



Rhetoric of the Creative City in the Global South: The Case of Bangkok City of Design

Phitchakan Chuangchai

Management of Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries,
College of Innovation, Thammasat University, Thailand
Email: phitchakan@citu.tu.ac.th

Abstract

The Creative City has been an urban cultural policy ‘trend’ that cities in Southeast Asia welcome with open arms, including the case study of Bangkok, Thailand. Although the Creative City discourse has been celebrated by the Thai central and local governments, questions and issues considering the implementation of the term are widely discussed, especially by Western scholars and policymakers. This research aims to study the case of Bangkok City of Design, as it was designated to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2019, by answering the central research questions – 1) How has the UCCN and the Creative City discourse been developed in the context of Bangkok, and 2) Has the implemented Creative City discourse in Bangkok widen the inequality gap within the city and between the other cities. The mythological approach of this study is the empirical investigations (case study-based) and critical socio-cultural analysis. It is found that Bangkok utilises design in the development of the city in two different perspectives: 1) design thinking as a process of city development and 2) design-driven industries as keys to the development of the city’s value-based economy. The research, therefore, takes on the results to analyse and critically discussed further by focusing on projects related to urban regeneration or urban renewal. Three main issues are extracted from the analysis of the chosen regeneration projects as proof that the creative city of Bangkok has contributed to the widening urban inequality both within the city and between the city and the rest of Thailand.

Keywords: Creative City, urban inequality, Global South



1. Introduction

The year twenty twenty-one is the United Nations International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development. Despite the fact that the world is dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, the UN celebrates 2021 as the Year of Creative Economy as it recognises the potentials that the creative economy can offer; namely, develop competitive advantage, attract investment, support entrepreneurship, stimulate innovation, employ young people and women, and promote and preserve cultural diversity (United Nations, 2019). The UN Year of Creative Economy also echoes the ‘trend’ of creative discourses in the global context. Since its starting point in the Australian ‘Creative Nation’ report in 1994 and 1997 as appeared in the UK New Labour’s strategy ‘Cool Britannia’ and the establishment of the UK Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), the creative discourses have been developed into a whole system as termed ‘the creative ecosystem’ (UNIDO, 2015). The concepts around the development of the creative economy and the creative ecosystem are, for example, creative cluster, creative class, creative industries, and the main focus of this paper, the Creative City.

All the so-called creative activities happen in cities; hence the ‘Creative City’ has been one of the most influential discourses in urban cultural policy for the past twenty years. Started in the European social and economic changes in the post-industrial era, the Creative City idea was proposed by Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini in 1995 in their book *The Creative City*, which Landry took on and elaborated another book as a toolkit in the 2000 book, *The Creative City: Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. Cities in Western Europe around the 1970s and 1980s dealt with the impacts of the post-industrial era (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). Companies and factories moved to countries that offered cheaper places with cheaper labours like Southeast Asian and Latin American countries (ibid). The European cities, like Glasgow and Manchester, was then left with empty buildings. People lost their jobs and had no transferable skills to start over with new jobs since they had only been working in factories (CitiesX, 2018). Further economic and social problems sprang as consequences of this transitional period, for instance, unemployment, crime, and poverty (ibid). The Creative City, as well as other urban regeneration policies, has played a very important role in solving those problems. According to Landry (2000), creativity is the lifeblood of cities in the 21st century. Together with Bianchini, they proposed the way out for the discussed urban problems using culture and creativity as a tool to regenerate cities (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). For them, most importantly, people are at the heart of the Creative City; their concept of a ‘city’, therefore, is as an ‘ecosystem’ of human development — as human beings confront urgent needs, dilemmas and unforeseen change (ibid).

Another influential scholar concerning the development of the Creative City discourse is Richard Florida. His controversial ‘creative class’ discourse has been an influential direction for many cities to develop their creative city policy plan as Florida (2002, p. xxvii) argues that the creative class is the driving force of the creative industries; therefore, cities need to prepare themselves to suit the needs of the creative class. Florida’s controversial 3 T’s index has set the tone for many cities around the world that aim to attract the creative class to settle in. The 3 T’s index indicates that places need to be able to provide a sense of tolerance, talent, and technology



for the creative class (Florida, 2002, p. 223). Despite the welcome of the creative class discourse in many parts of the world, including the Southeast Asian countries, scholars (Chuangchai, 2019; 2020; Xin, 2020) criticise that the discourse causes the wider gap of inequality in the society where only certain groups of people are in the focus and people outside the circle are completely excluded from the development plan and that Florida's idea of the creative city is very economic-centric rather than focusing on the people.

Despite increased creativity for Florida (2017), five dimensions of a new 'urban crisis' have emerged (and on a global scale): (1) a winner-take-all urbanism generates economic inequalities and gaps between 'superstar' cities and smaller cities; (2) house prices, levels of inequality and 'plutocratisation'; (3) growing inequality in both cities and between cities and suburbs; (4) poverty, insecurity, and crime in suburbs; and (5) a crisis of urbanisation in the developing world. Florida's diagnosis, while credible, is surprisingly anachronistic given how all of these characteristics were already visible in the cities that Florida was celebrating in 2002 – and that decades of urban development, planning and regeneration had already employed culture and cultural facilities as a means of economic growth. Moreover, in 2002 when Florida was an economist, he would surely have known that inequality, social alienation, lack of participation, and so on, were all internal to the free market economic model that he assumed to be a *fait accompli* in the new millennium (post-2000) America. It is here that the concept of neoliberalism is useful – as it allows us to understand the processes by which material conditions of social life are established by economic growth and seeming material prosperity. It allows for social-human relations to be defined as competition, for citizens to be situated and motivated as consumers, and all communal or public goods to simply be the means of acquiring a greater density of private wealth. Florida's *New Urban Crisis* is a result of something much more profound than urban policies that are blind to their longer-term social impacts. It is symptomatic of a lack of real development, where the social, civic and place-based qualities and potential of a given city are enfranchised and involved in the forces of growth and wealth-generation.

Observed changes in cities undergone the modification process using the Creative City discourse reveal that the Creative City has now become a 'catch-all phrase' as Landry (2006, p. 415) himself puts it. Many urban regeneration forms have been criticised as a 'cookie-cutter' (Oakley, 2004), fast policy (Peck, 2005), a 'xerox approach' (Pratt, 2009), and especially for the Creative City urban regeneration, Mould (2015, 2018) criticises the discourse as an 'anti-thesis of creativity' and 'Trojan horse of neoliberalism'. While everywhere else around the world has been warned and concerned with the extensive use of the Creative City, it is clear that these criticisms have not been brought to the attention of the Thai policymakers as this paper aims to prove. Moreover, with the popularity of the UNESCO Creative Cities Networks (hereafter, UCCN) in the Global South, there is the need to investigate the purposes and impacts of holding the title of the network in the developing countries of the Global South.

Thailand has well-received this trendy discourse and has recently been active in applying the discourse at the policy level as it can be seen from the 2020-2022 Action Plan of the Thailand Creative Economy Agency (CEA) that one of their targets is to get at least two cities to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (Creative Economy Agency, 2020), as well as the establishment



of Thailand Creative District Network (TCDN) in 2021. Thailand is currently hosting four UCCN member cities, which are Phuket (gastronomy city joined in 2015), Chiang Mai (crafts and folk art city joined in 2017), Sukhothai (crafts and folk art city joined in 2019), and Bangkok (design city joined in 2019). Besides, in 2021, Thailand's Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) has pushed through with the Creative City policy trend by finalising Chiang Rai, Nan, Suphanburi, and Phetchaburi for the UCCN (DASTA, 2021). Thailand Ministry of Education has now chosen Chiang Rai and Phetchaburi for the selection process to join the UCCN under the design and gastronomy category respectively, and the selected city(-ies) will be announced later this year (2021: Ministry of Education, 2021).

Bangkok, a city of design, is slightly different from other UCCN member cities in Thailand as it is a capital city. In Thailand, an issue of inequality in urban development between the capital city and the rest of the country, sometimes called 'underdeveloped regions', has been long witnessed and discussed for several decades, and it has resulted in people leaving their hometowns and travelling to Bangkok looking for better opportunities (Hewison, 2014). It is true that for the past three decades the world inequality has been declining; however, the inequality within nations has been raising (ibid). This happens to be the case for Thailand as on the record, the number of people who dealt with poverty has been reduced, but that does not necessarily associate with reductions in inequality (ibid). According to Hewison (2014, p. 854), 'The incomes and inequality data for Thailand indicate a long-standing rural-urban divide'. Bangkok, as the capital city of Thailand, is a destination for many people seeking to access what they could not back home, for example, jobs, universities, and many more. The population density in Bangkok is very high as there are over 10,722,815 people living in a 1,569 square kilometre of Bangkok (July 2021) or the population density of 6,718 per square kilometre, and this is just the number of population on the records. There are more unskilled and migrant labours living in this big city as well.

This paper, therefore, attempts to serve as a primary investigation regarding the implementation of the Creative City policy discourse in Bangkok to answer two research questions: 1) How has the UCCN and the Creative City discourse been developed in the context of Bangkok, and 2) Has the implemented Creative City discourse in Bangkok widen the inequality gap within the city and between the other cities.

2. Research Methodology

In order to investigate the set issues, there are two main methodological-procedural characteristics of this research: the empirical investigations (case study-based) and critical socio-cultural analysis. These methods together were chosen so as to comprehend 1) the discourse development of the Creative City in Thailand and Bangkok, and 2) how Thai policymakers and authorities understand/deal with the co-extensive of culture, urban and politic under the implementation of the Creative City in the Thai cities, especially Bangkok. The critical socio-cultural analysis aims to look at the political conditions of the changes brought on a city by its adopting the Creative City model, and understand the relation between cultural policies and social change (though only insofar as it can be explained empirically – there are huge theoretical questions



that emerge from this that far exceed the scope of this research).

The principal method of this research is the case study: arguments and central claims are discussed and interpreted within the scope of the socio-cultural analysis to find their implications for both theoretical understandings of the Creative City discourse and a critical evaluation of its embodiment in Bangkok. Specific issues and policies were carefully selected from the case study to be discussed; this includes issues of 1) urban regeneration vs. urban renewal, 2) city branding, and 3) widening the urban inequality gap. These issues were examined thoroughly using the socio-cultural analysis as this responds to the central research questions – 1) How has the UCCN and the Creative City discourse been developed in the context of Bangkok and 2) Has the implemented Creative City discourse in Bangkok widen the inequality gap within the city and between the other cities.

As this paper aims to explain the phenomenon of the emergence of the Creative City policy in Bangkok, the qualitative approach is the suitable approach as qualitative approach offers the in-depth understanding of social phenomenon within their natural setting. The primary methodology of this paper is the case study, and it is suitable for this research because the case study helps explain complex situations and enables researchers to answer questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’. The case study uses various data sources, which allows researchers to understand multiple facets of the phenomenon in its own context (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This is one of the advantages of case study research because the application of multiple data sources enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Potential data sources may comprise documentation, archival records, interviews, physical objects, direct observations and participant observation (Baxter and Jack, 2008). These data are combined in the analytical process, which contributes to the holistic understanding of the Creative City policy movement in Thailand, especially in the case of Bangkok.

3. Findings and Discussion

Thailand and the implementation of the Creative City

In Thailand, like everywhere else in Southeast Asia, the implementation of Creative City discourse has been encouraged by the global ‘trend’ and global organisations like the UNESCO or the British Council. Since the UNESCO’s establishment of the Creative City Networks in 2004, cities in the Global South have been paying close attention in joining the network to catch up with the ‘cultural modernity’ written by the fellow Global North cities (Dragičević Šešić and O’Connor, 2020; O’Connor, 2020). In Southeast Asia, the British Council has been an important player in the region as a provider for this Creative City notion, for example, in Bandung (Indonesia) and Cebu (Philippines).

In the Thai context, it is a mixture of the influent from joining the UNESCO Network and the work of the British Council Thailand that encourage the widespread use of the Creative City discourse. It is evident in the case of Chiang Mai creative city that has been working closely with the British Council Thailand. For Bangkok and Sukhothai, it is the Thai central and local



governments that worked towards the goal of having more Thai cities joining the Network as mentioned in the introduction.

Thailand's economy has been relying on the tourism industry in the past decades, and this paper is trying to investigate whether or not the key performance indicator (KPI) of Thailand's creative city adoption still focuses pretty much on tourism – making the Thai citizens and the residents of developed areas becomes a so-called 'second-class citizen'.

Bangkok City of Design

'Design' for the city of Bangkok can be seen in playing a part in two main areas – 1) design thinking as a process of city development and 2) design-driven industries as keys to the development of the city's value-based economy (Bangkok City of Design, n.d.). Considering the urban development and planning of Bangkok, a variety of tools were deployed. The comprehensive city plan in 1990 is considered one of the most important urban planning tools. The physical development of the city is the main focus of the plan; as a result, regulations and guidance are set out for the management of the urban sprawl through zoning. The purpose is to ensure the alignment with the infrastructure, transportation, and utility systems for the maximum use of the citizens. The most recent plan regarding the development of Bangkok city is *The Bangkok City Plan (Fourth Revision)* that took effect in 2012. It aimed to promote Bangkok as "the business and commercial hub of Thailand and Southeast Asia, and [to] promote(ing) the creative economy in response to the Thailand 4.0 agenda through improving the infrastructure and facilities for investment in order to gain a competitive edge" (Creative Economy Agency, 2019, p. 56-57). Two projects emerged as a result of this plan – Charoenkrung-Klong San and Chulalongkorn University areas. They have been designated as "commercial districts for creative business, trade, services and research activities" (Creative Economy Agency, 2019, p. 57).

In the 21st century, city competition has been an ongoing 'trend' as cities prove an important node that provides a point of connection to other cities. Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, is no different than other. In 2019, Bangkok was designated the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the 'design' category, and Thailand Creative and Design Centre (2019: here after, TCDC) explains how the city has been 'crowned' with the UCCN title. According to TCDC (2019, n.p.), these are some of the reasons Bangkok got selected to join in the UCCN:

- 1) Related projects and activities in the selected field: Bangkok is full of activities and design movement. One of them is Bangkok Design Week;
- 2) Unique human resources: Bangkokians are known for their flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to use the informal way to face challenges through design thinking, as well as having highly respected designers;

- 3) It is a city that supports the cultural, economic and occupational aspects of the local and community. The design industry is the key economic unit that propels Bangkok to stand out on the global stage;
- 4) Creativity is being used in the way of local development. Creative districts blooming all over Bangkok is the best evidence.

TCDC (ibid) also gives a clear statement of the benefits the city of Bangkok is getting from joining in the UCCN.

- 1) It is a channel to publicise the city for the benefit of trade, investment and tourism internationally;
- 2) It opens opportunities for cooperation in the development of arts and culture and creativity and exchanges of knowledge and personnel with other member cities around the world;
- 3) Membership is indefinite.

Table 1: Bangkok design-related developmental projects (Adapted from Thailand Creative and Design Centre, 2019)

Issues	Projects	Description and aims
City regeneration	Bangkok 250	-To increase opportunities for those living and working in the inner city area -To boost the potential of the Bangkok’s Old Town that align with future of the urban development
	Kadi Chin waterfront regeneration	-A prototype project for reviving the old city in the category of history and ancient arts and culture along the Chao Phraya River -To improve the connection point for the waterfront walkway, waterfront courtyard, wharf and continuity area -To promote eco-tourism and develop the connection point of Kadi Chin-Klong San area
Safety and health	Chulalongkorn University Centenary Park	-Chulalongkorn Centenary Park is a large green area in Suan Luang – Samyan area with a total area of over 29 rai -Built for students and community to interact to each other and with the nature -The concept of urban forestry and as a model of parks with water seepage area/water retardant area and is a water line with underground drainage systems to support when heavy rains



	Klong Ong Ang	-The landscaping project around the Ong Ang Canal aims to turn the 1,500-meter walkway on both sides of the canal into a shady, beautiful, safe, and modest pedestrian street that can be a historical and cultural attraction
Green and public space	Lankeelapat	-To turn the wasteland and unused area in the urban area to benefit the surrounding community -Has transformed the area under the expressway over 13 rai to become a quality exercise facility -There is a multipurpose building for community activities. Encourage the participation of all residents of the neighbourhoods near the sports grounds.
	Phra Pok Klao Sky Park	-The project to improve the traffic landscape on the bridge structure over the Chao Phraya River in the middle channel of Phra Pok Klao Bridge -To improve the unfinished and left-behind Lavalin Railroad and became a pedestrian and bicycle path across the Chao Phraya River -To increase the connection channel between Thonburi and Rattanakosin by giving people the option of roaming amongst the greenery of trees and plants instead of using cars
Mobility and connectivity	Newly designed bus stop directory	-Use design thinking to create a more responsive and user-friendly bus stop directory
	City Lab Silom	-To study the relationship between public space and local activities through the process of experimenting and researching people's behaviour in urban contexts
Economic and creative economy	Bangkok Design Week	-To spread mutual understanding of design and creativity as a tool of economic, social and cultural development
	Bangkok Creative District Network	-Pilot project to develop interdisciplinary creative centres in five areas of Bangkok, namely 1) Charoenkrung 2) Kadi Chin-Klong San 3) Aree-Pradipat 4) Ekkamai-Thonglor and 5) Sam Yan -Designate each district to be the centre of the creative community (creative hub) in

		<p>different fields according to the identity of the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To help build on the cultural heritage in the area, revitalise the neighbourhood -To strengthen the traditional community -To foster a collaborative network between such neighbourhoods to be a model for ecological development of the creative economy at the community and urban levels
	Creative Economy Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Three-day forum -To encourage the public and private sectors to participate in the development of the creative economy and the wider creative community -To exchange ideas, principles, policies, and operational guidelines to develop creative economy both nationally and internationally
	World Design Capital 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan for the title ‘World Design Capital’ in 2024 by the World Design Organisation (WDO) -To promote the competitiveness and liveable identity of Bangkok in the long term

This research looks at the policy level of the work done in relation to Bangkok City of Design. The twelve given projects show the connection between design thinking and the planning of the city and the involvement of design-driven industry in the economy of the city as can be analysed that a) projects related to the implementation of design thinking are under city regeneration, safety and health, green and public space, and mobility and connectivity issue, and b) those related to the design industry are under the economic and creative economy issue. The main focus of this research is on those related to the use of spaces and their impacts on society. From the given examples of design-related projects happening in Bangkok, certain themes of issues can be analysed and will be discussed in the following subsections.

Presentable Bangkok: Urban regeneration vs. urban renewal

As the capital city of Thailand, Bangkok has undergone several urban regeneration projects to make the city appealing to visitors and investors. This paper argues that these projects do not concern the well-being of the citizens and treat them as second-class citizens in their own homes by having the first priority to serve tourists or those doing business in the city. This section aims to examine such circumstances with the projects related to the title of the city as a UNESCO Design

City. The project in question is the ‘Klong Ong Ang’ Landscape Improvement Project. ‘Ong Ang’ is the name of a canal in Bangkok. The project runs along 750 metres of the canal (1.5 kilometres in total), using at least 400 million baht (12.3 million USD) since 2016. The project got nominated for the ‘2020 Asian Townscape Awards’ from UN-Habitat Fukuoka, which could have proven the success of the Klong Ong Ang project; however, the question of whose success arises. Investigating the landscape improvement project of Klong Ong Ang, it is found that during the ‘physical’ improving process, there was no hearing sessions or consensus process among its residents (Wattanasukchai, 2021). It is, therefore, questionable if the reimage of Klong Ong Ang actually portrays the identity of the people living in the area.



Figure 1: Klong Ong Ang before and after the Landscape Improvement Project

(Left photo: Leelawannasuk, 2018; Right photo: trip & drip, n.d.)

This leads to the greater concern of the use of this kind of urban image improvement projects in Thailand, especially Bangkok. The ‘Urban Renaissance’ discourse of the West has proven to be an influential urban regeneration idea for cities in the Global North, as well as the Global South. Urban Renaissance agenda can act as a political strategy of urban intervention when the main objective is “to create a new image of the city centre and inner-city areas able to attract inward private investments and dynamic new economy activities..., as well as to attract middle-class and upmarket forms of consumption (Porter and Shaw, 2009; cited in Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli, 2012, p. 289). The main device to join the Urban Renaissance community is by improving the built environment and spatial re-ordering (Mace et al., 2017) – in this case, the Klong Ong Ang’s landscape improvement worth 400 million baht to, as has been argued, attract middle-class populations to come to the areas and encourage social mixing that would create social capital and build social cohesion (Friedrichs and Blasius, 2003; Wilson, 1987).



However, the notion of Urban Renaissance has been widely questioned by scholars whether this is a form of “a ‘regeneration’ programme – injecting *social* interventions and infrastructure as the primary tools to benefit low-income and vulnerable populations – or, rather, is just a ‘renewal’ programme – investing in *physical* interventions and changes of image to attract and benefit the middle classes, as rooted in the Urban Renaissance agenda” (Colomb, 2007; cited in Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli, 2012, p. 289). In the case of Klong Ong Ang, it is still questionable whether this area-based renewal programme objectives have all forgotten the residents’ needs and opted for the economic development of the area under the cover of the urban landscape improvement plan.

Sweeping things under the rug?: City branding at its finest

Continuing from the previously discussed case of Klong Ong Ang, this section will explore a bigger picture of Bangkok at the city level. Bangkok, as a city, has been perceived as a splendid destination for many visitors; however, one could not say the same for its residents. The problems of traffic, inequality, poverty, flooding and many more have been presented as the city develops throughout the years. New shopping malls or extended metro lines bring about the development of the economy for certain groups of people but do not offer equal accessibility for all. Moreover, with the title of the UNESCO Creative City, the question arises as to whether or not the mentioned urban issues are being swept under the rug. Only the beautified areas and images of the city are presented to visitors and investors as cities around the world are competing to “get on the radar screen” (Landry, 2008, p. xvii).

Kadi Chin Waterfront Regeneration Project is one of the many projects under the urban landscape planning of the Bangkok 250’s Kadi Chin–Klong San regeneration plan. Bangkok 250 works towards the regeneration/renewal (or Urban Renaissance?) plan for Bangkok in 2032 (250th anniversary of Bangkok establishment), and Kadi Chin–Klong San is one of the targeted areas. The vision for the urban development in the areas are as followed (Bangkok 250, 2015, p. 54):

- 1) Leading local heritage tourism network : Being a cultural heritage touristic destination that is linked to the conservation tourism activities of other surrounding areas, responding to both the tourism sector and the service sector to support tourism in the area in a balanced way;
- 2) Business models from local heritage: Promoting the development of business models from local heritage, local culture – both tangible and intangible to provide opportunities for new developments that move through the area and cause the distribution of benefits and income back to the original community;
- 3) Contemporary Creative Community Area: Stepping into a contemporary Creative Economy District by bringing the local wisdom and cultural heritage potential to the front to drive the system stimulation neighbourhood economy through creative economy;

- 4) High-density, high-quality historical waterfront community area: Aiming to be a community area that has an identity linked to the physical characteristics of Thonburi City in the past by changing into a denser mixed-use residential area;
- 5) Multicultural Common Area: Improving the quality of life of the area through the development of public spaces that can be shared among many cultural groups in the area.

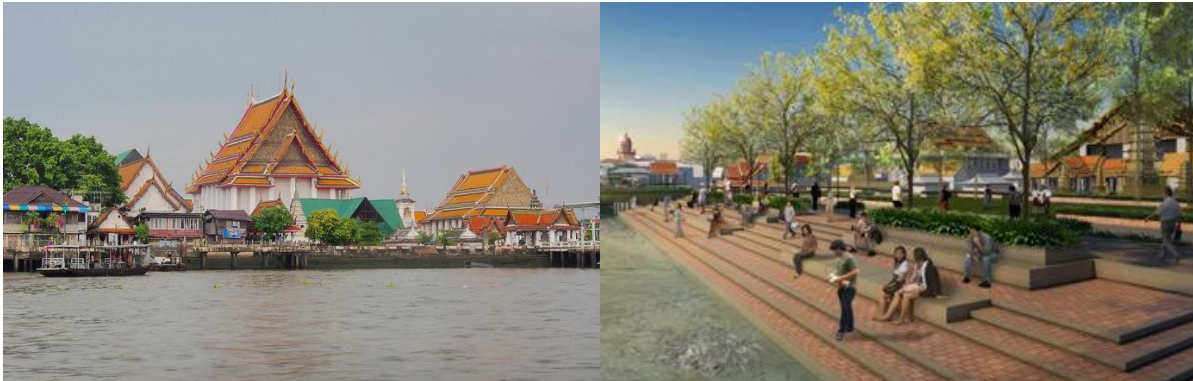


Figure 2: Kadi Chin waterfront now vs. the expected outcome of the regeneration project
(Left photo: Mattissa, n.d.; Right photo: Urban Design and Development Centre, 2015)

The implementation of the project according to the master plan for conservation and regeneration of the Kadi Chin–Klong San area will set the budget worth between 6,500 – 14,300 million baht (201.7 – 443.8 million USD). The question arises whether this large amount of budget is put into the development of the area that would really be beneficial for its local residents as it is presented in the vision of the regeneration project that the leading goal is on tourism. This, again, echoes the analysis of the Klong Ong Ang project, where the Creative City agenda is used as a mere city branding term. The question arises if this, then, means that other urban matters are being ignored and swept under the rug.

Widening the inequality gap: Bangkok and the rest of Thailand

Thailand has been under constant debate on the inequality of urban development, especially between the capital of Bangkok and other provinces in Thailand (Hewison, 2014). The governance system in the country allows and encourages decentralisation of governance as can be noted from the change in the increased power and authority of the local government in the past few decades. It can be argued, however, that the adoption and nomination of the Creative City membership of Bangkok – as presented in the analysis above – could possibly bring back the justification for developmental projects in Bangkok that would ultimately create a wider gap between the city of Bangkok and the rest of Thailand. Design-related projects presented earlier in this paper mostly



have something to do with the improvement of the landscape and therefore come with a high budget, and the creative city title could have given away the rights and justification to do so.

If we were to compare the projects done considering the creative city development in different cities in Thailand, it is obvious that being a member of the creative city network in the design category gives Bangkok the possibility to run projects resulting in the design of urban spaces or as discussed earlier as urban regeneration or renewal. In other cities, Phuket (gastronomy), Chiang Mai (crafts and folk art), Sukhothai (crafts and folk art), projects related to the development of the creative cities are less likely to result in the change of built environment. This gives Bangkok, the city with high potentials, to utilise those with full support from the title earned.

Looking back at the history of the development of the term Creative City, as presented earlier in the ‘introduction’ section of this paper, it should be noted that Landry and Bianchini (1995; Landry, 2000) place their central argument on the people – people-centric approach – since the Creative City was proposed to help with the problem of urban decay in the post-industrial era of Europe. Landry (2000) focuses on supporting the people of the community by providing, for example, workshops and training to guide people to utilise their culture and creativity to run the decayed city again. However, it does not seem to be the case for Bangkok since most of the projects happen top-down, blocking the creative process that could have happened organically in the targeted areas.

Therefore, instead of encouraging inclusive development of the people and cities, this paper argues that the designation of Bangkok as the UNESCO Creative City of design only contributes to the re-centralisation process of Bangkok while leaving the inequality gap between the capital city of Thailand and the rest of the country.

4. Conclusion

This paper has answered the two central research questions: 1) How has the UCCN and the Creative City discourse been developed in the context of Bangkok, and 2) Has the implemented Creative City discourse in Bangkok widen the inequality gap within the city and between the other cities. The popularity of the UCCN as a policy trend has been brought to the attention of cities in the Global South, including cities in Thailand. In the case of cities in the Southeast Asia region, another important player in the adoption of the discourse is the British Council as evidenced in the workshops, training, seminars and many more projects offering by the British Council. To answer the second research question, the paper points out three questionable issues, 1) urban regeneration vs. urban renewal, 2) city branding, and 3) widening the urban inequality gap, which arises with the designation of Bangkok as a UNESCO Creative Cities Network member in 2019. The first discussed issue is the issue of urban regeneration and urban renewal by the projects related to urban design. The case of Klong Ong Ang is brought up as it has been presented as a champion of the kick-start of the urban renewal projects in Bangkok. It has been proven, however, that the Klong Ong Ang project lacks the democratic process of hearing sessions and the voices of local residents



were not heard. This summarises the project as a mere urban renewal project that only ‘renew’ the physical environment of the space to serve as the next tourist destination both for Thais and foreigners. The second issue sets to investigate the waterfront regeneration project of the Kadi Chin-Klong San area, analysing the city branding issue. Despite a large amount of budget, the project sets the key performance indicator on emerging as a new historical tourist destination. The beautification of the space will only benefit the building of the city brand of Bangkok under the design category, and, therefore, would not necessarily be beneficial for the urban residents. This leads to the third point of discussion, which is the issue of widening the urban inequality gap both within the city of Bangkok and between Bangkok and the rest of Thailand. This topic explores the urban development context of Thailand in relation to the implementation of the Creative City policy discourse by comparing to Landry and Bianchini’s original work on the people-centric approach of the Creative City. The analysis suggests that the use of the design city by the case study may have been focusing too much on the design side, while the city seems to forget the heart of the city – its people. As stated earlier, this research serves as a primary investigation of the implementation of the Creative City policy discourse in Bangkok, more research and investigation can be done in order to understand the situations and circumstances in the deeper details.

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