural resources." These include designated historical sites, locations or public facilities that are used for cultural activities, and public artworks constructed as part of a revitalization program.

At the same time, we should also consider "intangible cultural resources" that may not have obvious inherent value. Nonetheless, these intangible resources may contribute to the relationship between people and place and convey the distinctive urban characteristics that give the space its meaning. Examples of such resources include an "authentic" way of life and a network of social interaction. These resources are important as they are a part of the social and cultural resources of shared cultural networks.

In cultural-creative clusters, the areas that sustain life and interaction between people may be found, for example, in the form of various public areas such as shopping streets and parks. These areas support "everyday" usage, local self-sufficiency, and small-scale social interactions. Furthermore, they help build cultural ecosystems and provide the "face" of social and cultural identity (Zukin, 2012).

Apart from local ways of life and social interactions, the characteristics and elements of cultural quarters where people live and engage in continuous activities should be taken into account. These include informal cultural organizations that support the development of diverse corporate groups; the values expressed by local people, such as the richness of cultural diversity; high civic engagement; a sense of pride in one's neighbourhood; and a sense of community (Dick, 2015).

The aforementioned characteristics and aspects are often disregarded; therefore, they are not on the list of cultural resources that help develop production or nurture creative activities. If we can create tools that assist us in finding out what the locals prefer, we should be able to figure out what the aims of the authentic creative space should be. This would also lead to sustainable management, as long as the new activities do not impinge on the way people make their livings.

The Specific Characteristics of Cultural-Creative Clusters

Cultural-creative clusters have several interesting characteristics. Initially, the emergence of a creative cluster is different from the formation of other clusters because cultural-creative clusters are dynamic and fluid; they are always changing and adapting to make a place livelier and more interesting by bringing people to the activities. The other interesting characteristic is ambiguousness of the area's borders, both physically and socially. Cultural-creative clusters are continually active and adaptable, allowing for greater adaptations. Furthermore, cultural-creative clusters bring people and places together by helping people understand the meaning of a place and share their own experiences.

Another essential feature is that a cultural-creative cluster attracts those who are interested in intense creative and entrepreneurial activities. For economic reasons, it appears that such an area attracts specific groups of people; however, it is not just economic concerns that draw creative people to one of these areas, but also an attractive lifestyle.

The Emergence of Cultural-Creative Clusters

Development of cultural-creative clusters is facilitated by a wide range of variables that may manifest themselves in a variety of ways. The process typically involves organic, gradual emergence; however, it is also often influenced by a governmental policy or strategic plan, or it may, less commonly, involve private investment (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012).

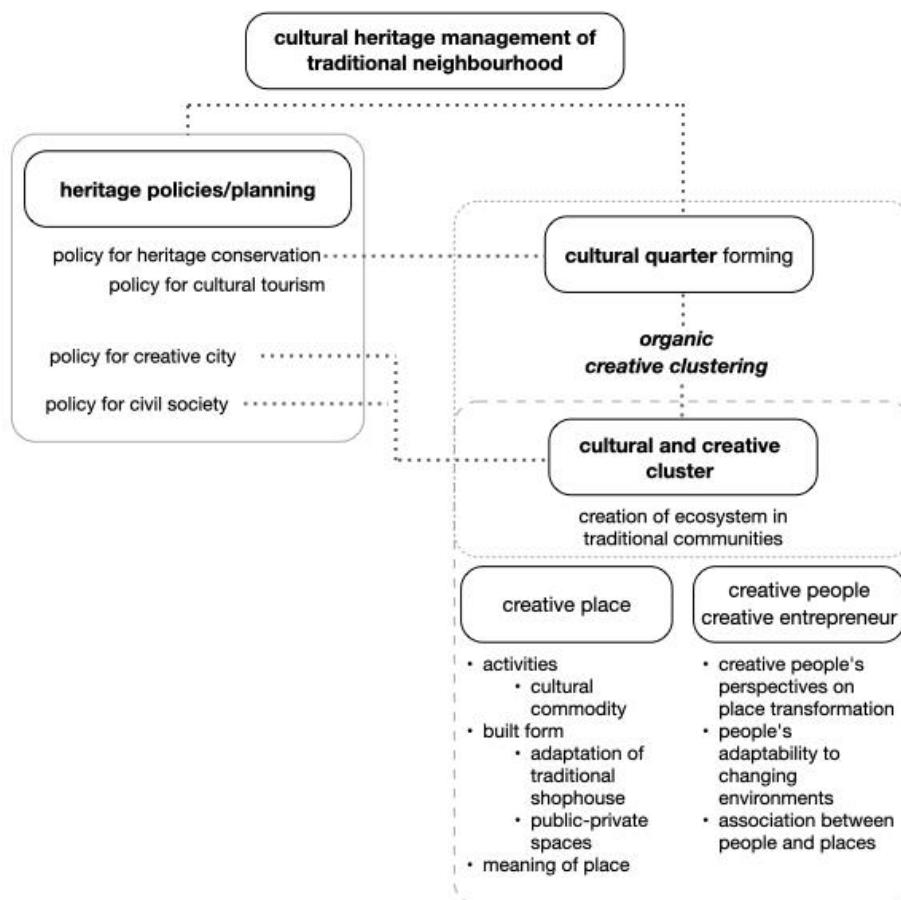
The cultural ecosystem of organic cultural-creative clusters comprises an assemblage of small businesses that are gradually formed and which appeal to both locals and outsiders. The clusters are scattered across many areas, and they may naturally expand or shrink depending on various factors. They are also formed when groups of people who meet at different events talk to each other and relocate as a result.

In the gradual formation of the clusters, we can see the interaction of two systems. In the first, the cluster helps build the identity of the area; in the second, the area helps provide a unique atmosphere and environment until the cluster is created.

The Components of Cultural-Creative Clusters

Recently, many scholars have argued for a concept of "creative clusters" that is opposed to the idea that creative space is formed by the efforts of creative classes. They think that the influence of creative people, the majority of whom are outsiders, should be diminished, and that the needs of the community should be met. They also believe that each creative place has unique qualities that support and inspire creative entrepreneurs (Evans, 2009; Rodwell, 2014).

The distinctiveness of the creative cluster is influenced by the following components: 1) Activities that take place with or in relation to selected cultural materials, and are used to generate creative outputs; 2) Forms that relate to the physical characteristics of the place, including tangible components and urban surroundings; and 3) Intangible components of meaning and identity, particularly meaning as interpreted by locals.

Figure 1*Diagrammatic Representation of the Theoretical Framework*

TRANSFORMATION OF THE PHRA ATHIT ROAD AREA

To get a better understanding of the Phra Athit Road area, a cultural-creative cluster, the author looked at a broader scale of urban precincts than just the Phra Athit Road shopping street. The area was extended to include the neighbourhoods of Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom.

The Ongoing Transformation of a Traditional Neighbourhood into a Cultural Quarter

The Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom areas, which are generally been referred to as "yan," are located in the northern part of *Krung Rattanakosin*,

the cultural quarter of the old town of Bangkok. The areas include a cluster of small, village-like communities ("chumchon").

This is a vibrant precinct with indigenous ethnic groups — Mon, Muslim, and Chinese — concentrated around cultural and religious centers like temples, mosques, and shrines. These neighbourhoods have traditionally also been centers of economic activity, with fresh markets, shopping streets, and artisan hubs (Askew, 1996; Issarathumnoon, 2020a; O'Conner, 1983).

Both Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom have changed dramatically over the last two centuries. During the early Rattanakosin era, the area functioned as a royal center of palaces and residences for King Rama II's officials. Following the country's political revolution in 1932 and the subsequent post-World War II era, the neighbourhoods evolved to accommodate a range of activities, most notably a mixed-use

residential and commercial complex. These days, the area derives its significance or meaning as a residential area, a business district, and a place of entertainment, but recent gradual regeneration has given the area new meanings and functions, such as being a cultural quarter, a cultural tourist destination, and a place that promotes creative clusters.

A Model of the Phra Athit Road Transformation Process: From Traditional Neighbourhoods to the Formation of Cultural-Creative Clusters

The understanding of creative clustering in cultural quarters, particularly inside traditional neighbourhoods, is not universally embraced as a guiding principle; nonetheless, we can apply Evans (2009, pp. 48-49) creative clustering concept to understand creative clustering process in the Phra Athit Road area.

The unplanned emergence and evolution of creative clusters has been a part of the Phra Athit Road area's gentrification, affected by internal and external factors. Even though the spontaneous changes of the area may be complicated and unclear, it is still possible to see patterns of the movement and extensions of the independently-generated clusters, which have given the area fresh vitality, and have, ultimately, been noticed and remembered by the broader public. This model of the creative cluster overlaid on the Phra Athit Road area can be divided into three transitional phases as follows.

The First Stage (1970s-1990s): The Period when the Phra Athit Road Area Started to Establish itself as an area of Well-Known Cultural-Creative Clusters

From the mid-1970s to the Rattanakosin Bicentennial Ceremony in 1982, Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom were transformed from traditional commercial and residential areas into mixed-use neighbourhoods for housing, local trade, and a cultural district, which supported middle-class locals interested in cultural and creative activities,

as well as certain foreign tourists known as "backpackers." During the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, the guesthouses on Khao San Road and local tourist attractions flourished and expanded into the nearby neighbourhood (Worasingsuk et al., 2011, pp. 73-74).

This area was a cultural melting pot that supported "backpacking" tourism. During this time, creative people formed a hub for intellectuals and artists on Phra Athit Road, a major street adjacent to the traditional residential areas, and the area became a shopping and dining destination for university students from the surrounding educational institutions (A. Srisuk, personal communication, February 6, 2021).

As a result of state-directed policies, the formation of creative clusters made enormous progress throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The major policy, which is *The Land Use Policy of Krung Rattanakosin Area and the Chao Phraya River on the Thonburi Side Area* (as approved by the cabinet on October 13, 1981), and two master plans, *The Master Plan of Conservation and Development of Krung Rattanakosin in 1997* and *The Master Plan and Action Plan of Conservation and Development of the Thonburi Side Area in 2000*, contribute to safeguarding cultural heritage sites and are used as the frameworks for the other control acts. Nevertheless, the policies and master plans lacked concern for the heritage of the local people, their daily lives, the landscape, markets, and shophouses (Peerapun et al., 2020, p. 45). Policies that promoted the growth of creative clusters were not based on historic preservation or cultural tourism, but rather on civil society policies, such as *the Healthy Cities Policy*. These policies supported the revitalization of neighbourhoods. They also encouraged them to use local cultural resources to make fun activities (Askew, 1993; Issarathumnoon, 2009).

Cultural activities and events at the time, particularly the Phra Athit Cultural Street Festival in January 1998, were so intense that the Phra Athit Road area took on a new identity. Activities in public spaces aided the area's rise to prominence and its new role as the heart of the old town. In many respects, the area's creative clusters may serve as a model for other areas. One is the utilization of local arts and culture as an innovative tool for revitalizing cultural areas. The other is the outstanding cooperation between residents and other sectors.

During the first stage of this process, the majority of the activities in the Phra Athit Road area were not based on traditional manufacturing. Instead, the cultural-creative clusters were built on small and individual works — both creative consumption and production. Each cluster was specific because it served a certain group of people. Thus, the modest, spontaneous, and autonomous cultural-creative clusters of the Phra Athit Road were considerably different from those in preceding and subsequent government-funded creative districts.

The Second Stage (2000s-2010s): The Period during which the Neighbourhood was Transformed into Clusters of Nighttime Activity, and the Clusters Spread out from the Central Area

The formation of cultural-creative clusters transitioned from the first to the second period when its original variety and appeal declined (Issarathumnoon, 2020b). During the first stage, creative clusters diversified to include both consumption and production activities. They matched the skills of entrepreneurs while meeting the needs of a specific group of people.

A significant shift occurred when cultural-creative clusters concentrated on consumption activities, particularly evening and nighttime activities. Consequently, the area could no longer satisfy the requirements of all groups of people. This impacted local communities and businesses that utilized cultural resources to develop their activities. Pubs and bars, which hosted evening and nighttime activities, pushed up building leasing prices. Consequently, similar evening and nighttime activities largely replaced other kinds of activities. Also, the neighbourhood lost some of its appeal when the theater festival moved out of this area in 2011 (S. Jittrajinda, personal communication, February 8, 2021).

In the late 1990s, creative clustering-based subdistricts began to form on the outskirts of the Phra Athit Road area, signaling the approach of the third stage. Some shops on Phra Athit Road were relocated to the Phan Fa area on Phra

Sumen Road, which is connected to Ratchadamnoen Road and the inner Rattanakosin area. In addition, tourist activity clusters spread from Khaosan Road and Phra Athit Road to Samsen Road.

At this time, cultural-creative clusters formed based on the aggregation of activities and physical characteristics. The clusters were connected to street life, where local shops and communities continued to flourish. As cultural-creative clusters spread throughout the outer subdistricts, networks of people with similar interests, or “shared cultural groups,” were formed.

The Third Stage (2010-2020): The Time when the Area was Turned into a Broad Variety of Creative Activities and Conventional Specific Activities

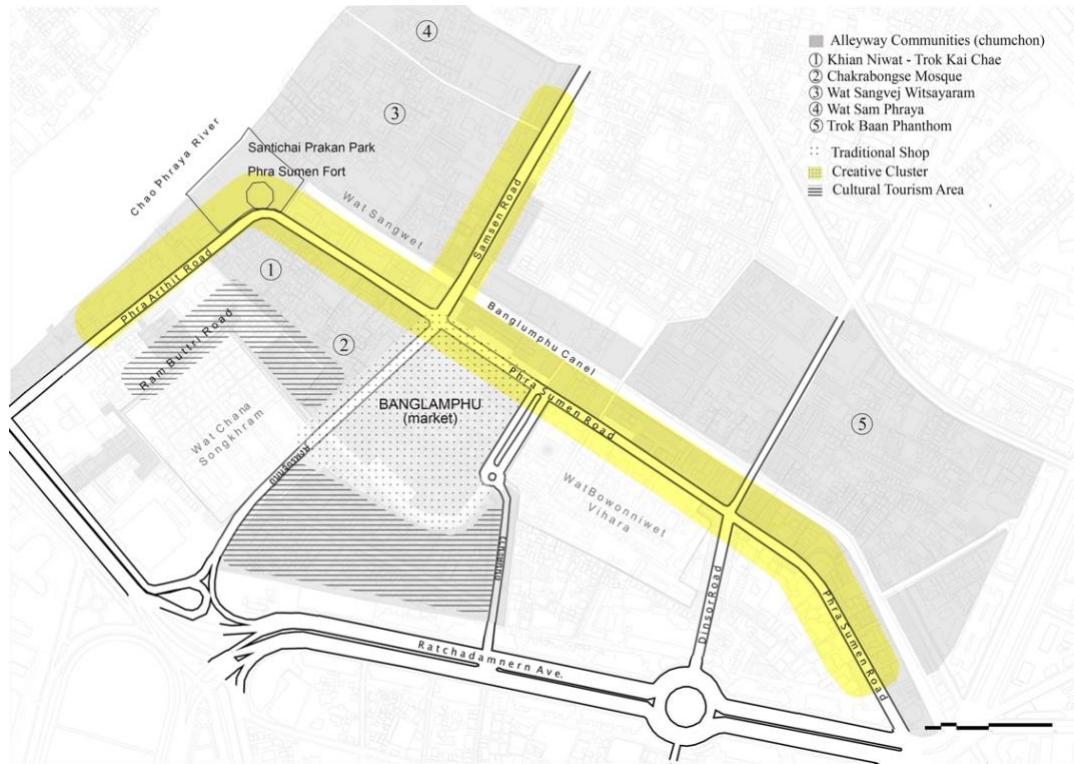
The third period began when some creative activities were adjusted and rebalanced. During this time, new cultural sites such as museums and tourist accommodations were built. The amount of tourist accommodation increased, making the area more interesting, and the establishment of the Banglamphu Museum contributed to the consolidation of the local group network. The hotels that sprung up around the Chao Phraya River attracted international visitors, who became new clients. Gradually, these new clients replaced the former main users, groups of young individuals.

The image of the former cultural-creative clusters in the Phra Athit Road area and its surroundings has been restored and replaced by independent, floating creative clusters. In particular, the floating clusters in the Phan Fa, Wat Bowonniwet, and Samsen Road subdistricts were formed and gained popularity. However, the clusters on Phra Athit major street remained conventionally formed. They eventually lost their “culture street” and “intellectual street” essences. Ultimately, they were less appealing than the new clusters in the outer subdistricts.

The following maps illustrate a collection of creative acts that happened across time.

Figure 2

Map of Phra Athit Road, Phra Sumen Road, and Samsen Road



Note. The research areas are shown on a map as Phra Athit Road, Phra Sumen Road, and Samsen Road. These areas are in the districts of Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom.

Figure 3

Map of Cultural-Creative Clusters: 1st Stage

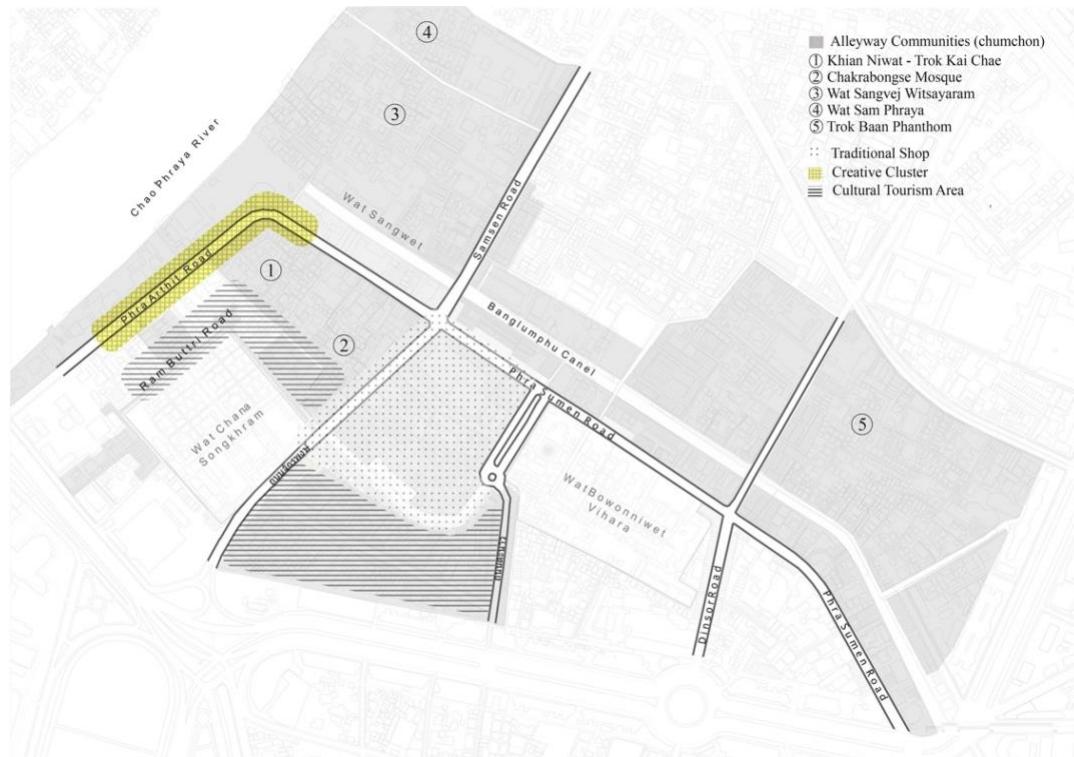


Figure 4

Map of Cultural-Creative Clusters: 2nd Stage



Figure 5

Map of Cultural-Creative Clusters: 3rd Stage



CREATIVE CLUSTERS AND CREATIVE PEOPLE

Based on the depiction of creative clustering in three stages (from the 1970s to the present), this section will use an essential method, "cultural mapping," to examine activity groupings, characteristics, and components of place. Other research methods, such as observation of activities in the neighbourhood, were also employed. In the cultural mapping, the areas were split based on the concept of "yan," which refers to the places or subdistricts that people perceive. These perceived places, or *yan*, are identifiable along major routes such as Phra Athit Road, Samsen Road, and Phra Sumen Road. In addition, the area along Phra Sumen Road can be subdivided into two tiny *yan*, namely Wat Bowon and Phan Fa.

The mapping classifies cultural-creative clusters into five categories: Category 1: production and

consumption of traditional cultural commodities; Category 2: production of creative products, including creative works in music, photography, and other creative fields; Category 3: consumption of cultural goods and services, such as cafés; Category 4: activities such as art exhibitions in galleries and performing arts shows in venues; and Category 5: creative design services provided by artists, architects, and other creative professionals.

This research investigated eleven creative entrepreneurs from four subdistricts: Phra Athit Road, Samsen Road, Phan Fa, and Wat Bowonniwet. The selection of the entrepreneurs was based on two criteria: 1) Entrepreneurs who take part in creative activities, which are classified into five categories; and 2) Entrepreneurs who can explain how creative activities started and changed over three key periods.

The following table contains data on the selected entrepreneurs from four subdistricts.

Figure 6

Map of Current Cultural-Creative Clusters

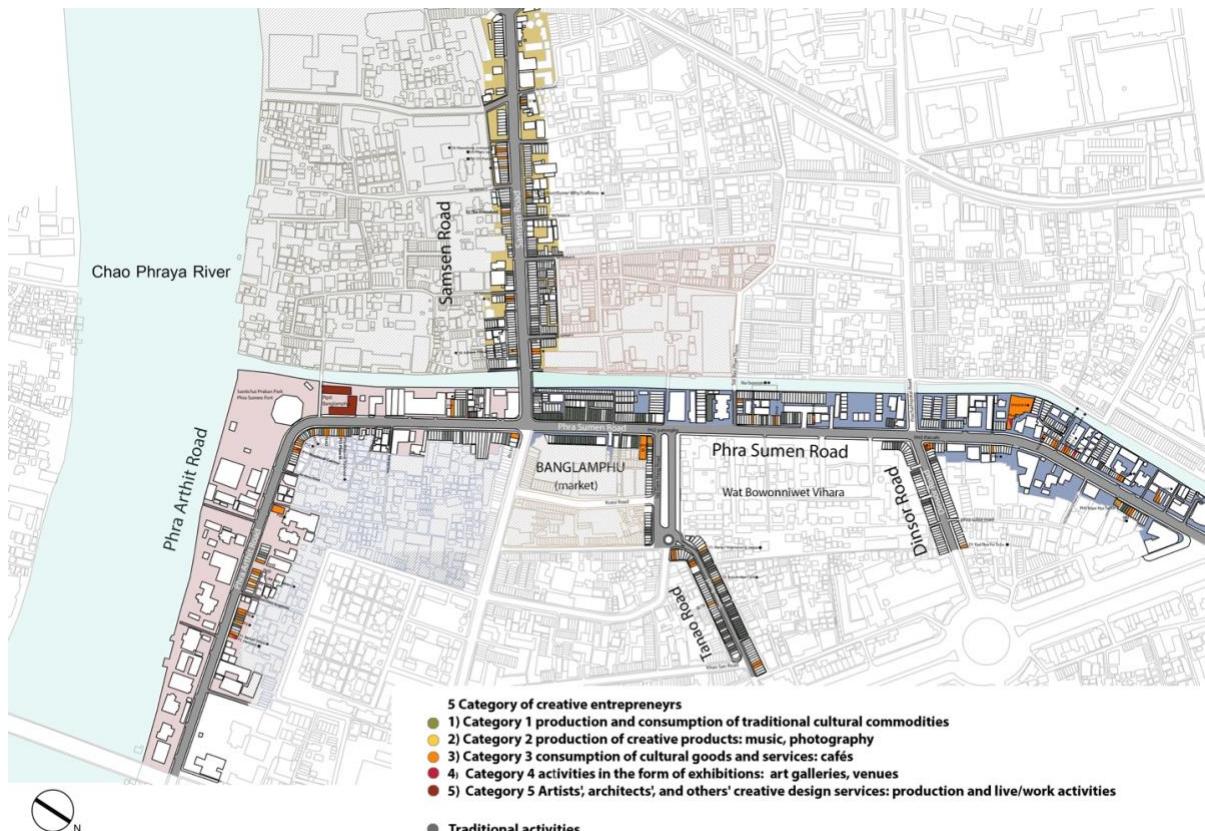


Figure 7

Diagram of the Emergence of Cultural-Creative Clusters

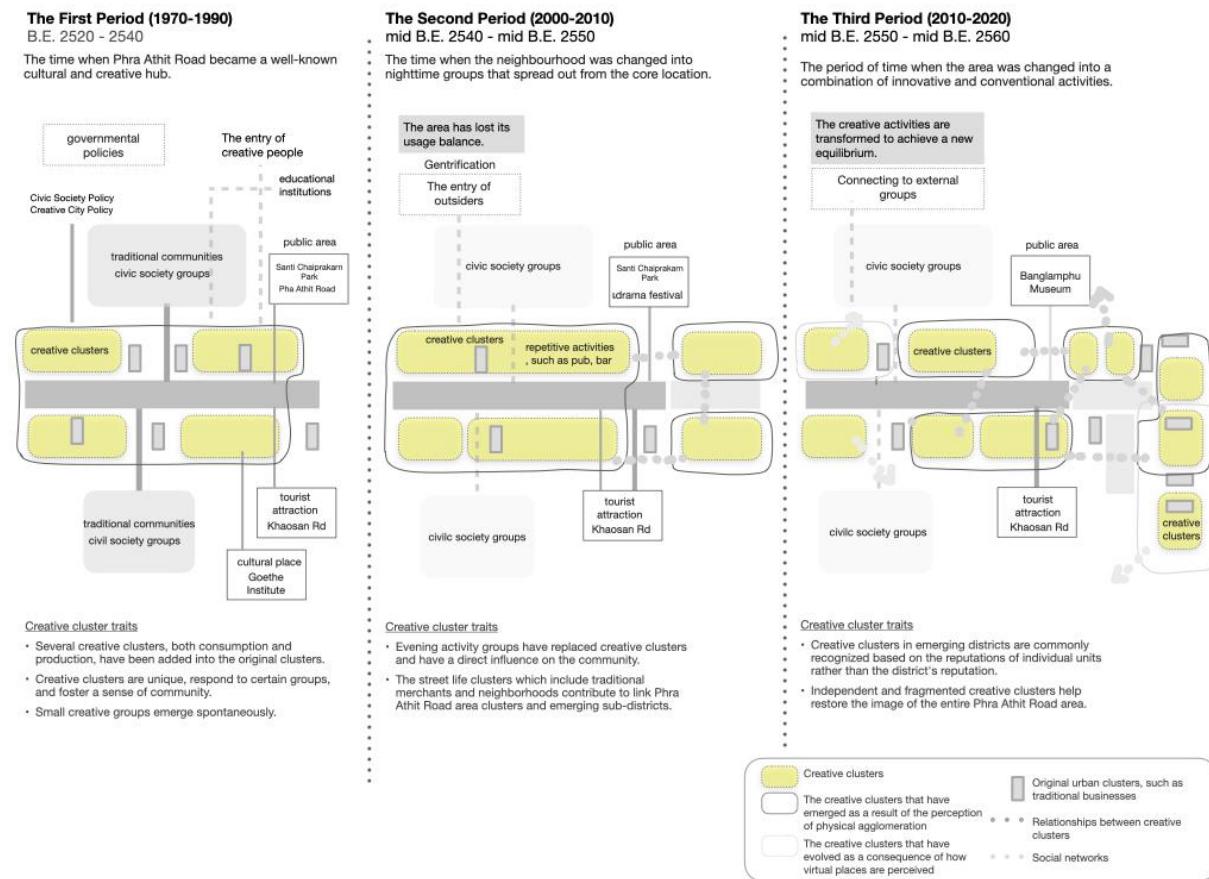


Table 1

Information About 11 Creative Entrepreneurs From 4 Subdistricts

Subdistricts as perceived by the public, Yan	Entrepreneurs who engage in cultural and creative endeavors	Categories of cultural-creative clusters	The entrepreneur's starting time, based on the three phases of the area transformation
Phra Athit Road	Bar Bali Bistro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a bar - production of creative products (category 2): a place for film production and cultural activities <i>*a third place for gatherings and meetings</i> <i>*evening and nighttime activities</i> 	the second stage (connect to the first stage)

Table 1 (Continued)

Subdistricts as perceived by the public, Yan	Entrepreneurs who engage in cultural and creative endeavors	Categories of cultural-creative clusters	The entrepreneur's starting time, based on the three phases of the area transformation
Phra Athit Road	Mitramit Teahouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café focusing on the art of tea-making. *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings / <i>a cultural learning space</i> 	the third stage
Phra Athit Road	Something about us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a clothing and accessories store that refers to itself as a “lifestyle boutique” - creative design services provided by artists, architects, and others (category 5): a design studio for clothing and household products 	the third stage
Samsen Road	Ad here the 13 th Blues Bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a bar - production of creative products (category 2): a studio for producing blues music - activities in the form of exhibitions (category 4): a concert venue *<i>a third place</i> for anyone interested in blues music * <i>evening and nighttime activities</i> 	the second stage
Samsen Road	Tepbantom Hostel and Why? Caffeine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café and restaurant *combined with other forms of cultural tourism, hostel 	the third stage
Samsen Road	Tham Na Hometaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a restaurant *<i>a niche restaurant</i> (vegetarian / Italian cuisine) catering to a particular group 	the second stage
Phra Sumen Road (Phan Fa)	Coffee Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings 	the third stage

Table 1 (Continued)

Subdistricts as perceived by the public, Yan	Entrepreneurs who engage in cultural and creative endeavors	Categories of cultural-creative clusters	The entrepreneur's starting time, based on the three phases of the area transformation
Phra Sumen Road (Phan Fa)	Passport Bookshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a bookstore and café - activities in the form of exhibitions (category 4): a gallery and venue *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings 	the second stage
Phra Sumen Road (Phan Fa)	Dialogue Coffee and Gallery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café - activities in the form of exhibitions (category 4): a gallery and venue *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings 	the third stage
Phra Sumen Road (Wat Bowonbiwet)	Na Bovorn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café and restaurant *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings *<i>a niche restaurant</i> (fine dining) *combined with other forms of cultural tourism, hostel (on a development process) 	the third stage
Phra Sumen Road (Wat Bowonbiwet)	Head in the Clouds Artsy House and Café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consumption of cultural goods and services (category 3): a café - activities in the form of exhibitions (category 4): a gallery - production of creative products (category 2): a place for the creation of artworks - creative design services provided by artists, architects, and others (category 5): artists' studio, dubbed "art house"/ a place for living and working *<i>a third place</i> for gatherings and meetings 	the third stage

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES AND COMPONENTS OF CULTURAL-CREATIVE CLUSTERS

Social and cultural resources

Social and cultural resources in the Phra Athit Road area demonstrate the potential or special characteristics of the traditional neighbourhood, which facilitated the formation of creative clusters in the area.

Social resources

One of the key social resources in the Phra Athit Road area is a *complex network of creative people*. Unlike the traditional notion of a “creative district,” this study discovered that “creative people” in the Phra Athit Road area are “outsiders” with strong connections to “insiders,” local community groups, and civil society organizations. In the context of the Phra Athit Road area, the term “creative people” refers to groups of intellectuals with skills in creative economy and the tasks that require creative problem solving, as well as those who propose a new way of living. Additionally, people who use digital platforms to promote cultural activities in innovative and interesting ways are considered.

Here are some of the social resources that come from integrating and incorporating creative people:

The establishment of community groups can be regarded as one of the area's social resources.

The Phra Athit Road area is in the northern part of the Rattanakosin cultural quarter, and its traditional communities serve as the area's economic, social, and cultural roots. These roots aided in the formation of communal organizations, and later assisted in the formation of creative clusters. In the first stage, the creation of social networks in the Phra Athit Road area was influenced by government intervention such as a government

program that encouraged the formation of civil society organizations while also supporting arts, culture, and creative activities.

In the second stage, social resources in the form of cooperation between insiders and outsiders decreased because cultural activities were not as intense as in the past. There was a rapid influx of outsiders, which caused the phenomenon of gentrification, which had a negative impact on the residents. Later, in the third stage, the number of bars and taverns decreased. Meanwhile, the neighbourhoods were enlivened with unique activities. The clusters were then dispersed into newly defined subdistricts. As a consequence of this change, certain clashes over the use of land decreased since the new creative clusters did not integrate into traditional neighbourhoods as much as they had in the previous periods.

Shared cultural networks are seen as an essential social resource. In the first and second stages, the shared cultural networks were the networks among the creative entrepreneurs and the participants in the cultural and creative activities. From the third stage to the present, one particular social resource was created in the form of an online or virtual network of individuals who communicate and show their images on social media, making it easier for people to find them.

The interconnection of cultural groups and the collaborative work of intermediaries are seen as valuable social resources. The Phra Athit Road area can be regarded as a creative ecosystem or a creative hub. Although reconciling insiders and outsiders is challenging, they are in many ways intertwined. For instance, a group of musicians collaborates with residents on musical activities, while other entrepreneurs develop relationships with members of the community via kinship. Some groups are connected by their modest interdependence, while others are linked by individuals who function as

intermediaries who facilitate collaboration and coordination of all stakeholders.

Cultural resources

“Urban culture,” which has been cleverly interpreted and utilized, is one of the primary cultural resources of the Phra Athit Road area.

During the first period of change from a cultural quarter to a creative cultural quarter, the main cultural resources were based on the cultures of traditional communities that were connected to those in the Phra Athit Road area and the surrounding conservation zones.

From the end of the first stage to the beginning of the second stage (from the mid-1990s to the 2000s), the cultural resources of the local communities were inventively used to create new activities of “urban culture,” the so-called “Bangkok people’s culture.” Gastronomy and traditional festivals were chosen, then reinterpreted and presented to the public, particularly during public events that comprised a range of cultural and creative activities. Some creative people from outside the area helped come up with new ways to define “urban culture,” which brought vitality to the area. One example of this is consumption activity in “third spaces,” such as cafés.

Another example of utilizing cultural resources is the invention of creative activities based on the district’s reputation as a meeting place with a creative atmosphere and an authentic way of life reflective of the traditional communities. Several creatives have stated that they chose this area because it promotes this “authentic” way of life that comprises the historic neighbourhood’s ambience, local businesses, and places that facilitate everyday living.

Some creative entrepreneurs moved to the neighbourhood because they preferred the area with a long history. For them, this is a haven for creativity that allows them to create distinctive products and new lifestyle activities by combining cultural resources derived from their lifestyle and the ambience of a creative setting with

their entrepreneurial experience and external resources. These are some of the creative entrepreneurs who have used the resources of their respective areas to create their innovative products.

A teahouse, “Mitramit Teahouse,” and a vegetarian restaurant, “Tham Na Hometaurant,” draw on the culinary history of the old town while incorporating outside cultural resources to create their own distinct food culture. “Passport Bookshop and café,” “Dialogue Coffee and Gallery,” and “Head in the Clouds Artsy House and Café” embraced culture that went beyond the local way of life and introduced a broader range of cultures. They create new activities through their sub-cultures and various forms of art.

The sophisticated use of cultural resources through creative production and presentation shows a transcendence of the basic concept of creative economy, which formerly focused merely on the production of creative items. Moreover, the new creative spaces serve a wide range of customers, not just artists, intellectuals, or tourists.

Another important cultural resource is the ability of creative entrepreneurs to adjust their lifestyle and work to changing situations. The study found that some cultural-creative clusters were not reliant on a single activity, such as tourism or evening activities. As a result, the clusters can adjust to changes.

In addition, several clusters utilize innovative tools and communication channels, such as social media, to organize events, publish content, and create images of the clusters. Customers can easily access activity groups, despite the fact that they are “hidden gems” embedded in existing communities. In this regard, the owner of the “Something about Us” lifestyle store immersed her shop in the historic neighbourhood’s ambience and created engaging content, and then used online forums to publicize the shop (K. Jinyoung, personal communication, May 25, 2021).

The Components of Cultural-Creative Clusters in the Phra Athit Road Area

The components of cultural-creative clusters in the Phra Athit Road area are described as follows:

Activities

The Phra Athit Road area is an example of a cultural-creative cluster in which consumption activities (particularly cafés, bars, and exhibition spaces) coexist with production and design services for creative products. Creative people produce a variety of creative works using materials from both inside and outside areas. The advantage of the cultural-creative clusters in this area is that they are financially self-sufficient in terms of administration and utilization.

One disadvantage of these clusters is the limited availability of external aid. This contrasts with other creative areas that receive planning policies and development subsidies from outside agencies. Another disadvantage of this area's creative clusters is that they are based on market competitiveness rather than rent control or planning, so there is a chance that activities will shift completely to evening/nighttime activities, or become too repetitive to meet the needs of more than one user group.

According to in-depth interviews with creative entrepreneurs, creative clusters function as "social and cultural spaces." Some creative clusters have tackled niche culture to provide "spaces for cultural education" for designers, artists, and creators of creative products. Moreover, some creative clusters provided "platforms" for artists to display their work, while others offer "stunt venues" for emerging artists to show their talents. These kinds of spaces strengthen the connection between creative people and their audiences. These spaces also help support new activities that arise from local activities.

Physical features

In the Phra Athit Road area, retail spaces are quite limited in size. The interesting point is that this

limitation has led to an effective use of the space between the shopfronts and the sidewalk, which acts as a connector between public and private space. The public-private interface areas are used for many kinds of activities. They also give life to the street since people perceive the lively storefronts as one of the defining characteristics of the area.

Another interesting thing about the physical features is that some creative entrepreneurs use the space and physical features that define a place's identity in their designs. "Passport Bookshop," "Bar Bali Bistro," "Dialogue Coffee and Gallery," "Head in the Clouds," "Tham Na," and "Something about Us" are several instances of enterprises that highlight the interior spaces and physical aspects of a shophouse, such as brick walls and air vents, to feature the building's identity. Furthermore, "Na Bowon" coffee shop is an example of a business that made use the features of the nearby Wat Bowonniwet Temple, an important historical site in the neighbourhood, in designing the restaurant.

Meaning and image of place

The Phra Athit Road area represents unplanned cultural-creative clustering based on traditional neighbourhoods. The area was initially influenced by government initiatives, which led to spontaneous clustering. Later, several clusters relocated from the Phra Athit Road core area to the area's periphery.

It is possible to infer that the cultural-creative clusters change independently in terms of function and location. The creative clustering was spontaneously generated, infiltrated, and dispersed within traditional neighbourhoods due to the area's complexity. The intensity of activities, the density of built forms, uncertain vernacular streetscapes, as well as the space used for daily life and providing people with memories of shared space, and all contributed to such complexity.

The culture of traditional neighbourhoods has shaped the meaning of the Phra Athit Road area, but the area has also taken on new meanings from new activities like "venues for public events" and "melting pot of cultures" because it is close to international tourist attractions and has subcultures comprising many different groups.

Figure 8

Tham Na Hometaurant



Note. Tham Na Hometaurant is an example of a creative place that uses the identity of a traditional shophouse to tell its own story while combining the traditional setting with modern activities.

Figure 9

The Adhere 13th Blues Bar



Note. The Adhere 13th Blues Bar is an example of a place for music concerts and the assembly of people who are interested in jazz music.

ADAPTATION OF CULTURAL-CREATIVE CLUSTERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON EXISTING NEIGHBOURHOODS

When the Phra Athit Road area was transformed into cultural-creative clusters, the uses of space were integrated to accommodate the various activities of many groups. The way creative people led to the establishment of creative clusters might be regarded as displacement of conventional activities, with consequences for local people. This is quite similar to the "gentrification" phenomenon that has occurred in other creative quarters.

During the first stage of the area's transformation, the cultures of middle-class people supplanted local culture. Public venues in the community were utilized for larger-scale events than in the community.

During the second stage, the phenomenon of "gentrification" arose. Tourism and activities in pubs and bars disrupted the balance and affected other creative activities that needed cultural resources as a base to start up new ones (A. Rattanamanee, personal communication, April 22, 2021). As a result, the group of creative activities from Phra Athit Road relocated to the Phan Fa area, Phra Sumen Road.

Throughout the third stage and continuing to the present, the area has been infused with distinct creative clusters. In the past, creative activity clustered on the main streets. Now, though, new creative clusters penetrate the neighborhoods and the conventional commercial areas. In the Phra Athit Road area, cultural-creative clusters have had both positive and negative effects. The cultural-creative clusters have helped revitalize Phra Athit Road's creative cluster in a new form. Nevertheless, this adaptation brings with it the risk of negative impacts on the neighborhood.

Here are some good and bad effects of the current cultural-creative clusters in the Phra Athit Road area.

The first positive impact is that the current cultural-creative clusters are quite cohesive. They occupy the retail areas along the main street. However, since the groups are not as large or

dense as the clusters in the first and second stages, they are less detrimental to traditional neighbourhoods. People who taking part in the new clusters are able to gain experience related to the authentic ways of life as well as the innovative activities that entrepreneurs have created. The other good impact is that the newly formed creative clusters are used by several groups. It is not just a group of visitors who participate in the activities; instead, they involve a range of people with similar sub-cultures, who connect with each other and form a network.

On the other hand, the cultural-creative clusters may cause negative impacts in the area due to the fact that outsiders may undermine the area's original social structure. The formation of cultural-creative clusters may pose risks to the area since the clusters may not fit in with the former activities. The majority of the new activities are focused on producing goods and establishing places for creative activities that complement entrepreneurial talents. These activities use resources from outside the area instead of solely making use of the area's cultural resources for production and consumption. Moreover, in cases where creative entrepreneurs do not use space carefully, it may have a direct impact on the well-being of individuals around them, for example, noise and visual clutter. This is because the new activities have moved closer to traditional neighbourhoods and old commercial areas.

CONCLUSION

The Phra Athit Road area exemplifies how some traditional neighbourhoods have gradually transformed into cultural-creative clusters. The area provides a deep understanding of the notion of "creative clustering," which refers to a spontaneous or "dynamic" process. It is not limited only to the leisure/lifestyle, entertainment, tourism, and commercial aspects. Cultural-creative clusters in the Phra Athit area that have been layered on Banglamphu and Ban Phanthom neighbourhoods show undoubtable transformation processes. This is because creative clustering develops in the presence of rich traditional, artistic, and cultural resources.

This gradual transformation, however, is different from the regeneration of the historic areas that

are the sequential outcomes of cultural heritage management. This spontaneous change demonstrates an interesting way of managing an historic area, since this gradual transformation may help local people adjust to the change, while creative entrepreneurs develop unique products and services that fit into the complex and functioning systems that are still in place. However, without proper management, the attendant risks could lead to situations that diminish the area's value and appeal.

This research suggests a number of ways to find a balance between the protection of traditional structures and allowing for changes in the Phra Athit Road area and other historic places that have been turned into cultural-creative clusters:

The first suggestion is to embrace the growth of the area as a natural and positive consequence of a variety of circumstances, based on the idea that each area is unique in terms of composition and social and cultural resources. In this sense, the design or planning of the area should allow for development that is consistent with the rhythm of life in the area. Proper pacing of changes, and the growth of well-sized creative clusters should create an ecosystem that is good for both the residents and creative entrepreneurs. All the possible effects should be considered, and plans for dealing with these effects should be prepared accordingly.

The second suggestion is to enhance a place's value by integrating both internal and external resources. Looking at the Phra Athit Road area, it becomes clear that creative entrepreneurs use both local and external resources to design successful new activities. Local cultural resources cover numerous forms of art, living patterns, relationships among residents, and people's attachment to places, and external resources include innovations based on creative knowledge and skills. These two kinds of resources — local and external resources — are key elements in establishing a creative ecosystem. When created from these resources, the result is a wide range of creative production and consumption activities that are unique and endlessly adaptable. Consequently, the creative activities attract a diverse range of people, and are suitable for groups of people who are looking for them.

The third suggestion is to strengthen the adaptability of cultural-creative clusters, particularly during times of crisis. Some cultural-creative clusters in the Phra Athit Road area have coped successfully with the economic and social crises caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. This is because they have unique activities that serve specific groups. In other words, they are not overly-dependent on tourism and general customers.

Cultural-creative clusters in this area need adequate facilities to maintain their activities and networks. The state-led creative programs and other kinds of urban regeneration programs should provide good services and support such as car parking, incentive rental spaces, promotion and presentation of the area, and so on, to support the vitality of these cultural-creative clusters. The plans or strategies, however, should not be so rigid that they limit the creativity and flexibility of these clusters.

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