การริเริ่มศิลปะชุมชนในราชบุรี

Community Art Initiatives in Ratchaburi

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์การเกิดขึ้นของศิลปะชุมชน ซึ่งริเริ่มโดยศิลปิน
ที่มองหาพื้นที่แสดงงานศิลปะทางเลือกและรูปแบบใหม่ๆ ในการมีส่วนร่วมของชาวบ้าน
โดยให้ความสำคัญกับการริเริ่มศิลปะชุมชนจังหวัดราชบุรี ซึ่งมีการขยายพื้นที่ศิลปะออกมา
นอกหอศิลป์และได้กลายมาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของชีวิตประจำวัน ด้วยแนวคิดที่ว่า "ทุกบ้าน
คือแกลเลอรี ทุกที่คือหอศิลป์" งานศิลปะหลายชิ้นงานถูกนำมาจัดแสดง ในพื้นที่ใช้สอย
ในตัวเมือง ซึ่งเป็นพื้นที่ที่คนในชุมชนดำเนินกิจกรรมประจำวัน สิ่งสำคัญคือชาวบ้าน
ในพื้นที่และศิลปินมีอาชีพต่างมีส่วนร่วมในการสร้างสรรค์ผลงานศิลปะ และใช้พื้นที่ร้านค้า
ของตัวเองแสดงงานศิลปะเสมือนหอศิลป์ชุมชน บทความนี้ได้ทบทวนบทบาทของศิลปะ
ชุมชนในด้านการพัฒนาชุมชนและวิเคราะห์ลักษณะโดดเด่นของงานศิลปะชุมชนที่ริเริ่ม
โดยศิลปิน วศินบุรี สุพานิชวรภาชน์ ผู้ประพันธ์ได้อธิบายสิ่งที่ได้เรียนรู้จากการดำเนินงาน
ผลงานของเขา ซึ่งมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วมในชุมชนและการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์กัน
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คำสำคัญ : ศิลปะชุมชน การมีส่วนร่วมของในชุมชน พื้นที่สาธารณะ พื้นที่ศิลปะ ราชบุรี

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the emergence of community art initiated by artists who are searching for alternative and more community-engaged art forms and spaces. Particular attention is paid to community art initiatives in Ratchaburi, Thailand, that have grown outside galleries and become an integral part of everyday life. Based on the concept of "Every house is a gallery and every place is an art museum", a series of creative artworks were brought into everyday spaces in the city where local residents conduct their daily routine. Importantly, both locals and professional artists were engaged in co-creation of artworks and used their private shop houses as the community gallery. The paper critically reviews the role of community art in community development and analyses prominent characteristics of community art initiated by artist Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch. Based on semi-structured interviews with the artist and on-site observations at the community art venues, the authors discuss artist Wasinburee's reflective curatorial practices aiming to promote community engagement and social interaction from collaborative action.

Keywords : community art, community engagement, public spaces, art venue,
            Ratchaburi

Introduction

Art events have been increasingly used by several cities across the globe as an important instrument for tourism and local economic development, urban and cultural regeneration, flagships for destination branding, and engines for social cohesion (Quinn, 2005). In this respect, artists and art organizations have increasingly sought for innovative strategies to enhance the quality of audience engagement in art and cultural programs. It is recognized that "community art" or "participatory art" can engage audience in more meaningful ways by connecting local residents together to understand their own cultural values and address complex issues around them. The practices of community art often strengthen social networks, have the potential to improve community well-being, and enhance creative skills and self-esteem of individuals (Guetzkow, 2002; Lewis, 2013; Stern & Seifert, 2010). In this sense, organizing community-engaged art exhibitions is a creative tool for "community engagement", defined as "the process of public participation and involvement that promotes relationship building through learning, action and the expression of needs and values" (Beaver and Hodgson, 2011 : 1).

In Thailand, visual arts are often neglected by many educators, administrators and parents who believe that art has little intrinsic value and tangible results (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010). While the government recognizes the significance of the art in its national grade 1 - 12 curriculum, most Thai university students receive little or no formal instruction in art history, art appreciation or aesthetics (Schoonmaker, 2014). Without a solid foundation in visual arts, people tend to be culturally illiterate and have little understanding or knowledge of the community where they belong and the wealth of their own cultural identity. Therefore, visual arts have been an

essential tool to decipher our cultural roots – who we are, or once were, and understand other cultures around us. This would help people to think more critically about social and cultural issues around them. Meanwhile, much of what we know of our past will help support and maintain our cultural identity.

It is noted that the Thai government has invested in mega projects for the development of cultural infrastructure (such as public museums, concert halls, grand theatres, art galleries or heritage districts) for maintaining the global city status and tourism purposes (Kong, Chia-ho, and Tsu-Lung, 2015). However, it is argued that locals in small cities or peripheral areas in Thailand have perceived arts something abstract, complicated or unattainable. They find it relatively difficult to understand the context that renders a particular work of art iconic framed and displayed in an art gallery. This is due to social and educational differences in Thai societies, people in small cities or peripheral areas may lack adequate access to cultural resources and facilities compared to metropolitans. Furthermore, they have perceived arts something irrelevant, abstract, complicated or unattainable, especially when they are framed and displayed in an art gallery. Therefore, the question of how to bring the arts to local residents who are non-traditional art audiences by making art a part of their everyday lives so that they could have easy access to and experience of art, has become a matter of particular concern.

The objective of this paper is to analyze community art initiatives where local residents are encouraged to engage in artistic creation and dissemination of artworks alongside professional artists. Particular attention is paid to an innovative art exhibition called 'Art Normal' in the small city of Ratchaburi, a city once neglected by travelers. Being a widely recognized event attracting larger media, artists, and creative visitors from outside the

community, Art Normal constitutes numerous distinctiveness in relation to unconventional art venues where activities of everyday life conducted, co-creating artworks between locals and experienced artists, a variety of art disciplines displayed or performed by both professional and amateur artists, a low-budget art program with high flexibility and adaptation to urban spaces and cultural contexts.

Data were primarily collected from semi-structured interviews with artist Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch through several field visits from October 2014 to September 2016. Furthermore, on-site observations at public areas and private shophouses where a series of artworks have been displayed and documentary analysis were also employed.

Community art : Definition and content analysis

There is no generally accepted definition of "community art"; rather, it is commonly discussed under a variety of meanings of art practices. Some definitions often focus on the unique and specific process of participatory art making as a mode of engagement, while others address the end goals of art projects. It is a collective method of art-making, engaging professional artists and self-defined communities through collaborative artistic expression. Similarly, Barraket (2005, p. 3) defined community art as the "specific approach to creative activity that connects artists and local communities in using the arts as a means of expression and development".

It is noted that Bondarchuk and Park (2013) include both the artistic process and end goals in the definition of community art which is a process whereby professional artists situate themselves within a community, developing strategies, and engaging community members in creating arts and

cultural programs. In this regard, community art is often referred to as "dialogue art", "community-based art", "community-engaged", "participatory art", "activist art", "relational art", "socially-engaged art", and "art for social change".

The role of community art in community development

As community art is primarily built on the concepts of audience, relationship, social justice and political intervention rather than promoting aesthetic quality or physically conceptual art objects; therefore, this art practice can serve as an effective tool for community development (Kay, 2000). Community art helps promote empowerment of community members in creative skills as an informal educational method, which consequently raises confidence in participants and pride in community (Guetzkow, 2002). In this regard, community-based art can enhance a collaborative relationship between artists and residents through the interactive process that provides mutual support, mentorship, learning and skill development. Furthermore, art could effectively instill pride in citizens, strengthen social bonding, and reinforce a sense of community identity because it encourages the sharing of untold stories within a group of diverse individuals, resulting in a better personal understanding of their past and what it means to the present (Rall, 2009).

Creating community art events and programs requires high levels of audience engagement and collaboration. Such practice provides opportunities for artists to work with various vulnerable people who may not otherwise normally actively engage in arts and cultural activities. Often, community art is based on the needs of community members to be actively engaged in the

creative production process and dissemination of artworks. Therefore, community art is designed to achieve socially positive outcomes for those whose voices and experiences are ignored by mainstream, and may have different degrees of access, participation and ownership (Lee & Sim, 2017). In this sense, arts and artists, as players in social activism, have the ability to engage in social change by stimulating public dialogue on important contemporary issues relevant to their community, influencing their attitudes, and subsequently moving them to take action (Stern and Seifert, 2010).

In most Western countries, community art has been associated with various areas such as mental health and wellbeing, rural revitalization, social inclusion, multicultural integration, education, political activism, environmental initiatives, and urban regeneration (Anwar McHenry, 2009). Simultaneously, organizing community art events has contributed to the economic development of tourism and creative industries, including attracting media, talented manpower, and investors to the destination (Guetzkow, 2002; Lee & Sim, 2017).

The emergence of community art in Ratchaburi

Located on the bank of the Mae Klong River, Ratchaburi is approximately 80 km west of Bangkok. Once a neglected city by domestic travelers, Ratchaburi has been a reputable destination as a major producer of dragon pattern water jars. Until recently, Ratchaburi has been promoted as a city for contemporary arts where urban art events are proliferating and flourishing by private initiatives. Besides the first contemporary art gallery in the city center, there are walls of street, a large fiberglass, pop-art sculptures displayed as new city landmarks for Ratchaburi. The key man who has played

a significant role in transforming the city of Ratchaburi, raising a high city profile, and creating a new destination identity is Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch, a third-generation successor of the leading ceramic manufacturer and a national Silapathorn award-winning artist.

A series of community art projects undertaken in 2011 - 2016 give priority to social development, much more than economic outcomes. Artist Wasinburee intends to make locals understand their own cultural values, reinforce local identity and create the community pride of his hometown. His initiative on urban art events shares the same value as of Klaic et al (nd.), who stated that festivals can help create the self-confidence of residents and change the perception of area within and outside the community. They suggest that a festival enables the residents to create a new vision, a way of looking at the place where they live from another point of view. It can improve the quality of communication among the residents and enhance the mutual understanding of social, ethnic, age and cultural groups (Klaic et al., nd : 48.).

Artist Wasinburee initiated his first community art project in Ratchaburi called "Think Art in Ratchaburi". An experienced curator from Bangkok was invited to curate a contemporary art exhibition and offered 12 talented youths an opportunity to display their creative skills at public spaces around the gallery in Ratchaburi. The program featured different forms of artistic disciplines such as painting, photography, fashion design, food design, animation films, music, and performing arts. The event was held shortly after the gallery was officially open to public in May 2011. This event created awareness among the public and local authority of the significant roles of art that it can offer enjoyment, connect people in the community, and stimulate imagination.

Artist Wasinburee has a clear vision of making art a vehicle for empowering locals, especially economically and socially disadvantaged groups, and developing their mindset to perceive art as part of their way of life. On 17th January 2015, he and the local municipality co-organized a public art event called "Art for the City" aiming to improve the urban landscape and raise funds for economically disadvantaged students through the use of art. More than 250 participants took part in mosaic cube installation at railway tunnels, once unmaintained and flooded with garbage. All revenue from the sale of mosaic cubes successfully went towards helping 63 disadvantaged young students in the area.

Art Normal

Of all urban arts festivals in Ratchaburi, the community-based art exhibition called "Art Normal" is the most innovative event attracting larger media, artists, and visitors outside the community. Art Normal constitutes numerous distinctiveness in relation to unconventional art venues where activities of everyday life conducted, the creation of art spaces at local shophouses for future use, co-creation of activities between local residents and experienced artists, a low-budget event with high flexibility and adaptation to urban spaces and cultural contexts.

Based on the creative slogan of the project "Every house is a gallery and every place is an art museum", art and cultural venue is one of the key factors that partly shapes the success for art programs. Venue is not only about a physical coordination, but also about the unique characteristics of a place that helps shape and mold the specific identity or character of art and cultural products (Kong et al., 2015). In more recent times, Artist

Wasinburee has offered a new perspective of the city by displaying creative artworks at unconventional venues where the locals conduct their daily routine and existing infrastructures in public spaces including coffee shops, restaurants, grocery shops, barber shops, beauty salon, butchers, and private establishments. Art installations were displayed around the municipality and featured street art (graffiti) at the wall of Ratchaprapha Dam, under Thanarat Bridge (see Figure 1), on the rooftop of a ferry and on wall of vacant shophouses. In contrast with sophisticated art galleries, the unconventional art venues provide more interactive opportunities to experience art outdoor and create a new alternative channel of exchange, socialization, and construction of collective identity. Meanwhile, they can be served as a means used by locals to express their reactions towards urban regeneration and social policy (Sarmento & Ferreira, 2016).

Figure 1. "Art Normal" displayed at Thanarat bridge, Ratchaburi
Source : Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch

Local art groups are significantly active in art and cultural activities. More than 120 professional artists in sculpture, painting, photography, short

films and videos, and public graffiti design were involved in creating artworks. Importantly, this community art initiative primarily aimed to make contemporary arts accessible to local residents, from all levels of society, in their own surroundings. Instead of attracting visitors outside the community, Art Normal proposed interactive opportunities to reinforce community networks through the production and consumption of artistic experiences - 10 local residents and youths were also trained in painting, photography, and short films by professional artists and display artworks at their own establishment. In other words, the local residents are not only spectators but also the actors for this art event.

Viewed as dynamic, non-commercial, non-sanctioned, local scope and impact, Art Normal is an ad-hoc exhibition which is partially funded by the Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture, Ministry of Culture – but not the local municipality, and some of private enterprises. As it is not largely dependent on government funding or private control, the working team can create the content and formats of programs in alignment with real values of cultural contexts for the sake of community members in the city. Social media is used as the main channel of communication among the stakeholder groups. This art event requires a high level of commitment, collaboration, and shared responsibility among stakeholder groups.

Art Normal has been viewed as "alternative form of cultural tourism" - a definition based on literature that viewed characteristics of alternative events as co-operative, non-profit, participatory, independent, non-spectacularized, non-violent, and intercorporeal (St John, 1999). Such criteria are generally applied to nonprofit art and cultural organizations, which their management approach is relatively collectivism, non-official, run by a small number of staff and volunteers or self-managed by local artists. The horizontal

administrative structure of the specific event, blurred boundaries, and collective ownership help generate the capacity for social bonding and networking. The bottom-up network-based model appears to promote local activities and potential for creativity.

Transformative direction for community art in Ratchaburi

Table 1 displays a transformative direction for the presence of community art in relation to place-making process over the past 17 years in Ratchaburi. This transformation shares the same characteristics to what Kwon (2002) stated about a shift of emphasis from aesthetic concerns to social issues.

The presence of community art has made a significant change in the art world. The new genre has shifted from the conception of an artwork primarily as an exhibited object to ephemeral processes or events, from prevalence of permanent installations to temporary intervention, from the art outside of traditional venues to community engagement through the art- making process, and from autonomy of authorship to its expansion in collaborative networks (Kwon, 2002). Moving away from site-specificity is a logical step towards a meaningful relationship between artists and participating audience. Within this regard, the role of professional artists has shifted from a sole creator or producer of artworks to a collaborator or mentor by engaging audience in the process of art making, rather than simply being an observer.

Table 1. Transformative direction for community art in Ratchaburi (2000 - 2017)

Dimension/perspective	Transformative direction : Then and now
Cultural policy	From pubic–led policy (Top-down) to community art initiatives
Goals	From urban aesthetic concern to social issues (civic engagement, social capital, contribution to economically and socially disadvantaged groups)
Art space	From non-existence of sophisticated galleries to a test with temporary art spaces where locals conduct their daily routines and eventually to permanent arts spaces at private establishments
Artist	From professional artist outside the community to a larger number of non-artist community members with close supervision
Event planning	From an experimental project to a more structured and thematic event
Community engagement	From a small group of talented high school students in visual arts to a larger group of residents of all ages (from senior people to disadvantaged children)
Urban context and inspiration	From artwork by professional artists displayed at gallery to creating a masterpiece inspired by Ratchaburi urban contexts

Reflective Curatorial Practices by Artist Wasinburee

Community relationships : A community art program should be initiated from a small number of art spaces where everyone has acquainted networks. The art venue can be a noodle shop, a coffee shop or a beauty salon. After community relationships are well established, it is possible to share and display creative works among the networks on different occasions. Building a network is important for the success of public art events. However, this requires a high level of collaboration, coordination, and commitment and the sharing of responsibilities among the stakeholder groups.

Economic concern : It is true that the main goal for community art events is to reinforce the local identity and create a sense of community through visual arts events, rather than generating economic outcomes. However, in order to engage people at grass-roots level in art activities, tourism revenue generation and economic benefits should be raised and discussed as a priority in convincing the idea, rather than the social outcome.

Sophisticated art galleries may not be a right choice : In order to plan and develop urban art events, it is crucial to understand and analyze the behavior and needs of local residents associated with local contexts. The investment of art museums or galleries has high costs for operations, renovation and maintenance. Furthermore, sophisticated art museums or galleries certainly fail to attract local residents, particularly the low-income ones, to experience artworks. Due to social and educational differences in Thai society, visual arts are generally perceived by many local residents as "a high culture", elitist, unapproachable, and unattainable. Many locals still perceived art as something abstract, complicated, and difficult to understand its artistic value, in particularly when artworks are framed and displayed in

a gallery. Therefore, public spaces and places where locals conduct their daily routines can be an alternative means among artists to display their artworks and engage locals in artistic activities. Because art is part of everyday life, local residents possibly create and display their artworks in their own establishment, a place of familiarity and routine.

Public spaces and everyday life : It is interesting to note that community art projects in Ratchaburi have grown outside the conventional art spaces and become an integral part of social development since the first contemporary art gallery in the city was open to the public in 2011. Public space in urban settings is a strategic location where art is more visible and accessible to local residents.

Urban contexts : The community art initiative is highly influenced by the urban contexts far more than official policies. Leadership of artistic community and committed team, the uniqueness of urban design, strong event concepts and structure, and community engagement shape the success of urban art events in Ratchaburi.

Negative criticism : Community art events have not always been received positively. The presence of contemporary artworks displayed in public spaces has raised criticism on the loss of urban identity. Some locals who expressed their dissatisfaction towards graffiti artworks said that Ratchaburi deserves to be a peaceful and clean city and that no fancy artwork was needed.

Perishable artwork : Graffiti design, photographs and art installation displayed at outdoor art venues were removed after the project had been completed. They cannot be restored and reused for next events. Therefore, the important question is how community art projects in the future can be conducted with scarce budget. In this sense, in order to manage the budget

effectively, the development of permanent art spaces at community residences can be a long term solution for future projects.

The lack of support by local municipality : There is no integral art event/festival with all relevant policies. The Ratchaburi Municipality mildly acknowledge the critical importance of public art. There has been a lack of policy levers and institutional machinery to implement full-scale public art programs.

Scarcity of volunteers : Based on a voluntary basis, community art events are highly unpredictable both in terms of their outcomes and development paths. They rely on resources and interest of private individuals, and it is likely that they will face modification and interruption. They also impact team building in the workplace aiming for positive long term results. The lack of experienced volunteers and workforces affects the project outcomes and sustainability of public art events.

Conclusion

There has been a recent shift from public-led policy on urban art and cultural programs to bottom-up initiatives, especially in Ratchaburi. This is due to the reduced financial capacity of the public actor, the rigid and lengthy bureaucratic processes making local artists and art organizations rarely have the chance to voice their views about the city they live in, and the superficial understanding of policy makers on value of contemporary arts in small peripheral cities. Without continuous support from local municipality, local residents are left ill-prepared to develop their aesthetic appreciation, artistic imagination, and problem-solving skills needed in the modern world. However, the constraints of the public sector allow the emergence of

community arts and cultural programs initiated by artists and nonprofit art organizations. In comparison to public-led policies, the goal of community art initiatives is to create new alternative channels of art and cultural consumption and production which are usually restricted to what Rota & Salone (2014) termed "elite atmosphere" of galleries, museums, opera houses, concert halls, and events.

Beautiful urban surroundings may not necessarily make local residents artist, but the attractive environments can stimulate creativity and turn people into anything they want as far as their imagination can reach. The presence of community art potentially relieves stress while creating aesthetic enjoyment and collective entertainment. Community art also promotes community engagement and social interaction through collaborative action. The initial achievement of community art events in Ratchaburi has reinforced a sense of cultural identity and a positive image of the destination itself. The practice of community arts can be a means to build community capacity, help improve their vision, and raise awareness of important issues facing young children and other people in the community. Thus, they can make further progress and continue to make the city more attractive and sustainable.

If community art programs are to reinforce a sense of community and make Ratchaburi more attractive, then local authorities must support and engage in policymaking for community art activities. It is suggested that the Ratchaburi Municipality directly influence the scope and sustainability of art and cultural events. It would also require a more long-term and holistic approach to urban planning and development. Meanwhile, this shift requires a more integrated, consultative and collaborative approach. As community engagement has become an important part of art and cultural strategies,

therefore, there is a need to provide policy levers and institutional support so as to integrate art, culture and tourism as an innovative policy for the well-being of local residents and destination competitiveness (Quinn 2005).

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