

Spatial Dialogues between Exhibited Interiors and Cultural Exteriors: How Local Museums Connect to the Community

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Abstract

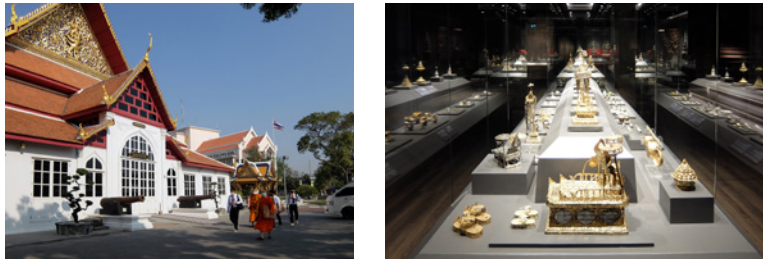
Local museums can no longer simply wait for visitors to come and see their exhibited interiors. They are tasked with community engagement and cultural continuity. They must remain relevant to their communities, but how? Recently, local museums, especially those promoting local history, have struggled to relate to rapidly changing and diverse communities. To ensure museums are community-centred spaces, this research suggests that their spatial components need rethinking. While exhibitions in local museums should be designed through a collaboration and co-creation process between museum staff and locals, semi-outdoor and exterior spaces could be organised to host community gatherings, cultural events, and public conveniences. The paper explores the spatial dialogue between exhibited interiors, semi-outdoor multifunction spaces, and cultural exteriors of four local museums in Thailand, including how they build communities and support cultural heritage. The paper elucidates that while the exhibited interiors of these local museums represent pride in treasures of the past, semi-outdoor multipurpose spaces and cultural exteriors support heritage continuity. With a combination of the three spatial components: exhibited interior, semi-outdoor multifunction space, and cultural exterior, local museums can look forward to a promising future.

Keywords: local museum, community, interior-exterior connection, culture

Introduction

In Thailand, the museum concept is a relatively new spatial typology. Over almost two hundred years, museums have evolved from private royal displays into public interiors. The Royal Museum, located within the Royal Residence of King Rama IV, was first established in 1933. It was a private place for archiving artefacts from the royal collections and was not open to the general public. These royal collections travelled to London to join the *Great London Exposition or International Exhibition of 1862*. In 1874, King Rama V established the Royal Siamese Museum at the Concordia Hall located in the Outer Court of The Grand Palace Bangkok. The exhibition was set up by Henry Alabaster, the British Vice-Consul, making it the first curated exhibition in Thailand. In 1887, this Royal Siamese Museum was relocated to the Front Palace of the Vice King, occupying the interiors of three Royal Halls, allowing public access to the display of archaeological artefacts, natural science artefacts, and scientific inventions. The National Museum Bangkok—the first public museum—was established in 1934 and occupied all buildings of the Front Palace, curated to archive and display national treasures (Thai Junior Encyclopedia Foundation, 2015). The word museum in the Thai language was established to connote a repository of meaningful artefacts for knowledge development.

Figure 1
National Museum
Bangkok in
2022 displaying
national treasures
(Photographs
by authors)



The 1960s to 1990s was a period of transformation in national museum management. During this period, forty-three national museums were constructed or occupied existing historical buildings in various cities of Thailand. The Office of National Museums, established under the Ministry of Culture, became responsible for listing, archiving, conserving, and managing displays of national treasures (The Office of National Museums, 2007). With all these historic moves, museums, especially national ones, are commonly perceived as formal institutions. Responding to the core objectives of The Office of National Museums (2007), a national museum functions as a place of historical knowledge, where the past can be understood and national identity cherished. Methods of artefact display in these national museums have evolved from how the royal collections were

curated and exhibited in the palace, promoting artefacts as treasures. In an example of the National Museum Bangkok, after undergoing a major renovation, the museum continues to focus on displaying national treasures such as gold ornaments, Buddha images, and royal thrones (Figure 1). National museums interiorised national treasures and the exhibited interiors confirm their formality. The wisdom and pride of the nation are cultivated through museum visits.



Figure 2
Exhibited interiors
of Koh Mak Museum
in 2018 (left) and
Ban Muang Ranong
Museum in 2019
(right) (Photographs
by authors)

On the other hand, the emergence of local museums in Thailand came much later, situated within the interiors of temples, town halls, or the residences of local aristocrats. Local museums are often established with limited funding support, occupying existing buildings, putting everything on display with little exhibition content, and being prone to artefact burglary. The majority of local museums in Thailand have been established using the same approach as the national museum—emphasising artefact displays to fill the interiors. It has been speculated that local communities find it difficult to connect with these artefacts, leaving local museums merely deserted artefact warehouses (Wallipodom, 2002). To a certain extent, some local museums have been unable to survive due to maintenance problems and a lack of visitors (Karnchanaporn & Lumthaweepaisal, 2020). In two examples of local museums, Koh Mak Museum and Ban Muang Ranong Museum, household objects and dilapidated artefacts filled the interior spaces of the houses for visitors to explore (Figure 2). Koh Mak Museum occupied an old house belonging to the merchant family. Ban Muang Ranong Museum occupied a house belonging to a local teacher. The museum doors were left open each day as a welcoming gesture, but with no one to care for the visitors. When visiting Ban Muang Ranong Museum in 2019, the museum appeared to be deserted and portrayed a very different atmosphere compared to the opening event in 2017. Currently, Koh Mak Museum is closed due to a lack of visitors and poor building conditions.

Researchers of the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center proposed changes to local museums during the Museum

Forum in 2002. Discussions on local community involvement during the process of constructing and curating knowledge for the exhibited interiors would help to reconnect the bond between the museum and its locality (Wallipodom, 2002). In addition, the association between the museum and its local history should include local culture. The exhibition content should be culturally related to the locality and spaces for cultural activities would be considered vital for local museums (The Office of National Museums, 2007). Where wisdom can be found in the locality, the museum should become a facilitator of cultural assets in the area. This could be achieved by setting up culturally related exhibition content, involving locals of different generations, awakening and instilling cultural values, emphasising a sense of pride in the local community, and creating a sense of belonging and diversity acceptance among locals (Koanantakool, 2012).

According to the visitor interviews, the exhibited interiors of local museums in Thailand are facing problems, with the artefact displays being neither attractive nor exciting to visitors. The time spent browsing displays is short, discouraging visitors from returning (Karnchanaporn & Lumthaweepaisal, 2020). Museums, especially local ones, can no longer simply wait for visitors, near or far, to come and view their exhibitions. With limited resources, local museums cannot operate in the same way as national museums, which focus on artefacts or treasure displays within the interiors. The concepts of serving, reaching out, and strengthening local communities are becoming vital to the management of local museums to engage not only museum visitors living nearby who can culturally relate to the museum but also the general public.

Museums as Community-Centred Places

We have been trained to think of museums as separate from communities; they are seen as buildings with collections, objects, exhibitions, and experts made available to communities on a limited basis. Referring to some museum functions as 'outreach' just reinforces this separation. By default, museums then exist as being disconnected, disengaged, and distanced from this idea of community. (Murawski, 2021, p. 20)

This phenomenon has not only happened to local museums in Thailand but is shared elsewhere, with museums being disconnected, disengaged, and distanced from the idea of community (Murawski, 2021). The concept of community in the locality context and the sense of belonging are as significant as a sense of place (Wallipodom,

2002). Community refers to a diversity of museum visitors with shared interests but different perspectives and needs. Community also means a group of people that care about each other and feel they belong together (Pfortmüller, 2017). In a community, people develop trust, collaboration, sharing, support, hope, and safety, which form relationships and shared identities. Community is about people who participate in and identify with multiple communities at the same time (Murawski, 2021). When the goals of local museums are set to represent and serve their communities, the realisability of such goals needs to be reappropriated, perhaps on a contextual basis.

When constructing local museums as community-centred places, their reconnection between people, trust, collaboration, and shared identity must involve not only the management of the museum but also members of the community. Through a participatory process, the museum and the local community should agree on the following: methods for decision-making, degree of community involvement, what to exhibit and the message to be conveyed by the displays, space distribution, management of the museum revenue, and commitment for the museum's maintenance (The Office of National Museums, 2007; Wallipodom, 2002).

Building relationships among the museum, visitors, and local community involve understanding the visitor-centred role played by museums, defining what community truly means for a museum, and shaping a set of core service values reflecting a commitment to accessibility, inclusion, justice, and human rights (Murawski, 2021). For local museums, the exhibited interiors need to be community-driven, co-created, and participatory. Local museums should invite community members to become involved with the fundamental aspects such as: In which areas should the community participate? What artefacts should the museum and locals choose to display? How are these artefacts linked to the local culture? How do the museum and locals choose the exhibition topic? What exhibition strategies does the museum use? And who will take care of the displays? After all, objects and exhibitions educate museum visitors and locals on topics considered to be important, not only to the museum but also to the community where the museum is located. Apart from displays and exhibitions, the supporting facilities of local museums are important for community building. The following questions arise on how museums can be socially responsible by providing physical space:

Do we welcome people just to be with each other in a museum setting? Do we have amenities that invite socialization? Is it easy to enter and find one's way around?

Does the place feel like a cathedral or a clubhouse? Is the building located in a neutral or non-neutral environment? And who decides? (Gurian, 2006b, p. 72)

It is argued that social bonds can be built through artefact displays and exhibitions based on storytelling, lived experience, memory, and civic engagement (Murawski, 2021). People not only visit museums to learn but also to feel (Smith, 2020). Museum visiting is considered a process of heritage-making in which cultural meaning is remade, and people invest emotionally in a certain understanding of the past and what it means for their contemporary identity (Smith, 2020). The contemporary identity shared by general museum visitors and community members can be considered part of social bonds. To build social bonds and communities, it is necessary to provide space for socialisation in the museum.

Visiting a museum is often a social outing between family and friends. Inspired and excited by the exhibited interiors, museum visitors expect to talk, interact, and share their experiences (Samis & Michaelson, 2017). Supporting facilities such as a restaurant, canteen, café, souvenir shop, or workshop area offer spaces for socialisation. These facilities should be welcoming, friendly, easy to navigate, and enjoyable. Local communities can become involved with setting up, supplying goods, and managing these facilities. Museum experiences can then be extended from exhibited interiors to these supporting facilities. Outdoor spaces are more flexible than interiors and can be used for relaxation before, between, or after exhibitions. When carefully curated and planned, outdoor spaces allow museums and locals to collaborate and conduct cultural activities, events, festivals, and ad hoc programs. These supporting facilities and outdoor spaces reflect cultural transformation while providing convenience and enjoyment for museum visitors (Karnchanaporn & Lumthaweepaisal, 2020). Culture can be animated as lived experience and social engagement formed through learning and public programs, enriching the exhibited interiors.

This paper seeks to explore four selected examples of local museums in Thailand to elucidate how spatial dialogues between exhibited interiors, semi-outdoor spaces, and cultural exteriors are established to benefit community enhancement as much as museum survival. Local museums in Thailand tend to be relatively small, commonly located inside a single building, naturally ventilated, have no supporting facilities or outdoor space, and last no more than 10 years. According to the findings of this study, these four selected local museums have been operating for more than 15 years and reopened

after the pandemic. Apart from having exhibited interiors, the four museums under study have outdoor cultural spaces and semi-outdoor supporting spaces that function as contact points between visitors and the communities (Karnchanaporn & Lumthaweepaisal, 2021). By exploring the spatial components through sectional drawings of local museums, this paper demonstrates how these museums sustain a lively atmosphere on their grounds and project the hope that they will continue to be relevant in the future.

Comparing Spatial Components of Local Museums

Four local museums have been selected to compare the relationships between three spatial components: exhibited interiors, semi-outdoor multipurpose spaces, and cultural exteriors. The selection criteria are as follows: 1) the local museums must be located in different regions of Thailand for cultural background diversity; 2) the existence of an association between the local museum and its surroundings; 3) the existence of active cultural events initiated by the local museum; and 4) the local museum possessing the three spatial components. The four selected local museums consist of the Wat Muang Folk Museum in Ratchaburi (central region), Phuket Thai Hua Museum in Phuket (southern region), Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center in Chiang Rai (northern region), and Tai Dam House of Museum in Loei (north-eastern region) (Figure 3). The diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of the selected examples demonstrate the unique relationship between local museums and the area. In this context, the local museum practically performs as a community-centred place.



Figure 3
Location of the
four selected local
museums plotted on
a map of Thailand
(Image by authors)

Wat Muang Folk Museum

The Wat Muang Folk Museum is located inside the Wat Muang Temple in Ratchaburi Province. The temple was built in 1680 by Mon ancestors who migrated from Myanmar and settled around the west bank of the Mae Klong River for over 300 years. Most of those settling in the area were Mon, inhabiting together with Thai, Chinese, Lao, Yuan, Khmer, and Karen. The various ethnic groups have created a distinctive local community in Wat Muang. Wat Muang Folk Museum and Mon Education Center were established in 1992 to preserve local treasures: antiques, artefacts, and historical instruments found in the surrounding area (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.-b). The Wat Muang Folk Museum and Mon Education Center occupy two stand-alone buildings with a connecting bridge built within the area of the temple (Figure 4 left). The exhibition focuses on the history and culture of Wat Muang community: the way of life, local wisdom, and archaeological artefacts of the Mon from the past to the present (Figure 4 right). The Mon Education Center offers a classroom and library for Mon and Buddhist study (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.-b). Other supporting facilities located in close proximity include a canteen, souvenir shop, meeting room, public toilets, and a hand-weaving fabric workshop.

Figure 4
Wat Muang Folk
Museum and Mon
Education Center
(left) and the
exhibition space
(right) (Photographs
by authors)



Figure 5
Museum's semi-
outdoor multipurpose
area (left) and a semi-
outdoor canteen with
local food stores (right)
(Photographs
by authors)



The museum building has a semi-outdoor multipurpose area at the ground level, which is used for local cultural events. The semi-outdoor multipurpose area is connected to an open-air courtyard with a *Saba* ground. *Saba* is Mon traditional play for men and women from different villages to play and get to know each other. This open-

air courtyard is occasionally hosting cultural activities. The courtyard acts as a cultural exterior and connects to the semi-outdoor canteen, souvenir shop, and hand-weaving fabric workshop (Figure 5). The hand-weaving fabric workshop allows elderly Mon to pass on their folk wisdom to the younger generation and visitors. These semi-outdoor multipurpose areas help soften the solid boundary between the museum and the Mon community.

In a sectional drawing of Wat Muang Folk Museum, the open-air courtyard of Wat Muang Folk Museum is surrounded by big trees, the museum building, and supporting facilities, forming an encircled outdoor space (Figure 6). This spatial character reflects Mon's cultural space and way of life. In the past, Mon people often utilised the outdoor space between houses for gatherings and celebrations. In the same manner, the locals use this open-air courtyard for traditional activities such as the Songkran Festival, Swan and Centipede Parade, Loy Krathong Festival, etc. The open-air courtyard is an area for cultural activities that can be witnessed and watched from the multipurpose semi-outdoor area, canteen, and souvenir shop. The semi-outdoor spaces and open-air courtyard are open to everyone, creating a lively atmosphere on the museum's ground floor. Wat Muang Folk Museum acts as a cultural ground where Mon people, museum exhibitions, and museum visitors unite.



Figure 6
Sectional drawing
of Wat Muang Folk
Museum, showing
interior-exterior
connection (Image by authors)

Phuket Thai Hua Museum

The Phuket Thai Hua Museum is in the heart of Phuket's old town. The building has a Sino-Colonial architectural style (Figure 7), representing the old town civilisation. It was formerly the first Chinese language school in Phuket, established in 1977 by migrated Hokkien Chinese. After the school relocated, the building was used as a meeting space for teachers and alumni. The museum was established through the cooperation of the community and alumni, with the aim of collecting important historical evidence on the Chinese people in Phuket. The museum was opened in 2008 to acknowledge the value of the Chinese historical past and provide a learning centre for the community. The exhibition content includes Chinese migration, settlement, beliefs, art and culture, traditions, and wisdom (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.-a).

Figure 7
Front view of Phuket
Thai Hua Museum
from Krabi road (left)
and exhibitions with
various multimedia
presentations (right)
(Photographs
by authors)



The museum's supporting facilities include a library, souvenir shop, workshop space, and public toilets, all within the same building. The museum café is special, located at the shop house adjacent to the main road, separated from the museum building but in close proximity. The museum café can be accessed either from the main road to serve the general public or from the outdoor multipurpose area to serve the museum visitor. A sectional drawing of Phuket Thai Hua Museum shows the connection between the museum building, inner courtyard, outdoor exhibition space, supporting facilities, the outdoor multipurpose area with entrance to the museum café, and parking area next to Krabi road (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Sectional drawing
of Phuket Thai Hua
Museum showing
interior-exterior
connection (Image
by authors)



The Sino-Colonial architectural style of the museum building and the artefacts it hosts encourages visitors to learn more about the history of the area. The inner courtyard of the building portrays the lifestyle of Chinese people when the place is being used as a gathering or leisure space for a stopover between other activities. The outdoor multipurpose area in front of the building provides a place for cultural activities, connecting the community to the museum. When there are no events, the outdoor space acts as a large welcoming area for receiving museum visitors. On important occasions such as the Chinese New Year Festival or Mid-Autumn Festival, it hosts culturally related events, which include orchestral music performances and a media projection on the façade. It also provides rental space for community gatherings, private celebrations, or wedding ceremonies.

The museum café has the character of the Chinese shophouse and is directly connected to the pedestrian walkway. The mural in front of the museum café draws the attention of pedestrians on Krabi road

(Figure 9). The painting represents the co-existence of local Thai and Chinese in Phuket through the traditional dessert of the Chinese community in Phuket. The museum can, therefore, indirectly interface with the city and its people. From an analysis of program placement, it can be confirmed that Phuket Thai Hua Museum provides an uplifting experience for visitors to the old town while at the same time enhancing the pride of the local Chinese community in Phuket.



Figure 9
Mural in front of the
museum café (left)
and a view of the
museum café from
Krabi road (right)
(Photographs
by authors)

Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center

The Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center was established by the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) in Chiang Rai Province. The PDA works to improve the quality of life and support education for hill tribe people in urban and rural areas. The museum and PDA are operated by Mechai Viravaidya, a former politician and activist famous for promoting the use of condoms, family planning, and AIDS awareness in Thailand. Viravaidya is also a founder of the restaurant chain Cabbages & Condoms, where condoms are given to customers with their bills. The museum was founded in 2003 and is located on the third floor of the PDA building as a source of information on tribal culture and to enhance the understanding of ethnic minorities in Northern Thailand, especially Chiang Rai (Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center, 2018). Viravaidya claims that "there is no better place to learn about a tribal culture than the Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center. ... All tourists planning to visit tribal villages must come to the Hill Tribe Museum first" (PDA Chiang Rai, n.d.-a, paras. 1–3).

The exhibition, without any multimedia, provides basic information on the way of life, objects, utensils, and costumes of the six hill tribal groups: Lisu, Akha, Yao, Hmong, Karen, and Lahu (Figure 10), along with details of the 5,500-year history of opium and its invasion of Southeast Asia. In the same building, other services support the objective of the PDA, including the Cabbages & Condoms Restaurant, family clinic, language centre, PDA Tour and Travel Office, and banqueting hall for rent. A sectional drawing of the PDA building shows the location of the restaurant (first floor), family clinic and

language centre (second floor), Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center and PDA Tour and Travel Office (third floor), PDA Office (fourth floor), and banqueting hall (fifth floor) (Figure 11). The building faces Thanalai Road, opposite Chiang Rai Walking Street (Saturday night market) and Chiang Rai City public park. The PDA Tour and Travel Office on the third floor offers community-based information for tourists, linking museum visitors to the exterior cultural activities of the Hill Tribe community.

Figure 10
Exhibition displays
provide information
on the culture of
six tribal groups in
Northern Thailand
(Photographs
by authors)



Figure 11
Sectional drawing
of the PDA building
shows the location
of interior programs.
(Image by authors)



The Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center is part of the PDA and plays a significant role in supporting the hill tribe communities. In this case, the cultural activities occur not only in the building but throughout the Hill Tribe Villages. The museum exists not only to maintain the tribes' cultural heritage but to help the social development of minority ethnics in Northern Thailand. In addition, each year, the museum organises a social project to distribute sweaters and blankets to tribal people in remote villages, disadvantaged persons, those with HIV/AIDS, and orphans (PDA Chiang Rai, n.d.-b). In this way, the social responsibilities of the local museum can be acknowledged by contemporary society.

Tai Dam House of Museum

The Tai Dam House of Museum is situated in Tai Dam Cultural Village, Ban Na Pa Nad, Loei Province. Tai Dam is an ethnic group of Tai people who migrated from Dam and Daeng River Basins in North Vietnam during the Ho War in 1882 and settled around 1905. The museum was established from 1996 to 2011 by the director of

the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education together with the villagers of Chiang Khan and then registered as Tai Dam Loei Cultural Conservation Association (Tai Dam Ethnic Groups Cultural Center, 2018). In this cultural village, Tai Dam's living culture is represented through architecture and activity. Visitors can explore a small cluster of Tai Dam vernacular housing. There is a tri-loop pole in the outdoor space for *Maklon* (ball) throw play, the traditional play of Tai Dam to enhance the ethnic gatherings and develop acquaintanceships among Tai Dam people (Figure 12).



Figure 12
At Tai Dam Cultural Village, houses form an encircled cultural exterior where villagers and visitors meet (Photograph by authors)

The upper levels of the houses are utilised as exhibition spaces, a learning centre, and a library where visitors can learn about Tai Dam's written text and characters. The semi-outdoor ground floor spaces function as a cooperative souvenir shop, information centre, and multipurpose space for cultural activities such as a traditional hand-weaving fabric workshop, Tai Dam cultural performances, and gathering area (Figure 13, left).



Figure 13
Visitors observe a Tai Dam cultural performance (left), exhibition guided by Tai Dam children (right) (Photographs by authors)

The exhibition contains information on the Tai Dam way of life, traditions, rituals, and beliefs (Tai Dam Ethnic Groups Cultural Center, 2018). A guided tour of the exhibition is led by Tai Dam children, dressed in traditional costumes, enabling them to learn and continue with their own heritage (Figure 13, right). Tai Dam cultural activities mostly

take place in the outdoor activity space between the houses (Figure 14). This cultural exterior is not just an outdoor space but also creates a sense of place for the community.

Figure 14
Tai Dam cultural activities mostly take place in the outdoor activity space between houses (Photograph by authors)



The Tai Dam Cultural Village is more than just a museum. It is an assembly place for the Tai Dam community, where thousands of Tai Dam people from around Thailand gather each year. A sectional drawing of Tai Dam Cultural Village shows the connection between the museum building, semi-outdoor multipurpose area, two outdoor activity spaces, and other supporting facilities. The outdoor activity space is where cultural activities take place. The tri-loop pole at the courtyard is a symbol of gathering, encircled by houses which help form the cultural exterior (Figure 15). The outdoor and semi-outdoor multipurpose areas become lively when the community assembles. These activity spaces have become part of the community, helping to maintain the lively atmosphere of an outdoor culture rather than interiorising it. Visitors to the museum can also experience such gatherings and enjoy various cultural events.

Figure 15
Sectional drawing of Tai Dam Cultural Village, showing interior-exterior connection (Image by authors)



More Than a Museum

Museums are predominantly institutions that hold, preserve, and exhibit objects and collections. They are also living institutions that serve a powerful role as active spaces for connection and coming together; for dialogue and different conversations; for listening and sharing; and for care, healing, and repair. Museums have the potential to tell new and diverse histories; amplify marginalized voices; celebrate unheard stories; and recognize the creativity, knowledge, expertise, and lived experience that is already

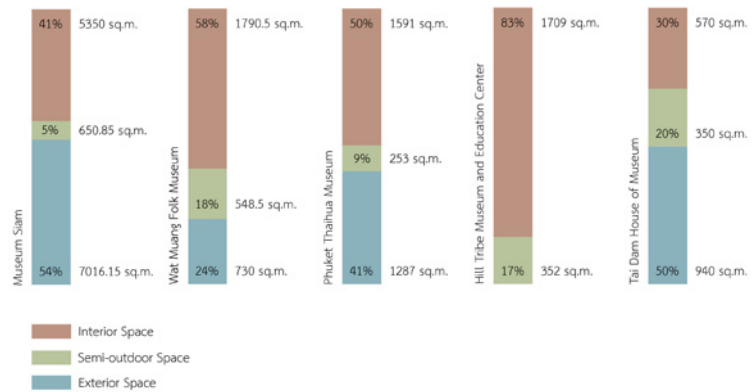
thriving within their local communities. They can be spaces for acknowledging and reflecting on differences, and for bridging divides. They can be spaces for justice, growth, struggle, love, and hope. (Murawski, 2021, p. xi)

Mixed-use spaces in museums support community building (Gurian, 2006a). From the four examples of local museums in this study, it can be observed that local museums need to increase their functionality to survive. The missions of these local museums have evolved from being object-oriented entities to becoming an agent for a cohesive community and a place to experience different cultures. Significantly, these local museums provide facilities outside their exhibited interiors to support various activities, contributing to collective civic life, cultural links, and public conveniences. The supporting facilities of the four local museums include semi-outdoor multipurpose spaces, such as a local restaurant, canteen, café, public toilets, local souvenir shop, tourist information point, library, and workshop area. Outdoor spaces are cultural grounds prescribed to support ceremonies, event rental, and ad hoc programs. These interior and exterior spaces create connections among a broad ecosystem of people, such as museum staff, members of local communities, museum visitors, and the general public.

The spatial ratios between exhibited interior, semi-outdoor multipurpose space, and cultural exterior of the four local museums are compared in this study by using the bar charts (Figure 16). In addition to the four local museums, the spatial ratio of Museum Siam, Bangkok, is presented for comparison. According to the bar chart, three space types can be observed in three local museums: Wat Muang Folk Museum, Phuket Thai Hua Museum, and Tai Dam House of Museum. Wat Muang Folk Museum and Phuket Thai Hua Museum share a similar ratio between the exhibited interiors (58% and 50%) and two other kinds of spaces (42% and 50%), respectively. Wat Muang Folk Museum and Tai Dam House of Museum account for 24% and 20% of the museum space, respectively, for semi-outdoor multipurpose areas such as a local canteen, café, public toilet, local souvenir shop, and weaving workshop. Fabric weaving is significant for the Mon ethnic group at Wat Muang Folk Museum. Whereas colourful embroidery on indigo and mud-dyed fabrics is important to the Tai Dam ethnic group. Local souvenir shops, fabric shops, and weaving workshops are all part of the museum experience. Inspired by fabric and clothing displays in the exhibited interiors, museum visitors mingle in these shops afterwards, while the canteen offers food prepared and cooked by locals. The Thai Hua Museum in Phuket has a café offering a traditional Chinese dessert about to disappear from contemporary society.

The Phuket Thai Hua Museum and Tai Dam House of Museum designate 41% and 50% of museum spaces, respectively, to outdoor spaces where cultural Chinese gatherings and Tai Dam ceremonies take place. The Phuket Thai Hua Museum offers a plaza in front of the museum for public programs and rental events. The Tai Dam House of Museum is a place where thousands of Tai Dam people who have settled in different parts of Thailand reunite once a year to worship the spirits of their ancestors and meet their relatives. The Wat Muang Folk Museum allocates 24% of its overall area to outdoor spaces where Mon ceremonies can be performed at the temple and near the river. In fact, the outdoor spaces of Wat Muang Folk Museum blend with the temple grounds and are considered to be part of the temple.

Figure 16
The spatial ratio
between exhibited
interior, semi-outdoor
multipurpose
space, and cultural
exterior of the four
local museums and
Museum Siam (Image
by authors)



Spaces at the Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center are mostly interiorised except for the parking lot. The exhibited interiors occupy the third floor of a five-story building owned by the Population and Community Development Association (PCA). With its interior spaces, the Hill Tribe Museum offers exhibitions, tourist information on public satellite programs, a family planning clinic, a language centre, and a restaurant. The Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center act as a city centre link to hill tribe communities located in the mountains.

In addition to the four local museums, the spatial ratio of Museum Siam, Bangkok is also presented for comparison (Figure 16). The Museum Siam is considered a benchmark of a museum as a civic space in Thailand as its spaces are curated and planned for exhibitions, education, and cultural activities so that the Museum Siam is to be a part of the neighbourhood as much as a destination for museum visitors (Karnchanaporn & Lumthaweepaisal, 2021). Museum Siam is the first discovery museum in Thailand established in 2008 and is recently reopened after two years of renovation in 2018. Utilising the old Ministry of Commerce building as exhibited interiors with

an additional education and training building, the Museum Siam has designated 54% of space to its outdoor spaces—a front yard with a new landmark sculpture and a back yard with an event space and an outdoor amphitheatre. The outdoor spaces are framed by museum buildings and supporting facilities such as a library, café, restaurant, and toilet, so cultural activities can be organised to happen after the museum's opening hours. Activities such as performances, public talks, music festivals, night museum activities, and pop-up markets take place in the front and the backyard of Museum Siam.

The spatial ratio bar charts indicate how outdoor spaces are important parts of the local museums. When comparing the spatial ratio between Phuket Thai Hua Museum and Tai Dam House of Museum with Museum Siam, we can see a similar approach to outdoor spaces between these museums. The Wat Muang Folk Museum has given less percentage for outdoor spaces; however, the museum's outdoor spaces unite with the temple ground. Outdoor spaces of the Hill Tribe Museum and Education Center extend as satellite programs in the Hill Tribe Villages producing cultural exteriors at the heart of Hill Tribe communities. These outdoor spaces, extending from the exhibited interiors, are vital to cultural continuity in Thailand. These outdoor spaces are not blank spaces; they are scripted with cultural activities, are marked with cultural symbols, and are framed by the exhibitions and the museum's supporting facilities. The cultural exteriors are curated to co-exist with museum experiences. Although artefact displays may remain unchanged, cultural activities can bring a sense of liveliness to these local museums.

Conclusion

When local museums extend their facilities from interior to exterior, it helps to break down the barriers between them and their local communities. Semi-outdoor multipurpose areas and outdoor communal grounds encourage local communities to perform cultural activities relevant to them. Museum visitors can experience these cultural assets first-hand as a continuation of the exhibited interiors. In terms of the local economy, restaurants, canteens, cafés, souvenir shops, and weaving workshops help develop careers and generate income for the locals. While their children assist with guided tours of the exhibition, the adults cook with local recipes for canteen customers. The locals bring their woven fabrics and handcrafts to sell at the souvenir shop and gather at the outdoor communal grounds for festivals, experiencing a sense of ownership and acting as co-owners of the museums and their facilities. These examples can be useful for local museum development in Thailand or other countries sharing similar weather conditions or cultural diversity.

In the four examples of local museums in Thailand, collaboration with the local community and partnerships with organisations such as ethnic associations, temples or religious places, public organisations, or social enterprises seem to work best. The setting up of a partnership would provide a mentoring function, help to establish teamwork, bring assistance from experts, facilitate participation with locals, and ensure the museum can be maintained with the help of locals. In this sense, local museums can be considered a community development initiative for building and strengthening the neighbourhood. Local museums can help to facilitate a new form of collaboration and community. Over time, museums will enable people from different cultural and social positions to build relationships with each other. At the same time, locals can establish a sense of relatedness and being part of something important to the community. The combination of exhibited interiors, semi-outdoor multipurpose spaces, and cultural exteriors are agents of cultural awareness, ultimately promoting cultural continuity.

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