

ThaSala Street Art: Restoring the Colors to the City in the Time of Pandemic

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Abstract

Thailand's street art circle is now gaining popularity. As a tourism country, Thailand has a policy to promote tourism in a number of ways. Therefore, street art has been used to promote tourism in various locations. In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, this article reveals a story of a street art initiative in an overlooked district in southern Thailand to establish a new tourist attraction. The article covers the story since the beginning of the idea, specifies concepts and processes behind the showcase, interviews various stakeholders for insights and provides additional thoughts on street art creation. It also summarizes the lessons learned from the project that has been done through interviews with stakeholders from different perspectives to use as a guideline for further street art project development.

1. Introduction

Just two weeks after Chinese authorities announced a group of severe lung infections of unknown cause, which was later found to be caused by the new coronavirus or COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) office in Thailand announced the finding of the same infection outside China for the first time. It was from a Chinese tourist arriving from Wuhan to Thailand on January 13, 2020. This was followed by the discovery of the same infection in 5 different countries on that week, 25 countries by the end of January, and more than 200 countries by March. Finally, COVID-19 has become a major global crisis as we know it.

Following the lockdown and travel restrictions in April 2020, Thai government prohibited oversea travelers from entering the country to control the outbreak. As a result, Thailand tourism industry, that generated US\$58 billion

in revenues from 39.9 million foreign tourists in 2019, had shrunk to US\$10 billion from 6.7 million foreign tourists in 2020¹. Hotels and hospitality services in the tourism industry gradually closed the business. Laborers in the tourism sectors were forced to return to their hometowns.

When the COVID-19 situation relieved in the second half of 2020, Thai government issued economic measures to stimulate domestic tourism to compensate for the missing income from international travelers. It was during this short period that domestic tourism began to recover. Entrepreneurs in tourism, both locals and those who returned from major tourist destinations, came up with different strategies to attract Thai tourists to their area.

1 - Thailand Tourism Statistics [source: Ministry of Tourism & Sports] (https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=592)

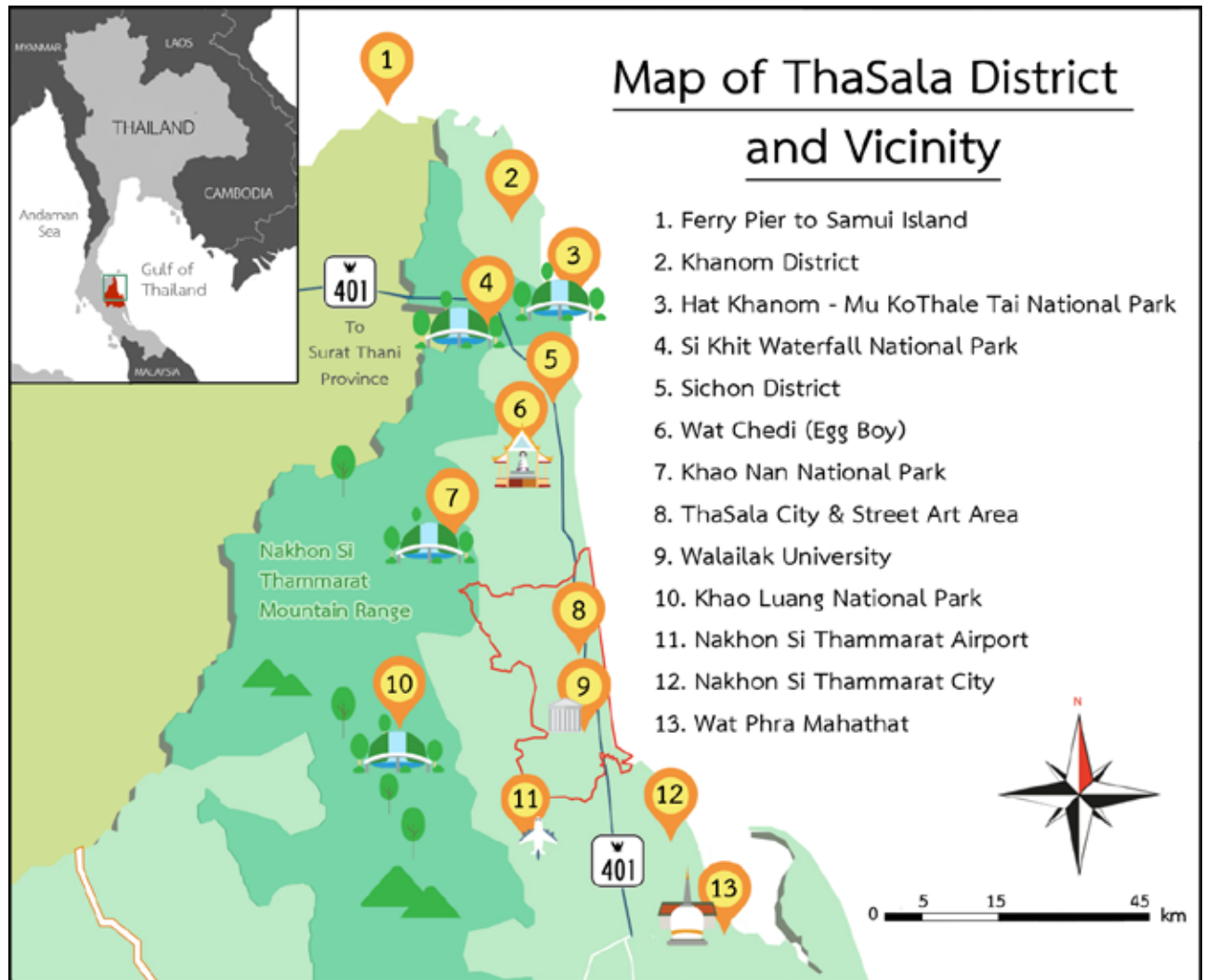


Figure 1. Map of ThaSala District and its vicinity. The boundary of ThaSala District is bordered in red. [source: Patibut Preeyawongsakul]

As contributors to a tourism promotion activity in ThaSala District, we revealed a story of street art creation in this overlooked district in southern Thailand. It was an effort to create wall paintings on public spaces in a place that most people had never known it before. This article tells the story, specifies concepts and processes behind the showcase, presents interviews various stakeholders for insights and discusses additional thoughts concerning the street art. This in an attempt to look back at the event and learn from the collaborative works we experienced in ThaSala community in the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Background

ThaSala District is one of the 23 districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. This region has a long civilization since the prehistoric era and once was a large kingdom, called Tambralinga, in the Malay Peninsula (Noonsuk, 2013). Phra Borommathat Chedi, or great noble relics stupa, has been a sacred Buddhist site since the early-13th century. Nakhon Si Thammarat is one of the recommended provinces by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in the “secondary cities” campaign that wants to diversify and expand the tourist destinations from major cities (TAT, 2018).

The Highway 401 connects Nakhon Si Thammarat Province and Surat Thani Province with three districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat along the way, namely ThaSala, Sichon, and Khanom District (see Figure 1). This area is a long coastal plain between Nakhon Si Thammarat Mountain Range in the west and Gulf of Thailand in the east. There are three national parks in this area, ranging from mountains and waterfalls to islands and white sand beaches. ThaSala District is 20 kilometers away from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Airport and is often overlooked as a route to Sichon and Khanom, where there are many beautiful beaches and resorts. Furthermore, Sichon District is famous for a sacred boy statue, called Ai Khai or Egg Boy, in Wat Chedi (Bush, 2021). It is believed that the Egg Boy brings good fortune to worshipers. People from all over the country visited Wat Chedi to make a votive offering with firecrackers, asking for their fortune in a tough time, especially in 2020—the year of pandemic crisis.

In addition to the natural and cultural attractions in its vicinity, ThaSala is also a home to Walailak University (WU). Founded in 1992, WU is a comprehensive university under the supervision of the government. It has several public attractions on the campus, for instance Walailak Park, Botanical Gardens, and Sports Center. Moreover, the university supports many social engagement projects in ThaSala area (Amaek, 2019), such as improving the landscape at a beach and initiating the founding of ThaSala Tourism Club (TTC) as the driving force to transform ThaSala into a tourism city in the future.

ThaSala Tourism Club (TTC) is a non-profit gathering of entrepreneurs in tourism-related business in ThaSala District. Its main objectives are to create a cooperation among all sectors relating to tourism industry, including government agencies, administrative organizations, and local communities, to develop, support, promote and provide tourism activities in ThaSala area. All TTC members agree on the fact that ThaSala District does not have enough interesting attractions to draw visitors. Therefore, the club introduced the slogan “ThaSala, Not just a passing by” and tried to find the selling point for the district. TTC committees, then, proposed the idea of street art to attract tourists for a visit. Furthermore its tohow s

3. Literature Review

3.1. A Very Brief History of Graffiti and Street Art in Thailand

Graffiti and street art in Thailand have evolved continuously over the past four decades with increasing acceptance, from the offensive graffiti by teenage gangsters in the 1980s and Hip-Hoppers in the 1990s to the well-received street art in demand as tourist attractions in 2010s until now. Although Thai people are familiar with mural paintings, depicting the Buddha’s biography or Thai ancient literatures, on walls of the main hall in Buddhist temples and regard them as revering works, they initially considered painting on public walls more as nuisance pieces rather than a work of art. Later, when Thai society is more open to Western culture, street art on public walls began to gain more acceptance gradually. In the nowadays social media era where people enjoy posting selfies with picturesque walls as their backdrop, street art can be seen everywhere throughout the country as tourist attractions, especially in the form of mural paintings ranging from public rejuvenation of old town areas to private decoration of hotels and restaurants (Sereemongkonpol, 2014).

In the 1980s, Thai graffiti on public walls were created by vocational students sprayed on the wall announcing their institution’s name to intimidate other institutions and expand their territory over the rival’s (Tengya, 2015). The main characteristics of these graffiti consist of two major components: the use of Thai characters and the use of their institution’s logo or symbol (see Figure 2 left). These works were often negatively linked to news of inter-institutional gang violence.

Unlike original works in US where graffiti writers expressed their artistic skills as individualism, Thai graffiti borrowed a form of working in public spaces to express the group identity and occupying territory to which the student gangs belong (Tengya, 2015). In addition, there is no such artistic rankings or guidelines between writers on graffiti style quality, i.e., tags, throw-ups, and pieces developed in New York City during 1970s (Whitehead, 2004). When existing works were overpainted by rival gangsters, no matter what its ranks or styles, the real attack between gangs



Figure 2. Thai graffiti in various styles. [source: (left) Thanachart Siripatrachai, (middle) FB: Aong Love, (right) Sakballang Charoenkijtara]

might occur, without any graffiti battle for better artistic expression, to determine the real winner. Challenging tags like “XXX, Daddy for ALL” was a common phrase often seen in public buses and bus stops locating in the gang’s own territory. However, regarding to graffiti paintings that is also illegal in Thailand, there is no formal confrontation between graffiti writers and state authorities, like the case of New York City Transit Authority in the mid-1980s (Young, 2013).

Another category of Thai graffiti is a painting decoration on sightseeing coaches (see Figure 2 middle). These coaches were typically painted with decorated texts and motifs in vivid colors on all sides, including the roof top. This is to please children and prevent from being stolen. The motifs are usually from famous Japanese manga characters, comic characters, and fierce creatures (Tangpondparsert, 2015). However, in 2012, the Department of Land Transport issued a law banning these decorations to legally identify a vehicle color and to ensure the safety of other vehicles.²

Under the worldwide globalization that accelerated interaction among countries including cultural exchange, Thai Graffiti or Street Art in hip-hop style were spread to Thailand in the 1990s (Novak, 2017; Singh, 2020). Most of them are imitations of western graffiti using English characters, instead of Thai. However, the Asian financial crisis in 1997 caused the real estate sector to go bankrupt and over 300 large buildings under construction had been abandoned (Pohl, 2021). These abandoned structures became playgrounds for street artists and graffiti enthusiasts (see Figure 2 right) as well as skateboarding and

B-Boy. Gathering and practicing in these places gave artists more opportunities to develop their craft and share their skills (Sawangchot, 2003). In the 2000s, television programs featuring hip-hop culture and several graffiti competitions made public aware of these talented teenagers and made Thai graffiti more acceptable. This is the time that hip-hop became more popular and turned into a major subculture among Thai teenagers.

Thailand Street Art in its present form started with the influence of internet media and Western tourists who brought this culture in the mid-2000s. It was initially utilized as beautification techniques to quickly upgrade community environment in Bangkok and rebuild the community image from deteriorating look to welcome international tourists. Subsequently, it was heavily influenced by the concept of cultural tourism under the tourism industry until it became more popular as new tourist attractions (Soraprasert, 2019). Thai street art in current era is a favorite to Thai people of all ages and genders. Its popularity began with an exhibition *FOR: Wall Painting Showcase* held in the Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC) in 2009. BACC, a contemporary arts center established by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, was the main driving force in presenting street art to the public awareness. This exhibition had aided in bringing street art to numerous sites throughout Bangkok, allowing artists to work freely and their work to be more appreciated (Tengya, 2015). At the same time, in the major tourist destinations such as Pattaya, Phuket and Samui, 3D Art Museums were built to attract tourists to take selfies with illusion paintings and share on social media.³ Another important milestone was an international

2 - Similar style of vehicle decoration with graffiti art can also be seen in India as truck art (Bhasin, 2018).

3 - Note that similar phenomenon of private museums with illusion paintings built specifically for tourists also appeared in Georgetown, Malaysia when Penang Street Art became popular

festival called *BukRuk Urban Arts Festival*⁴ in Bangkok, under the support of the European Union in 2016. Well-known street art artists from Europe and Asia were invited to create their works in the heart of Bangkok, along with art exhibitions, artist talks, projection mapping showcase and open-air music stage (Soraprasert, 2019). Afterward, street art was created across the country for benefits of area development and tourism promotion in various provinces. Currently, street art is usually done through an organized project and the working space is requested in advance. There is no need to work secretly, giving artists more time to perfect their works (Tengya, 2015).

After the 2014 military coup in Thailand, protests against the junta have been erupted by both the pro-democratic and the oppressed. By 2020, high school and university students were in a great political awakening. The demands for democracy and reform of the Thai monarchy have led to several peaceful demonstrations, with symbols from various pop cultures (Hui, 2020; Singh, 2020). Many street artists in Thailand turned into anti-state rebellion using their skills to express the mob's demands. During this period, anti-government artists became more creative and diverse. For instance, graffiti on a paved road and a covering of Democracy Monument with cloth in "Mob Fest" on 14 November 2020 (The Hindu, 2020), or street art painting on shipping containers that brought by soldiers as barricades between the protester site and the offices of the Prime Minister in March 2021 (The Nation, 2021). These events result to graffiti and street art in the form of political statements with a sense of humor, that provides fearlessness and more energy for the protesters to continue their resistance (Panlee, 2021).

turned in anti-governmentists creative and their expression into many art forms

Nowadays, Thai street artists often come from varied backgrounds such as painters, graphic designers, interior designers or even architects. Therefore, street art circle in Thailand is diversified and open to creativity. Their works are unique because of the artist's past professional

(Liang C. M., 2017).

4 - <https://bukruk.com/festival/> (Bukruk literally means invasion in Thai.)

experience. Thai street artists in current period prefer to work with their original character. The cuteness and the attractive colors of the characters make them more accessible and recognizable to the audience. The artists usually compile their works on social media, mainly Facebook and Instagram, to form their followers and communicate to the fan club with their new paintings and collectibles (MacDowall & de Souza, 2018).

Examples of popular Thai artists and their characters are:

- P7 and his various hybrid creatures and mutant babies.⁵
- Alex Face and Mardi, a 3-eyes child in a rabbit costume.⁶
- Mamafaka and MR.HELLYEAH!, an one-eyed monster with hairy body and curly moustache.⁷

3.2. Street Art in Tourism

Street art is not only a tourist attraction, but also a publicized space. It invites people to take photos and share the images on social media (Yan et al., 2019). This helps to promote the area and attract more tourists, at no additional cost. Furthermore, residents of local community, particularly youngsters, benefit from the presence of street art in their surroundings. They get a good opportunity to view art pieces at various locations across their neighborhood, comparable to having an art exhibition at home (Cooper & Sandlin, 2020). For art enthusiasts, this is a great source of inspiration. Street art encourages the residents to engage with art in their daily lives, to pay great attention to its details, to devote more time thinking about the artwork, and eventually to learn how to create ones. In terms of placemaking, street art not only helps to beautify and revitalize the neglected areas of the city, but also to restore local pride and sense of place in that area (Insch & Walters, 2017).

One of the most distinguishing street art scenes in Southeast Asia is in George Town, the capital of Penang, Malaysia. George Town has been listed as a UNESCO World

5 - <https://www.instagram.com/p7/>

6 - <https://www.instagram.com/alexfacebkk/>

7 - <https://www.facebook.com/MMFKstudio>

Heritage Site since 2008. Penang Street Art outstandingly depicts the town's unique local culture and daily lives of its inhabitants (Liang C. M., 2017). This helped to create dynamics and attract more tourists for street art tour, leading to economic expansion due to creative economy (Fun, 2014). Penang Street Art is considered a model of street art tourism in many places throughout the region, including Ipoh and Alor Setar in Malaysia and Songkhla Old Town in Thailand. Street art on the old walls of the shophouses in George Town create a visual and cognitive effect and become a city memorial for visitors. Most of the tourists queuing to take photos of street art are Asians. This could be "a result of the manifestation of the 'cutie-look' or 'I've Been There' socio-cultural behaviors commonly found among Asian tourists" (Liang C. M., 2017).

One of the key features in Penang Street Art is the juxtaposition of relevant objects alongside the wall paintings, e.g., a picture of local children playing a swing with real swings hanging nearby. This arrangement allows visitors to interact with real swings in their own way, whether sitting, hanging, swinging, or showing other gestures while taking photos (Soraprasert, 2019). The role of a tourist is transformed from a passive viewer into an active co-creator that conveys emotions in response to the street art context (Thonglert, 2017). This process constructs location identity and promotes the place through emotional engagement, encouraging new media viewer to respond and share the image and, ultimately, increasing the number of views in return.

According to visual analysis on Penang Street Art and Songkhla Street Art from both the mural paintings and Instagram posts, there are mainly two groups of top-ranked social media contents: 1) Stories about the traditional culture in the community; including ethnic groups, folk arts and culture, and home cuisine that signifies local identity and 2) Stories that display the cuteness of children or pets that often conveys innocence, growth, and hope (Thonglert, 2017). Nonetheless, caution must be taken in the use of logos or emblems. Be aware that audiences may not belong to the same culture as the creator, and they are difficult to get the intended message (Soraprasert, 2019).

3.3. Management Models for Street Art in Tourism

As street art is easily accessible and creates better interaction with audiences, many cities around the world use street art as a tool to attract tourists. Street art is a quick and simple device for small towns to gain attention from visitors and compete well with big cities on the art and cultural fronts (Insch & Walters, 2017).

There are several models to develop and manage street art in a city. On the one hand, it emphasizes the participation of communities and artists, as in a case of Staro Zhelezare village in Bulgaria (Piriankov, 2018). On the other hand, it focuses on the full management of street art by government agencies, like in Singapore (Chang, 2020), while many cities implemented a mixture approach between both ends (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2021; Hazelton, 2015; Zhang & Chan, 2021).

Staro Zhelezare Street Art Festival in Bulgaria initiated by Ventsislav Piriankov under the management of the Piriankov Art Center, the local art academy (Piriankov, 2018). Every summer, Polish art students from the Ventzi School of Drawing visit the village and reside at the art center. They have been a staple of the annual street art festival since 2013. The festival has helped revitalize the village, full of the elderly, from deterioration to a bright and cheerful reputation today. The project is partially funded by many institutions in Poland and Bulgaria and by the artists themselves with their own expense. Along with help and kindness from people in the village, they mutually create this fascinating street art festival happen. Based on the cultural diversity between two countries and people of two different generations, they collectively reinvent their own traditions out of rural creativity that is totally different from the big cities. This appeals tourists to visit Staro Zhelezare for its creativity and exceptionality.

As a nation state, the sturdy Singapore government wants to enhance its world branding with effective infrastructure. In the early 2010s, as the chief supporter in arts and culture, the federal government shifted its focus to public art under a concept that "Legality is thus at the very core of how (public) art forms are defined, perceived and responded to." (Chang, 2020). Some artists resisted the incorporation while others took this opportunity to be embraced by the policy. At present, Singapore's public art is restricted to

sanctioned spaces and compliance within guidelines while defiant artwork is quickly eliminated.

Meanwhile many cities opt to on mixture managing approach, like the case of Barcelona, Macao, and Dunedin. City of Barcelona has more than 30 years of experience as the world's leading tourist destination. For Pinacoteca a Cel Obert (Open-Air Art Gallery) project in Barcelona, Spain, this project aims to regulate and redistribute tourism within the city, from popular tourism areas to the outsides, hoping to reduce the negative impact on the tourist-congested communities (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2021). Although such policies are from Barcelona City Council, the project was planned and designed in a bottom-up approach, concerning with the economic, social, and cultural revival of the area. It took a lot collaboration from all stakeholders to create a sustainable tourism development. In Macao, a separation of sanctioned and unsanctioned street art area is clear. As pointed out by (Zhang & Chan, 2021), "Graffiti Park showed people's free expression of artistic, social or personal ideas and represented the creative and cultural face of Macao under tacit approval. In contrast, Nam Van Lake Underground features sanctioned murals." Thus, both management models are implemented in different place, allowing both artists and audiences to choose deliberately according to their preferences. In New Zealand, although Dunedin Street Art Charitable Trust is responsible for overall management, it includes some mechanism that allows different stakeholders to participate in each process (Hazelton, 2015). For example, the matching process that allows a wall owner and an artist worked together on the painting design until both parties reached a mutual agreement, the resource consent process that requires approvals from "affected persons" on the sketches of the proposed artworks, including the hosting system for international artists and the volunteering system to assist the painting.

4. ThaSala Street Art

4.1. Reviving the Community with ThaSala Street Art

TTC Club held an event called "Restoring the Colors to ThaSala" to launch graffiti project and creative market in the evening of 9th September 2020, on which Thai people considered an auspicious date according to the homonym of number 9 and progression—pronounced as K^๙๗.

The ceremony included parades, musical performances, Manora folk dance (see Figure 6 top left), and a trade fair with local products from many areas in ThaSala District. Due to the relief of COVID-19 situation at that time as Thailand reached zero new case since July 2020, a lot of people came out to celebrate the event both for the street art that they saw for the first time and for the improved COVID-19 situation.

The opening ceremony started at the courtyard in front of the government center, where the first street art wall is located (wall no. 1 in Figure 3). TTC plans to spread more street art throughout this 800-meters section on SriThaSala Road, starting from the government center toward the waterfront pavilion, which is the origin of the name ThaSala (Tha = pier / Sala = pavilion). SriThaSala Road was the main street of the city in the past. Nowadays, the area is inactive due to the city expansion to support the highway 401 and the construction of Walailak University in the late 1990s. With the street art project, TTC hopes to gain more attention from travelers to visit this inner area of the city. Accordance with the success of street art project in the first phase, TTC continued to add more wall paintings instantly. Table 1 shows major periods of the street art project as of July 2021.

In this article, we mainly focus on *The Wall of Colorful ThaSala* (wall no. 5 in Figure 3) because it well represents a contemporary situation of Thai street art as described in section 2.3. It is a wall that is created by professional street artists with their own original characters to promote the location as a new tourist attraction. This wall is now a new landmark of ThaSala District and a check-in point on social media for visitors.

4.2. The Wall of Colorful ThaSala

In ThaSala Street Art phase 2, TTC contacted Mr.Jitviwat Klomklao, a nationally-renowned artist who was born and raised in ThaSala City. In 2011, Jitviwat became the first champion of the television program *Ton Silpa* which is Thailand's first reality show in painting. From the initial concept of "Restoring the Colors to ThaSala", Jitviwat invited 7 volunteer artists from *HoW* group to help restore colors in ThaSala with the artists' characters. TTC selected the most outstanding wall on SriThaSala Road for this

Phase	Main Theme	Created Time	Painting No. (see Figure 3)	Number of Artists
1	ThaSala Identity: presents local identities of ThaSala to visitors through visual storytelling. The images mainly focus on fishery and its sea products because the area has long been fishing villages.	August – September 2020	1, 2, 3, 6	3 locals
2	Colorful ThaSala: restore the colors to ThaSala community with the concept of <i>Under the ThaSala Sea</i> with crabs, fish, shrimps, shells, and original characters from 8 Street Artists.	October – November 2020	4, 5, 7, 8, 9	2 locals & 7 guests
3	Memorable ThaSala: portrays the common memories of people in ThaSala community with memorable scenes of ThaSala residents, both in the past and present.	undecided (postponed since April 2021)	–	3 locals

Table 1. Schedule of ThaSala Street Art Project, as of July 2021.



Figure 3. Map of street art area in ThaSala City. [source: Pachara Thongnok in November 2020]



Figure 4. *The Wall of Colorful ThaSala* on an ordinary day (top) compared to on a market day (bottom). [source: (top) Suchaow Kaewprasert on 27 October 2020, (bottom) Varunyu Vorachart on 11 March 2021]

collaboration. It is a 50-meters long wall formed by two double-storey buildings against each other back-to-back. Two sloping roofs from each building produce a fascinating wall area, totally different from a typical rectangular wall. The area opposite to the wall is an open space, making this wall clearly visible from the distance. This provides enough viewing distance to watch a panoramic view of the entire wall area. Additionally, this wall is located within ThaSala Municipal Market. Vendors of food and various consumer products along with their customers gather here every Thursdays for the market, making a vivid scene in front to the colorful wall painting (see Figure 4 bottom).

Heart of Wall or *HoW* is a group of volunteer artists led by Mr.Pairoj Pichetmetakul and Mr.Chaisak Seeradang. Pairoj is a Thai artist who made his name in New York City by charity-drawing homeless people throughout the city, while Chaisak is an artist who lost his right arm since childhood but always strive to work for art and volunteering. Within *HoW* group, member artists are flexible to take turn in painting street art at various places throughout the country. For *The Wall of Colorful ThaSala*, the *HoW* group assigned Ms.Supaluk Praphasiri to manage all working schedule from start to finish. She was a former landscape architect who is now an independent artist focusing on social work. Supaluk brought in the concept of ThaSala Sea that was so prolific that it is named as the Golden Bay. The painting tells the story of ThaSala Sea with many marine creatures, such as squid, shellfish, starfish, stingrays, and the famous blue crab of ThaSala District. A variety of tiny animals and objects appear at various locations on the wall to interest audiences. The characters are arranged carefully to balance between sizes, colors, positions and poses as well as to avoid obscuring by electric poles. The artist uses the sea waves to connect all characters together. According to our survey with the artists, every character and its background information are shown in Table 2.

To accommodate the creation of a large wall painting, Jitviwat asked Dr.Witthaya Hosap, a lecturer at the Multimedia Technology and Animation (MTA) Program, Walailak University to help as a coordinator between the artists and TTC. In addition, Dr.Wittaya also led a team of MTA students and academic staffs to participate in the

street art creation, both in painting the wall primer in the pre-work day and in helping artists paint the walls in the painting day, between 22 - 25 October 2020 (see Figure 5 left). Moreover, MTA program organized a special seminar session for the artists to share their experiences with students. This is a true learning experience outside the classroom. In this occasion, Mr.Phanaran Janprung, an MTA supporting staff, was honored to launch his own characters along with other guest artists' characters. It is his debut as a character designer in street art painting.

Hearing about the new wall painting, ThaSala residents, both children and adults, gathered to see the painting site on Sunday October 25, 2020, the last day of the painting. Some residents brought beverages and refreshments to congratulate the artists and painting crews for creating such beautiful street art in their neighborhood. At the end of the day, the crew members asked the artists to paint on their clothes as a farewell gift before returning home (see Figure 5 right). It is a fun and exciting moment for people in ThaSala community amid the relaxation of the COVID-19 situation that tends to be improved in the second half of 2020.

5. Interview Results

To record the story behind the 2020 wall paintings, we conducted in-depth interviews with various stakeholders involved in the creation of street art project. This is to investigate both positive and negative impacts of street art on ThaSala communities, particularly in the neighborhood along SriThaSala Road, which is home to all of 2020 street art works. It is also a retrospective of previous activities to uncover some key insights that may be useful to the street art project in the future. The interviews consist of five persons as listed in Table 3. The interview results are analyzed and categorized into the following subsections.

5.1. The Relationship Between Operating Organizations.

In the street art project, there are various organizations working all together, namely TTC, WU, ThaSala Community, Local Administrative and professional street artists. The key idea is to understand the strong points and the weak points of each organization. A strong point of one organization complements a weak point of another. For example, as Sunthorn pointed out, TTC initially formed mainly by

	Artist Name (Alias)	Character Design	Created Year	Social Media Channels
A	Mr.Chaisak Seeradang (Soul Crazy)	Name: Soul Design: I like ducks because they have a variety of abilities. That's like me. Then, I development the character by blending duck and my mind (spirit) through contemporary forms under the name Nong Soul.	2018	Soul crazy
B	Mr.Utit Prokhum (JAYOTO)	Name: jayoto Design: Fresh & Fun.	2004	@jayoto
C	Mr.Pairoj Pichetmetakul (Pairojpichet)	Name: Frango (my dog's name) Design: ThaSala is a vibrant city full of people, culture, entertainment, and plenty of seafood. These served as inspiration for my design.	2018	FB: Pairoj Pichetmetakul
D	Ms.Supaluk Praphasiri (Praewpraphasiri)	Name: Fairyfox Design: A female fox who can transform according to the changing environment. That came from the designer's fondness for wildlife. especially the fox with a cute face and fluffy fur.	2019	IG: praew_prapha FB: praew.prapha FB: Ppraewprapha
E	Ms.Nutcharee Pumpayom (Cartair Rattie)	Name: Nicorn Design: Being a woman in her own way that sometimes looks like a man. Unicorn is my most favorite animal.	2020	IG: Cartairrattie FB: Rattie Cartair FB Page:l'mpaints
F	Ms.Wanchanok (CHIP)	Name: ECHIP Design: a unique character.	2020	Instagram
G	Mr.Jitviwat Klomklao (Noom Jitviwat) Local artist	Name: Noomnoom (from my nickname.) Design: I grew up in ThaSala. Therefore, I design a character riding a boat, which was a typical vehicle in the past. I draw this for people to see my journey, from growing up in this city and returning to benefit the homeland.	2019	FB: Artist Jitviwat Klomklao
H	Mr.Phanaran Janprung (Tang) Local artist	Name: Kodjahiem collections Design: Inspired by turtles and masked warriors	2019	IG: luffylucifer FB: SM Project toys Twitter:@kodhiem
I	Mr.Chatchai Phojjanaporn (Chat)	Name: ROBERTO Design: Inspired by the phoenix. Personally, I often dream that we are like big birds. Whenever in danger, we will use a strong flapping to fly up to the sky and feel at ease and safe.	2019	Facebook & Instagram

Table 2. The list of street artists with their character design information, in order of appearance from left to right, on *The Wall of Colorful ThaSala* (see Figure 3).

businesspersons. At first, the members didn't trust each other. Therefore, WU stepped in as a coordinator between TTC members because WU, as a higher educational institute, has more resources and credibility. When TTC members became more acquaintance, they collaborated very well and worked faster than WU due to the quicker decision making.

Another example came from Sutham, the president of TTC. He told that at first it was very difficult to obtain walls from the community to join the street art project because the elderly had no idea what street art is and considered not to join the project. That means the community has all the resources of walls, but very limited understanding. Sutham had to launch the project with very few walls to demonstrate the idea of street art to the community. When SriThaSala Road residents realized the potential of street art, many residents donate their wall to TTC without hesitation.

Mutual goal is very important when working across multi-organizations. TTC propose the slogan "ThaSala, Not just a passing by" as the common goal between the operating organizations. Therefore, every person sees the same target and be able to work all together toward the goal. needs

5.2. The Main Concept of ThaSala Street Art.

Sutham said that using art to connect through people with street art is effective. People in ThaSala community attended the event and it was well received. As for attracting tourists, it is also considered effective. Many visitors came to take pictures. Many people who have never entered ThaSala City before came inside because they saw the picture of street art from social media. However, if noticed carefully, tourists came here to take pictures and left. They did not spend as much time in ThaSala as expected. TTC must find a way to hold visitors to stay longer with more spending as well.



Figure 5. Group photo of street artists, painting crews and members of ThaSala Tourism Club at the painting site. [source: ThaSala Tourism Club on 24 – 25 October 2020]

	Name	Position	Interview Dates
1	Mr.Sunthorn Boonkaew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecturer at Walailak Management School, Walailak University. Adviser to ThaSala Tourism Club. 	25 Feb 2021
2	Mr.Sutham Noiheed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owner of Baan Don Tea House. 2021 President, ThaSala Tourism Club. 2020 Head of Public Relations, ThaSala Tourism Club. 	31 Mar 2021
3	Mr.Khantee Chanyayian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owner of One Day Café on SriThaSala Road. 	9 Mar 2021
4	Mr.Jitviwat Klomklao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional artist born & lives in ThaSala district. Director of ThaSala Street Art, Phase 2. 	29 Mar 2021
1	Mr.Phanaran Janprung	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MTA academic staff, School of Informatics, Walailak University. Amateur local artist. 	4 May 2021

Table 3. List of interviewees on 2020 ThaSala Street Art Project. The number on each interviewee is for referencing in **Figure 7**.

Sutham also added that most visitors drove into street art area and parked their cars at each painting spot without surveying around. This caused them to miss some walls in a small passage or overlook some in a hurry. In this respect, the solution is to make an area map notifying each painting spot. The map must be easy for tourists to access, either in a printed material or an online image. TTC can ask shop members on SriThaSala Road to be a map distribution point. Hence, amenities for tourists traveling on their own such as a map or a guide are needed.

TCC plans to continue developing the street art area in the region next to SriThaSala Road. Unfortunately, owing to a worsening COVID-19 scenario, the plan has been temporarily halted.

5.3. Wall Painting Development.

To create more street art, Jitviwat suggested that we encourage local artists and collaborate with professional street painters, at the same time. This will give ThaSala artists the opportunity to learn from the experts. In the long run, this will assist local artists in creating better works. Professional street artists are well-managed, and their contributions provide diversity to the project's overall environment.

In terms of new painting subjects, Sutham stated that TTC disallows pictures of revered social institution to avoid inappropriate postures from street art audiences that would be considered insulting to the institution. This issue may create a negative image on the ThaSala community, which owns the street art properties.

Furthermore, as a precaution to avoid any issues with the painting on the walls, TTC made a contract between the club and the wall owner to prevent destruction or abuse of the painting, according to Sutham. This gives TTC more confident to create new wall paintings.

Another issue that TTC is not yet fully understood is the copyright of the work. There are more details that need to be discussed rather than neglected, particularly in the copyright of the characters from professional street artists. In this regard, Jitviwat made an interesting comment that the artists who painted the wall have their own followers in social media which also help spread the characters' images in ThaSala Street Art. When the artist reputation grows, the value of souvenirs made from their characters may increase. Therefore, there should be a reasonable profit sharing between the artist and the club.

When it comes to the goals of ThaSala Street Art, Jitviwat wants ThaSala to be well-known throughout the country. He added that this requires many factors such as artist reputation, media communication, harmony of ThaSala community and tastes of the audience.

5.4. Negative Impact on the Residents in Street Art Area.

Sunthorn said that the street art area was originally a gray zone, where teenagers gang gathered around. When the region was established as a street art area, the residents frequently encountered difficulties with loud noises, making the homeowners unable to rest. Most of the issues caused by locals rather than visitors, added Khantee. To solve this problem, administrative organization installed CCTVs in the area. However, when requesting to inspect the recordings, there is always an issue with a damaged camera or no recording, revealed Khantee.

Khantee, as the owner of the largest wall, has an unfavorable attitude toward the street art since he was facing the issues by himself, whereas other residents may not as severely invaded. Regarding the extension of the street art area, Khantee prefers to do it gradually and carefully before expanding the project area. Furthermore, the community should find a means to educate people about the need of respecting the privacy of the residents in the street art area. Khantee observed that, despite having the direct impact, the community was not active in resolving the issues. This may be because most of the residents in this community are senior citizens, causing the community to address problems slowly.

5.5. Supporting Activities are Important.

Jitviwat wants to see a wider range of activities, such as music, sports, or art events. He wants to see more events in the street art area than there currently are, especially involving children in the community. Despite some students attended field trips (see Figure 6 top right), there were fewer than expected. He wanted the school to hold an art contest related to street art in the area. It may be a color book format in which children color wall figures based on their own ideas. To give the firsthand experience of street art to the community on a few weekends, Jitviwat gathered children who were playing around and asked them to color his character, Noomnoom, on a real wall (see Figure 6 bottom left).

Khantee considers these supporting activities to be more significant than the pictures on the wall. It is not difficult to paint a wall in any location. The essential concept, however, is the continuing activities in the area that influence the community and tourists. This should be a significant consideration when the COVID-19 problem is resolved, as it is the key to the project's long-term sustainability.

TTC covers most of the cost of the street art project through donations from club members and other supporters. In reality, TTC offers a variety of souvenirs, like ThaSala T-shirts, badges, and can openers, featuring the figures from the wall (see Figure 6 bottom right). The profit from these sales is insignificant when compared to the actual expenses of the painting. The sale difficulty is likely due to the lack of a selling point in the street art area. Although tourists learned via social media that souvenirs are available, they were unable to find a store to purchase the souvenirs. As a result, current sales are extremely low.

6. Discussions

TTC has an excellent management team, which is regarded as a significant element in the success of ThaSala Street Art. Consisting of tourism entrepreneurs, TTC committee made quick decisions and acted fast, with personal connections to both communities and local administrators as supports. TTC, who had no prior experience with street art, opted to contract a few groups of local artists to speed up the process and create different painting styles. To achieve the unity of wall content, TTC set up a broad theme and gave artists the opportunity to express their own characteristics, which is crucial for the attractiveness of each wall.

Following the success of ThaSala Street Art initiatives, restaurants and cafes in the area joined the trend by having their own wall painted in the similar theme. While TTC's initial project provided organized artworks to ignite the street art movement, these independent paintings added more organic attributes to the project. The combination of both organized and organic artworks enhances the appealing of the overall mural paintings (Insch & Walters, 2017). However, without TTC approval in painting content, some restaurant owners may paint the sensitive contents which TTC hopes to avoid in the first place. Nevertheless, as these walls are private properties, the likelihood of a conflict with viewers is low. In the future, TTC may add



Figure 6. Various activities from ThaSala Tourism Club on the street art project. [source: ThaSala Tourism Club]

more street art pieces to connect these separated works and create a street art walking tour in the neighborhood. This will contribute to a remarkable tourist experiences and strengthen ThaSala District's reputation as a creative city (Andron, 2018).

TTC has policies to prevent possible conflicts, such as obtaining contracts from building owners for the use of walls and prohibiting artworks that deal with sensitive topics like politics, religions, or monarchy. However, no contract for the copyright of the artist's characters has been signed yet. Because it's a novel issue that hasn't been addressed previously. There was simply a conversation with artists about granting TTC the rights to use their characters

that appears on the wall without modification, but no details about usage or benefit sharing as written evidence. In this regard, if the club wishes to expand its souvenir line-ups for real sales, there may be issues in the future. The issues about property rights and copyrights on both sanctioned and unsanctioned works are legal protections that all stakeholders should consider more seriously (Bonadio, 2018; Insch & Walters, 2017).

In the 2nd phase of ThaSala Street Art, there was a project restructuring, as shown in Figure 7, to tackle more demanding tasks. Both TTC and Jitviwat, a professional artist from ThaSala, are key players in this phase; from communicating with the community to select a suitable

wall space, contacting government agencies to solve legal issues, appointing professional street artists to design and paint the wall, and collaborating with Walailak University for advices and students to assist on the work. Each organization has a clear division of duties according to their skills and resources. Walailak University provided with both labor and expertise. The community donated their wall spaces. Artists designed the painting space and created the artwork within the specified scope. Government authorities aided in the resolution of all legal and security concerns, including the installation of CCTV cameras to ensure security in the wall area. TTC members, both resorts and restaurants owners, welcomed and looked after the artists from the moment they arrived at the airport. The artists visited several locations in ThaSala District and participated in tourism activities. This exposed ThaSala identities through their firsthand experiences that would be portrayed in the mural painting.

However, if TTC wants to take street art project more seriously in a larger scale with international streetartists, it needs to adjust its organization to be more efficient to support the expansion of street art area in the city. One approach may be to adopt the model of Dunedin City in New Zealand. Dunedin established a dedicated street art fund known as the Dunedin Street Art Charitable Trust (Hazelton, 2015), which is responsible for funding all street art activities and pairing artists with building owners to initiate the work. After a mutual agreement between a street artist and a building owner on the wall design, the artist come to work on the commissioned project while staying with the locals. This will enhance a strong bond between the artist and the community. Likewise, through a deep connection with Walailak University that could provide and organize international contacts, TCC should construct an international network of street art artists and offer a solid support to local talented. This highly organized management ensures high efficiency. However, at the same time, TTC must maintain a balance between organized and organic structure to give importance to all stakeholders, without limiting any party's participation (Quinn, 2005). To promote ThaSala Street Art, TTC and Walailak University used online channels mainly on social media to reach the potential visitors. In addition to the existing communication channels from the partners, a new Facebook page, titled

ThaSala District⁸, has been established to share news and tourist information and encourage people to visit ThaSala. Furthermore, the inviting street artists used their own social media accounts to publicize the event and location. Due to the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, when most people stayed home, digital marketing via social media has a greater capacity to distribute information, particularly visual messaging, to larger audiences and prospective visitors (Radisich, 2020), at least until the COVID-19 situation improves enough for tourists to resume traveling.

Meanwhile, to compete with street art in other cities, TTC may need to continue developing the initiative. For example, we may utilize extended reality technology (XR) to produce digital items for user interaction in addition to actual objects that a visitor can engage with physically. Furthermore, in the XR world, digital models can be modified to any possible notion that the visitors find more engaging. Ultimately, both real things on the street art wall and digital objects on a smartphone screen may interact with visitors to provide a more engaging experience. In the same manner that graffiti was invented along with rapping, DJing, and breakdancing, street art may be intended to include an audio component. This will help extend the viewer's experience to the same expected feeling in the environment context of the visiting location (Geroimenko, 2018).

Although there are not many tourists due to COVID-19 situation, but the interest from the local people is very high, both in ThaSala and nearby communities. There were teachers taking students on field trips, the newlyweds taking pre-wedding photos with street art walls, and the teenagers in the neighborhood riding motorcycles to take photos at night and making noise at the venue. Based on the concept of public art, street art is considered an open-air gallery that opens 24/7. It gives equality in viewing to people of all groups or ages. Its open environment lessens the rules and enhances interaction to audiences, in a way that any art museum cannot provide. Without any restrictions, the audience can touch or pose with artworks freely. This is an important characteristic of street art in tourism. However, some people in the community and neighboring areas still

8 - <https://www.facebook.com/ThaSala-District-108046387355846>

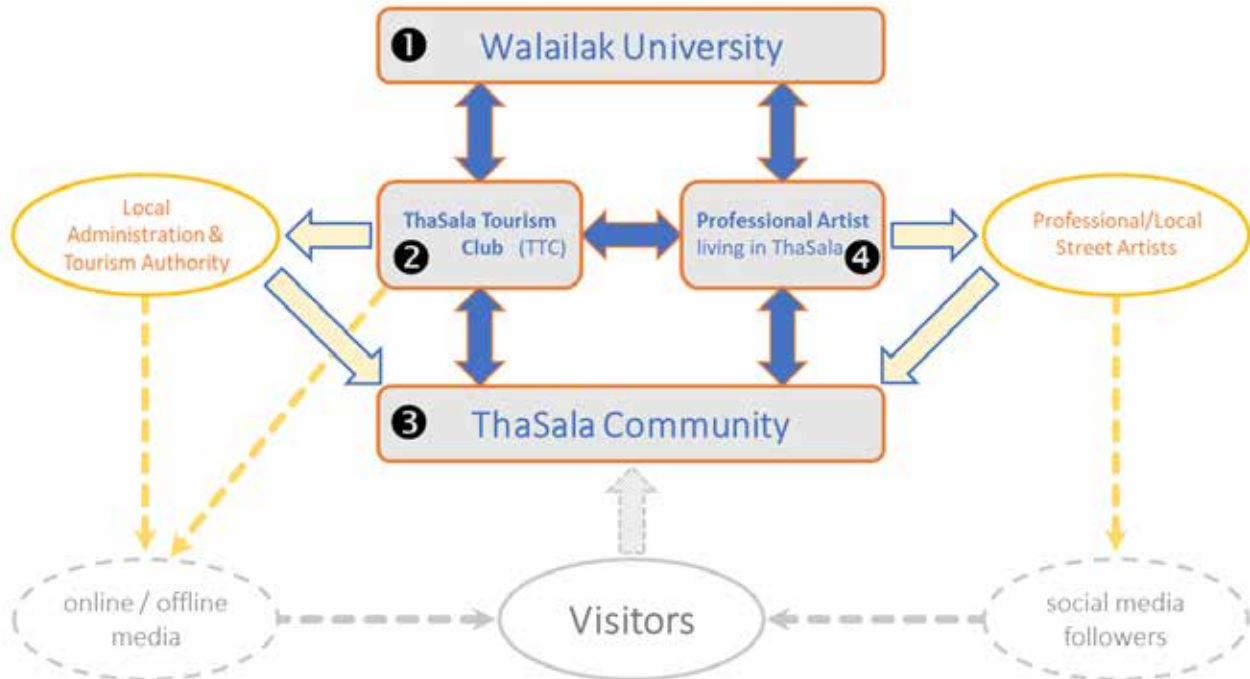


Figure 7. Diagram shows various stakeholders and their relationship in the creation of ThaSala Street Art. The number on each stakeholder is for referencing in **Table 3**.

lack etiquette and respect for the rights of others, especially of the homeowners. In fact, this is a basic problem in Thai society, not just in ThaSala community. Many aspects of vandalism prevention in tourism context share similar causes and preventions to this problem. As (Bhati & Pearce, 2016) suggested, ““Visitor behavior at tourism attractions is a complex phenomenon influenced by several factors such as the motivation for any action, the intention of the person, and perception of opportunity in the physical setting”. Several intervention approaches concerning social, environmental, psychological, and economic aspects are proposed in (Bhati & Pearce, 2016), ranging from short term practices, like an environment design to send visitors reminder of the viewing etiquette, to long term solutions, such as an effective campaign for respect the rights of others in both school system and public media. These negative impacts should be quickly resolved under the cooperation among stakeholders to limit problem expansion into new street art area.

7. Conclusions

ThaSala Street Art is an attempt to establish a new tourist destination for ThaSala City in the midst of COVID-19 crisis, which traveling is restricted. This project initiated from the collaboration of many parties involved in the development of tourism in ThaSala, a district that most tourists consider as a passing-by city. The project provides alternative attractions for tourists to visit ThaSala and presents an opportunity to turn ThaSala into a new tourism city. Even though still in the early stages, the project has already had an influence on the city with contemporary street art that stands out in scale and character design, along with local identities.

While the situation with COVID-19 pandemic has not been resolved yet and tourists are still worried about the situation, ThaSala Street Art has already begun. It is a good experience for stakeholders to learn from previous difficulties, a great inspiration for ThaSala residents and local entrepreneurs to join the street art movement, and an

excellent opportunity for working companions to continue and improve the project until ThaSala becomes a new tourist destination, not a passing-by city anymore when tourists return to travel again.

Although street art seems like a magic tool that made a city famous overnight, developing sustainable street art project with long-term benefits to all stakeholder is not easy. The management of street art spaces, from creation with outstanding identity to preservation and beneficitation, is of importance. Each city must choose an approach that is suitable for its context, which varies from place to place. A collaborative approach that allows all parties to participate in the process is likely to reduce conflict and eventually achieve sustainability.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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