

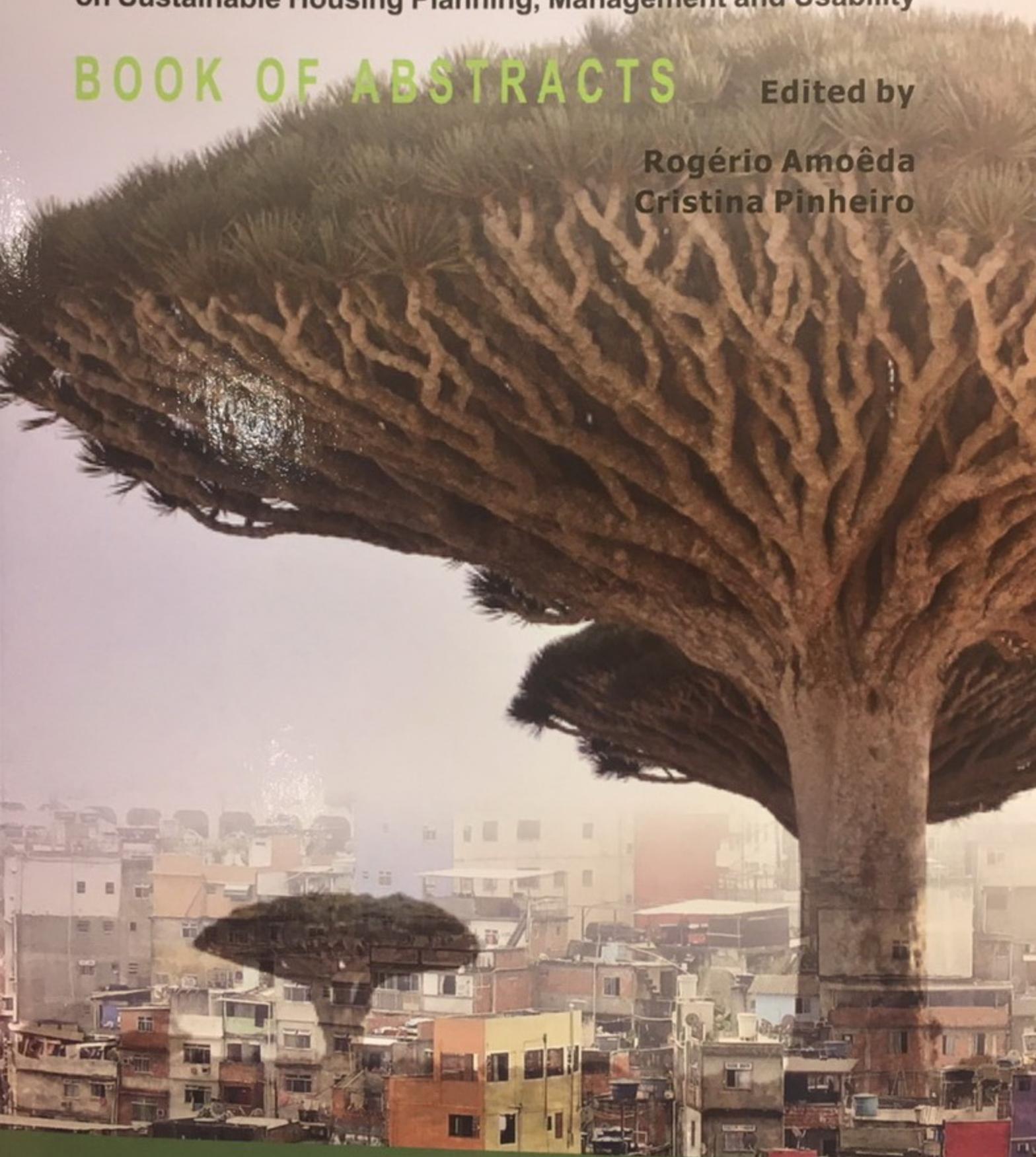
Sustainable Housing 2016

International Conference
on Sustainable Housing Planning, Management and Usability

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Edited by

**Rogério Amoêda
Cristina Pinheiro**



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Diversity comparison of Bangkok shophouse community for creative community development: Siam Square and Suan Mali community

T. Chamnam

School of Architecture and Design, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand

ABSTRACT: The Creative Economy is one of the economic policies to drive the new Thai national economy, while the creative environment has not been promoted. To promote the creative environment, the Creative City has been mainly focused for increasing economy in many countries. In addition, diversity is one of the keys in encouraging the creative persons. Thus, the study aims to investigate and compare the diversity of each shophouse community influence on creative atmosphere, based on a hypothesis that the diversity conditions of shophouse community can provide a creative community atmosphere. The investigation areas are Siam Square and Suan Mali. The survey of 60 questionnaires and 10 interviews of the business owners in both communities are carried out. The results show that the diversity of each shophouse community is valid. The unique business area, walkable community and various business activities are the most attractive diversity characters. In addition, accessibility of people and public transportation, and small block are important. The results of the different diversity character priority reflect the degree of importance in major business activities, aging, and family conditions from both communities. However, the primary use is the main key difference of promoting creative communities. Retails and rentable units in Siam Square encourage openness; while the wholesale business leads to negative atmosphere on the streets and unfriendly walking atmosphere in Suan Mali. The shophouse characters greatly brace the openness of place and people, place identity, and business opportunities. The diversity of shophouse community can be stimulated and reinforced by the physical creative community to nurture the new creative class in Thai society. Note: SS = Siam Square; SM = Suan Mali.

1 INTRODUCTION

Thailand has applied policies to promote Creative Economy in the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) (NESDP) to encourage the national economy of the country (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2015). This plan has been implemented since 2012. However, the Creative Economy policies have not been recently mentioned, it has been initiated since 2001 with “*One Tambon One Product*” (OTOP) policy (United Nation Industrial Development Organization) and the creative design center called Thailand Creative and Design Center (TCDC) in Bangkok started in 2004 (Thai Creative and Design Center, 2005). However, the policies have seldom mentioned the physical environment issue in details of how to nurture and create a creative community, but emphasized the policies and organizations.

To promote Creative City, the relation between place and creativity is relied in 3T: technology, talent, and tolerance (Florida, 2005). The technology and talent persons (creative persons) are dynamic and moveable. In the meantime, the tolerance (diversity of the place) assures that technology and creative persons can be nurtured and developed their ideas (Florida,

2005). In addition, Jacobs (1992) states that mix of uses, short blocks, variety of building ages, and population density encourage diversity. It emphasizes the importance of the place diversity which attracts the creative people to live in the place.

In Bangkok, shophouses are the mixed-use and flexible buildings which open to variety uses and activities. These characters of shophouses are comparable to the tolerance. Therefore, the study aims to investigate and compare the diversity of each shophouse community influence on creative atmosphere, based on a hypothesis that the diversity conditions of shophouse community can assist a creative community atmosphere. The shophouse communities are Siam Square, which is defined as a creative area (Keawlai, 2013), and Suan Mali which shares similar and different characters (see Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure. 1 The variety of shophouses' activities and functions in Siam Square.



Figure. 2 The shophouses on one of the Suan Mali streets.

2 CREATIVE CITY AND DIVERSITY

2.1 *Creative community development and diversity*

Creativity does not come out only from an individual, but it increases and multiples when exchange with others. Landry (2000) also introduces the Creative City which promote cultural resources into the economy and environment to support the creative persons and enrich the creative economy of places. Thus, opportunities for meeting new people, gaining new experiences, and exchanging new ideas are the most important creative seeds. Tolerance is one of the Creative City indexes. It includes the openness of various aspects: cultures, ethnics, or policies. Especially, a diverse place, where welcomes to all ethnics, is the most preferred living for the Creative Class (Florida, 2014). Therefore, flexible buildings and spaces for adaptability is also one of the major keys to serve various needs.

2.2 *Creative community in Bangkok*

In 2009, there were also initial studies to address and identify locations of work places of the talented people. One of the studies addresses 6 locations of the creative locations: Siam Square (fashion center), Jatujak (biggest weekend market for Thai local products), Thonglor (wedding studio and designer office center), Town in Town (residential mixing with multimedia and design offices.), RCA (entertainment and music industries), and Sukumvit (foreign communities, especially Japanese community) (Keawlai, 2013). Former studies show that the shophouses' flexibility favors to mixed-use development and community atmosphere (Davis, 2012; Tirapas & Boonyachatt, 2012). This study points out the potentials of Bangkok city for the creative city development.

2.3 Diversity and Bangkok shophouse community

According to Jacobs (1992), the diversity conditions are mix of uses, short blocks, variety of building ages, and population density. The shophouses characters; 2-5 storey in heights, built as a row of building, and block pattern planning, can be positively supported the ideas. The regulations allow them to be used for both residence and commerce (Riensriwilai, 2005). Furthermore, scholars also emphasize its bi-functional character in the economic and social practice (Nimmanhemint, 1981; Suchakul, 1982). According to these definitions, the shophouse owners often adapt spatial and physical elements according to their purposes to suit different uses or changes that can be occurred. However, there are limitations of alteration of shophouses due to the regulation controls, technical supports, leasing and rental contracts (Tirapas & Boonyachat, 2012). This mix of uses of shophouses, then, becomes a key of diversity of activities in the shophouses locations.

For shophouses, the adaptability and flexibility of uses are the main important factors for the diversity development within in an area. The former study shows that the shophouse's spatial, physical, and stylistic characters; and "shophouse support" aid the adaptability and flexibility of shophouses (Tirapas & Suzuki, 2013).

In addition, shophouse planning also encourages the diversity and meeting among residents. Besides, there are 3 different types of shophouse arrangements: linear, mixed pattern and block pattern (Chantawarang, 1985). The mixed and block pattern support the Jacobs' ideas of short block and population density. These arrangements also urge the community assembly along the streets. Furthermore, the survey reveals that the residents recognize the good neighborhood in their communities (Tirapas & Boonyachat, 2012).

According to Florida, the creative place's characters are quality of place, density, walkability, open-mindedness, and diversity (Florida, 2014). With the flexible and adaptive characters of shophouses, these assists diversity of activities, density, walkability and even diverse of ethnics within the communities.

3 METHOD

3.1 Survey method

The survey investigates the shophouse communities; creative community and non-creative community to compare the diversity conditions, mainly mix of use, short block, and mix of different building types. The survey takes two approaches: questionnaires and interviews in two districts: Siam Square and Suan Mali. The survey takes 31 questionnaires are distributed in Siam Square and 29 questionnaires in Suan Mali (total of 60 questionnaires) and 5 interviews of the owners of the businesses each area (total of 10 interviews).

The questionnaire survey aims to identify the priority of shophouse community characters impacting to their businesses; and in what issues are the main concerns for selecting the place for their businesses. These influence the creative place identities. The interviewees are asked to identify the major characters of the business in the areas.

3.2 Site survey selection and characters

There are many shophouse communities in Bangkok. However, for comparison, the criteria of site selection are made. The place should be well-known for its business. They should share similar shophouse pattern, and the location should be surrounded or nearby creative resources (cultural, academic, and technological resource).

Therefore, Siam Square and Suan Mali have been selected. Siam Square is the shophouse community in the shopping area of the city where young creative entrepreneurs initiate their new shops (Keawlai, 2013). It is nearby Chulalongkorn University, one of the famous universities in Thailand. It also connects with mass transit system called Bangkok Mass Transit System (BTS) and Metropolitan Rapid Transit (MRT). While, Suan Mali is a car-auto part business. Especially, it is near the one of the biggest electrical appliance, music instrument and machinery markets. It is surrounded with many cultural and old districts such as Saket Temple,

a hand-made monk bowl and wooden door maker community. There is also near a water transportation. In addition, the new subway extension line nearby this area is nearly finished in the next few years.

Both of them share similar and different characters. Siam Square and Suan Mali are both business areas. Their arrangements are the block pattern. They can be accessed from different transportations. On the contrary, Siam Square is no longer a resident area; while Suan Mali is still mixed of residence and commerce. Most of the families moved to suburb areas resulting the sprawl city (Meesiri & Perera, 2011; Klimalai & Kanki, 2013).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Questionnaire results

4.1.1 The place diversity characters of Siam Square and Suan Mali for living and business attraction

Figure 3 shows the results of what the diversity characters attract them to live and start their businesses in Siam Square and Suan Mali shophouse communities. For Siam Square, the most important issue for business attraction is Well-Known Business of Area (90.3%). Second importance is Mix of Age (74.2%) and Walkable Community (74.2%). Third is Career Opportunity (71.0%). Fourth is Mix of Professionals and Careers (61.3%). Fifth is Variety of Business (61.3%). For Suan Mali, the most important issue is Walkable Community (79.3%). Second importance is Well-Known Business of Area (62.1%). Third is Variety of Business (58.6%). Fourth is Neighborhood Network (51.7%). Fifth is Meeting and Exchange Ideas (48.3%). Among the top five issues, there are 3 similar selected issues from both communities: Well-Known Business of Area, Walkable Community, and Variety of Business. These confirm the characters benefit to the business atmosphere (Jacobs, 1992) and attract the creative class to join the area (Florida, 2014). However, Siam Square prioritizes the Well-Known of Business Area more than Suan Mali (90.3% in SS; 62.1% in SM). This results from the high degree of commercial district which will attract same customers to buy and use the products and services.

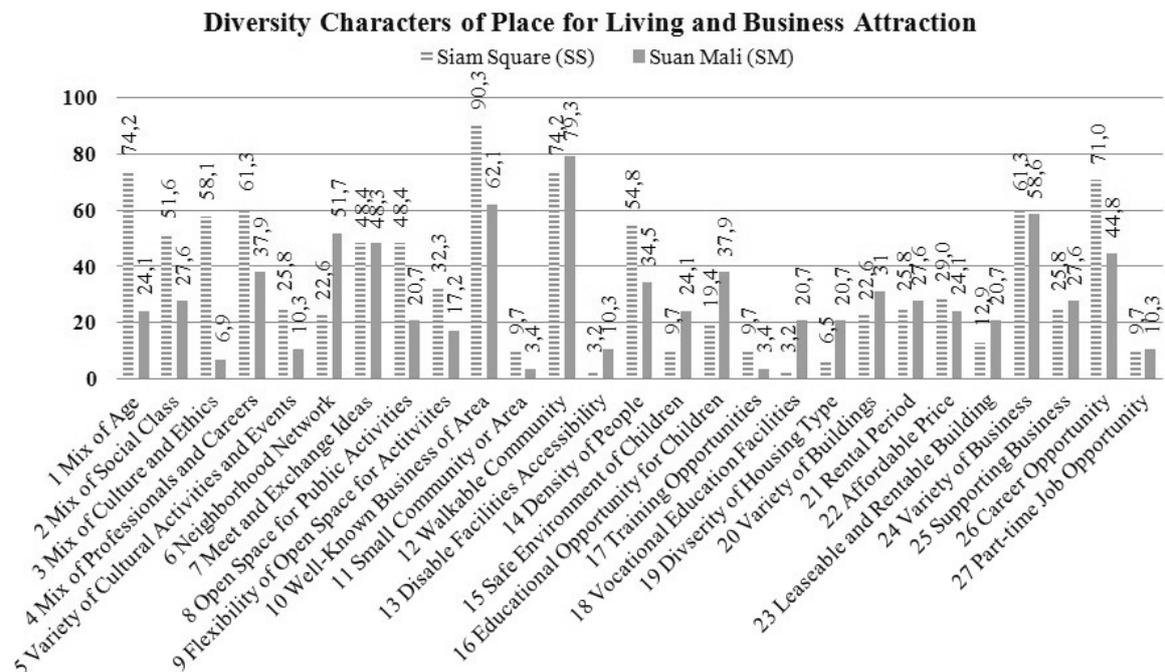


Figure. 3. The comparison of place diversity attracting people for living and business of both places.

The Mix of Age is the second important issue in Siam Square (74.2%). This offers a variety of users in different time period. This supports an opportunity for the variety of business which increases the diversity of place as well, while Suan Mali scores this issue quite low (24.1%). This emphasizes a specific group of customers and low degree of welcoming to the new people of Suan Mali business character. As a result, it reduces the opportunity for diversity of activities and new businesses in the place.

Even though, in Siam Square, the Neighborhood Network is scored as low as 22.6 %. Suan Mali scored it as high as 51.7%. Meeting and Exchange Ideas have the same rate from both communities (48.3%). This expresses the similarity of importance on this issue for business and living atmosphere. These two issues are explained by Florida that there are two network relations: bonding and bridging. Bonding is the tied relationship between close relations within the community. Bridging is weak tied relationship within community which preferred for the creative class (Florida, 2008). In Suan Mali, the neighborhood network reflects a strong relationship between communities where they have bonding relationship. On the contrary, in Siam Square, exchanging for ideas is more important.

Furthermore, the questionnaires are asked to prioritize the characters (see figure 4 and 5). For Siam Square, the most priority is Well-Known of Business Area (38.7%). Second is Walkable Community (22.6%). Third is Density of People (22.6%). Fourth are Mix of Professionals and Careers, Well-Known Business of Area, and Variety of Business (12.9%). The last one is Career Opportunity (16.1%). For Suan Mali, the first priority is Walkable Community (27.6%). Second is Well-Known Business of Area (20.7%). Third is Educational Opportunity (17.2%). Fourth is Career Opportunity (13.8%). The last are Meeting and Exchange Ideas and Safe Environment for Children (13.8%).

The results show that both communities share the most priority on Well-Known Business Area and Walkable Community. These characters also support the Jacobs' and Florida's ideas on promoting the diversity of place. In addition, Siam Square has prioritized Density of People as its 3rd range. The 4th and 5th range are also the characters of place attracting creative class to join the place (Florida, 2014). On the other hand, Suan Mali has pressed the importance on Educational Opportunity and Safe Environment for Children. This is a result of the difference of age which causes a different concern on the place conditions to live or do businesses. Florida (2008) has also defined 3 stages of life: when they graduate from colleges, when they have children, and when the kids move out. Their choices of the place diversity characters are different.

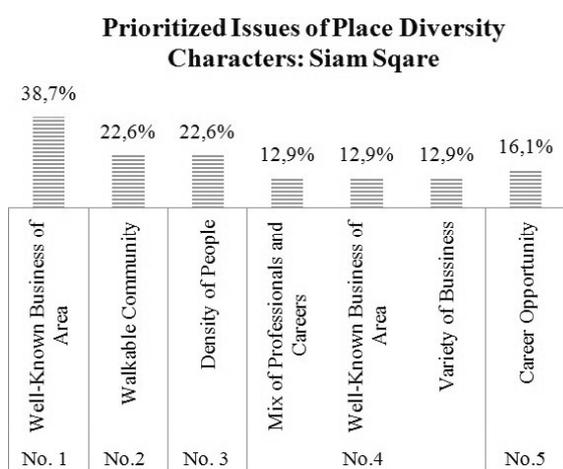


Figure 4. The priority of place diversity: Siam Square.

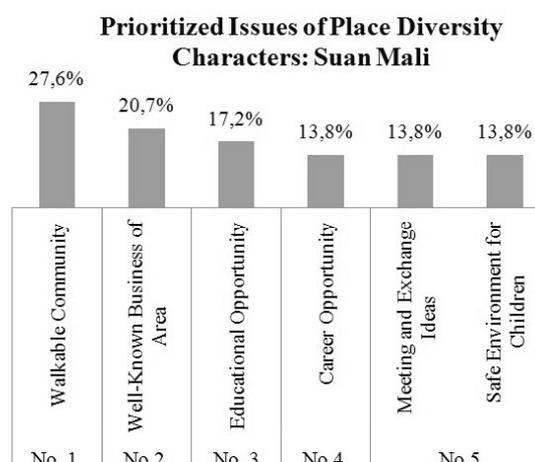


Figure 5. The priority of place diversity: Suan Mali.

4.1.2 The importance of place diversity characters for living and business

Figure 6 shows the comparison of the importance of diversity character results. For Siam Square, there are 8 issues that rated as 4.00 or higher are Mass Transit System Accessibility (4.55), Unique of Business of Community (4.50), Accessible of Outside People (4.25), Walkable Street (4.21), Diversity of Business (4.10), Support Business (4.07), Sub-leasable

(4.00), and Density of People (4.00). For Suan Mali, there are only 3 issues that rated above 4.00, Mass Transit System Accessibility (4.26), Unique of Business of Community (4.14), and Walkable Street (4.07). These could be the positive issues to draw people to live and do business.

Both communities rate Mass Transit System Accessibility as the first importance (4.55 in SS; 4.26 in SM) and rate Unique of Business of Community as the second importance (4.50 in SS; 4.14 in SM). Accessible of Outside People as the third importance in Siam Square (4.55), while it is rated the fifth importance in Suan Mali (3.64). Walkable Street is rated the fourth importance in Siam Square (4.21). However, it is rated as the third importance in Suan Mali (4.07). The different issues are that Diversity of Business is rated as fifth importance in Siam Square (4.10), whereas Building Function Adaptation is rated as fourth importance in Suan Mali (3.76). This reveals that Mass Transit System Accessibility, Unique of Business of Community, Walkable Street, and Accessible of Outside People are the shared significant importance for both communities. In general, this presents the uniqueness of the place which draw the talent people to come to find their opportunities and new challenge. Furthermore, with the easy access and open for outsiders, this reflects the importance of the openness of place which welcomes the talent people to join the place.

Besides, there are some similarities of rating the issues. Change of Physical Elements is only 0.01 differences (3.21 in SS; 3.22 in SM). Rearrange Planning is 0.19 differences (3.31 in SS; 3.12 in SM). Small Block is 0.29 differences (3.17 in SS; 2.88 in SM). Building Function Adaptation is 0.38 differences (3.38 in SS; 3.76 in SM). Low Rise Building is 0.41 differences (3.18 in SS; 3.59 in SM). These are fairly importance for both communities. In addition, all issues relate to the building flexibility and physical environment which are tremendously served with the shophouse's characters.

There is also some different prioritized importance. Sub-Leasable for Small Business is 0.89 in differences (4.00 in SS; 3.11 in SM). Mix of Various Building Design is 0.91 in differences (3.41 in SS; 2.50 in SM). Open Space for Flexible Activities is 1.04 in differences (3.71 in SS; 2.67 in SM). Open Space for Community Sharing (3.86 in SS; 2.58 in SM). These differences show that Siam Square, defined as the creative community, pays more value to rental space for the opportunity for new businesses which offers the chance to young businessmen to initiate their businesses. The various building designs also make the environment more interesting and motivate the new ideas. Moreover, the open space for the community sharing and serving various activities are also rated almost 4.00 in Siam Square; while Suan Mali is rated less than 3.00. The open spaces provide opportunities for new experiences to attract the creative class to come to the place. The new experiences are also a life preference for the creative class (Florida, 2014).

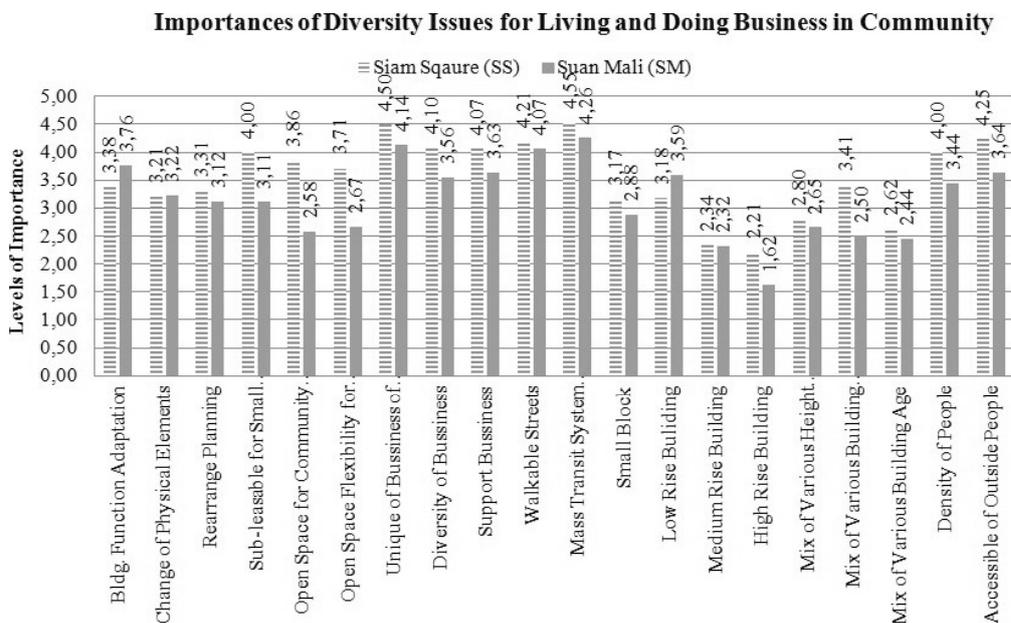


Figure. 6. The comparison of importance of the place diversity for living and business of both places.

However, both communities similarly rate the height and age of buildings with the lowest among others. Mix of Various Height Building is rated 2.80 in Siam Square and 2.65 in Suan Mali. Medium Rise Building is rated 2.34 in Siam Square and 2.32 in Suan Mali. High Rise Building is rated 2.21 in Siam Square and 1.62 in Suan Mali. Mix of Various Building Age is rated 2.62 in Siam Square and 2.44 in Suan Mali. It presents that these issues are less important to them. However, Mix of Various Height Building and Mix of Various Building Age is rather high in Siam Square. These still reflect the need of the variety of functions and activities.

4.2 Interview results

4.2.1 Major business of the district

The question asks them how they view the main business of their areas. People view the main businesses in Siam Square as fashion, restaurant, accessories, lifestyle businesses, and entertainment. The main businesses in Suan Mali are furniture, mechanical parts (wholesale), warehouses, electronic appliances, shoes, and wholesale business.

4.2.2 Attractive place characters for business

Owners in Siam Square express the reasons that draw them to live and do businesses are the old shopping area, the best shopping area of Bangkok, the center of fashion in the city, a good place to start their businesses, and mixing of different aging come to the place. This expresses the uniqueness and strong character of the place, openness, and mix of people. In Suan Mali, the old district and well-known business, easy to find support businesses (storage and workers), and its location offer a convenience to go around the city. This also expresses the same uniqueness and strong characters of the place, supporting business, and accessibility.

4.2.3 The social and economic factors encourage and discourage the business

In Siam Square, the uniqueness of business activities is its main benefit. The community positively opens for new businesses. The changeability of shophouses allows the shop design possibilities. The same business competition reinforces them to create new products which is positive for product developments.

Furthermore, the unique business draws the same interested group to start their businesses. The meeting with similar business is seen as a support for the businesses. They can exchange new ideas and new trends, learn new markets; build up the identity of the area which attract customers to come as well.

However, there are negative external factors. The city expansion has caused new shopping centers. This has reduced Siam Square's reputation as the fashion center. In addition, the landlord has not promoted activities within the area. The rental price is also unreasonable. In addition, the street hawkers on the main roads block the access and reduce walkable street atmosphere. This causes a conflict between hawkers and businessmen.

Suan Mali has a stronger relationship. They emphasize the bond of relationship with their neighborhood as the encouragement of the area. The meeting with similar business also recommends and shares the degree of reliability of the customers to each other. This also offers more product orders to each other as to help similar businesses. The negative issues are danger at night, price competition, traffic jam and difficulty to access by cars and walk. The business competition is viewed as negative aspect. There is a difficulty of renting or subleasing a building which reduces opportunities for new businesses.

4.2.4 The physical environment characters for the business support

In Siam Square, the small shophouse block creates a pleasant walkable street; an identity of place, a comfortable walk, and easy access to all the shops. In addition, within the blocks, there are some certain products and services which create identity and recognition of the area within a block.

Even though, Suan Mali has a similar shophouse block character, street patterns in some areas are confusing. As the business type is wholesale, products are mostly mechanical and electronic products. The car parking for loading occupy the pedestrians' walkways. This reduces the pleasant walkability. Furthermore, shophouses are mostly used as storages and daily offices;

therefore, there are fewer activities after evening causing the crime at night. Lastly, even if the area can be accessible from many roads, it is more private for local business than public to access. Most of the cars and motorbikes are owned by those doing business in the area.

4.2.5 *The support of shophouse for living and business*

The interviewees express that the shophouse support their businesses in many ways. In Siam Square, they positively view the shophouse flexibility potentials; freely to create and decorate their shops. In term of design, it is more variety than those department stores, freely to adapt to other kinds of businesses. In addition, the shophouse allows them to open-close the shop at any time. It can also create a good atmosphere for walking and welcome people from the street to come in. Besides, the shophouse offers the casual relationship between the shop owners and customers.

In Suan Mali, the owners state that the shophouses offer adaptability to suit their needs and can freely adapt to warehouse. It is also the mixed-use building which emphasizes the unique character of shophouses. It is convenient to sublease small spaces.

5 CONCLUSION

Siam Square and Suan Mali reflect the place diversity characters. The most business attractive diversity characters are the unique business area, walkable community, and various business activities. In addition, the most significantly important characters are mass transit system accessibility, uniqueness of business, walkable street, and people accessibility. With accessibility, walkable environment, and uniqueness of business area, these present the openness of the place which invite people whom seek for their opportunities, and also the target groups to the places for join and exchange ideas.

Even though, unique business area and walkable community remain the most prioritized issues, the result of different priority reflect the degree of importance in the main business activities, aging, and family conditions of both community interviewees. The different diversity characters show that Siam Square highlights the importance of the place openness, chances for new experiences, and exchanged ideas more than Suan Mali.

The interview results illustrate that both communities have clearly defined their business characters. Siam Square businesses are mostly retails which strongly support the concept of diversity to establish creative community. On the contrary, in Suan Mali, the wholesale business causes the negative community conditions (difficulty of leasing, danger at night, business competition, and traffic jam) which relegate the potential of the creative community encouragement.

In term of physical characters, both communities have strongly small block character. Siam Square has very good outcome of small block which support the accessibility and walkable street. Suan Mali, on the contrary, has some confusing traffic directions and uncomfortable accessibility for the new people which contradict with the questionnaire result where people accessibility is the important issue. This results from its wholesale businesses, storage function, and residents' migration.

The shophouse characters also convincingly benefit for the creative community by bracing the openness of place, people, and opportunity. The similar important diversity characters of both places are those related to the building flexibility and physical environment. The shophouses offer a great potential to create mix-use building for diverse functions and activities, to open for new people and businesses; to welcome for idea exchanges and new experiences in the area. Most importantly, it creates a good atmosphere for walking and welcoming people from the street, and offers informal relationship between shop owners and customers.

Lastly, the key to promote the creative environment is to create and improve the diversity characters of the place. Both communities present that the shophouse community greatly sustains the diversity conditions. This can be reinforced the physical creative community to nurture the new creative class in Thai society.

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