

The Value of “*Tha Non Kon Dern*” Walking Street as a Space to Enhance Tourism in Nakhon Phanom Province

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Abstract

Walking street has become a part of the social value for locals and tourists. The image of the walking street will be changed as the space becomes more modernized to attract tourists. This article aims to study (1) the physical of the walking street setting for the zone and (2) to assess the existing qualities of the walking street as a social space for tourists. On the characteristics of tourists, data were obtained from 400 randomly selected respondents. Content analysis and descriptive statistics are used to analyze data. The following are the findings of the study:

1. The Walking Street is located on Main Street in the city's heart, beside the Mekong River. From Friday to Saturday, from 5.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m., a traditional market selling various home things is held. The setting up of tents by the merchants who typically sell garments and accessories on the street from evening to late at night was spotted in the south areas of the street. Five zones were created in the walking street area.

2. In terms of physical and landscape settings, the tourists agreed that the “*Tha Non Kon Dern*” Walking Street provided a wonderful experience. There appears to be a clear link between the physical and landscape settings, with the site context area supporting the majority of leisure or social activities. The Walking Street itself is located by Mekhong River, which is surrounded by an old historical site. Instead of only having social interaction between sellers and tourists, Walking Street creates locations for tourists to sit and pause, allowing people to socialize, watch and listen to other people, or enjoy the sight, sound, and scent.

Keywords: Tourism Development; Walking Street; Nakhon Phanom Province

Introduction

Walking streets in Thailand are nighttime street markets located in urban or suburban areas that provide travellers with a more pleasant walking, shopping, and dining experience (Kingkan, 2014). The walking streets are one of Thailand's most popular shopping destinations, offering travellers unique exclusive activities, shops, products, and cultural space. The Walking Street depicts Thailand's history, culture, and economy, providing an authentic taste of Thai life (Suwanvijit, 2016). The majority of walking streets include entertainment, local goods, local consumers and vendors, and local traditions; many offer a variety of traditional products

and items, such as native foods, natural products, beautiful snacks, and oddities. The strolling streets also offer traditional knowledge and culture that cannot be found anywhere else and during regular hours (Mateo-Babiano and Ieda, 2007). To attract tourists, the Thai government has funded various local Thailand night markets and walking streets, both on a local and international level. According to Thailandometers (2016), the largest tourist attraction is native delicacies, particularly Tom Yam Kung and Pad Tai, followed by shopping on pedestrian streets such as Kad Sun Kew (Changmai Province) and historical monuments. This data demonstrates that walking streets are a popular tourist attraction in Thailand, encouraging locals to keep their traditional culture, which encourages a combination of traditional culture and shopping interests in Walking streets.

Even though the walking street can reflect a town's or city's traditional culture, enhancing sustainable cultural tourism, the significance of the walking street as a space of traditional culture has not received much attention in tourism studies, leading to the following two research objectives.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the physical walking street space setting for the zone.
2. To assess the existing qualities of the walking street as a social space for tourists.

Literature Review

The Walking Street is an urban space typology (Abrahale et al., 2019). It is one of the most popular activities on the streets as Carmona (2021) mentions that "...the activities they offer can encourage people to use the street". Usually, tourists visit Walking Street for shopping while interacting with other people, making the street more lively, dynamic, and vibrant. In this sense, the walking streets benefit the residents and tourists by playing an essential role as a marketplace. Tourists can buy goods from everyday items to unique products of the area. Usually, tourists expect a different locality to offer different types of walking street. It can allow tourists to experience different traditional cultures, goods, social interactions and other activities at the walking Street (Sekhani et al, 2019).

Some walking street offer distinctive and authentic products setting that turn them into a shopping area for tourist's destination. Tourists can understand and gain knowledge of some part of the traditional culture by visiting a walking street, usually made up for informal business activities by the local people in the area (Zhu, Song and He, 2020). The revenue produced from the walking-street activities contributes to the country's economy as well as the tourism industry (Evans, 2019). The vendors and local sellers can gain higher income when more tourists visit the night market. Moreover, the social interaction between the local people around the night walking street also give tourists an experience by talking to a local people, which can create an excellent memorable experience for the tourists. In sum, Figure 1 depicts the value flow of walking street, which becomes the conceptual model guiding this study.

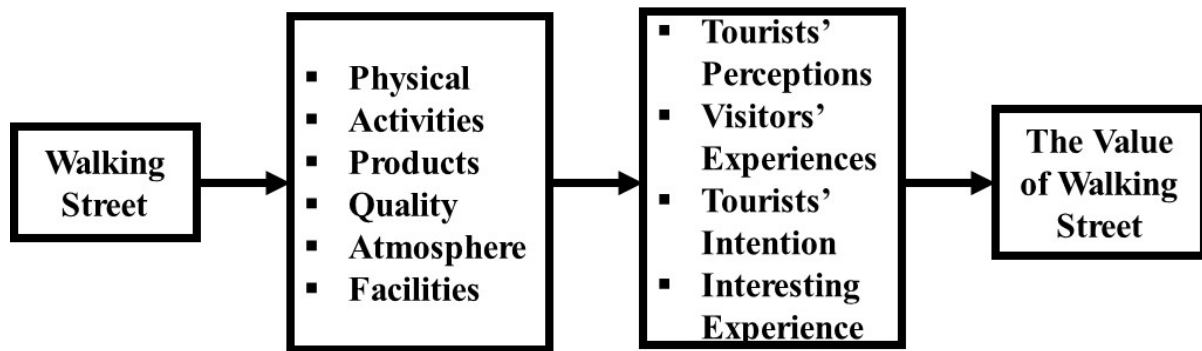


Figure 1. The conceptual framework

Methodology

Area Case Study

The study was conducted on the “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. It is the second most famous attraction for tourists to visit after Phra Thatpanom Pagoda.

The nearly one-kilometer-long walking Street is located alongside Sunthornwijit Street. It is well-known to tourists as historical sites surround it, old buildings, café’, magician view of Mekhong River and other tourist attractions. It operates Friday - Saturday starting from 5.00 p.m. till 10.00 p.m. Traditional handcraft, native food, T-shirts and souvenirs are mainly well-known products in Nakhon Phanom.

The walking street was chosen as a case study for its value as a tourist attraction site, and it represents a space for indicating traditional cultural significance. To achieve the aim and objectives of this study, extracting several pieces of information and data are needed, which are to classify the spaces and elements that shape the street market’s setting and experience. This study evaluated insights of the tourists towards the vibrancy of walking street and its qualities as a commercial, social and cultural space among locals and tourists. The findings can guide the improvement of the quality and image of the walking street itself and other street markets in Thailand as tourist attractions.

Data Collection

Data collection was required on the physical setting, the elements of the spaces, activities and tourists’ experiences. Three main methods were employed during the data collection:

- (1) observation and survey using a questionnaire, and
- (2) semi-structured interview.

Data were derived from distributing survey questionnaires among the walking street tourists. The observation was conducted on the weekend of January - February 2021, from 4 p.m. till 10.30 p.m.

Observation and Survey

The observation was completed in two main phases to ensure that the data were collected systematically and allowed for analysis from the first phase before starting the second phase (Pandey and Pandey, 2015).

1) First Phase-Observation and Participant Observation

According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), participant observation is used when the observer participates and shares the same experience as the observed group. The interpretation of the experiences is included as primary data. The first phase elicited the physical context and element of the space.

In order to build patterns and theories, perception and satisfaction were gained from tourist visits were made to the participants. The survey collected information from 400 randomly selected respondents on the characteristics of tourists, such as demographic background, assessment of the social value of the walking street, commercial value and cultural value of the walking street, and the visitors' opinions and recommendations on the walking street for subsistence purposes. The sample represented the quality and value of the walking street, while the survey used closed-ended questions to generate multiple-choice responses.

2) Second Phase-Direct Observation

The second phase was carried out as the observer occupied the case study site. The observation was documented through site mapping and photographing, based on the checklist created from the First-Phase, which has been prepared previously to ensure the fieldwork is focused on the objectives.

The direct observation method gathered data on the following aspects:

(1) Observe and identify the condition and quality of commercial space, social space and landscape space on the walking street.

(2) Identify the physical elements, especially, hardscape elements, and to relate to how the elements influence the spaces' appearance and users' behaviors

(3) Observe tourists' activities in order to understand their behaviour patterns and how they react to the existing space in the walking street, and the types of products to identify the abundance of products being sold, which may or not being part of the distinctive character of the walking street.

Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews provided a platform for validating some points of view of the sellers toward the walking street as an attraction that served the tourists in terms of the products, cultural activities and their satisfaction and suggestions regarding the existing qualities of the walking street.

The semi-structured Interviews were derived from the thematic patterns obtained by analyzing the individual in-depth interviews; 30 sellers were selected upon their willingness to participate in the interview. The sequence of question topics that guided the semi-structured interview was: type of product, such as food, art and craft, accessories, gadgets and souvenirs and walking street quality improvement.

Data Analysis

Descriptive univariate analyses, such as means and standard deviations, describe the profile of the sample, and the data were then analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel.

Research Results

Physical Setting and Circulation Objective 1

The result showed that the “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street is located in the city centre of Chayangkool Street, precisely in Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand. It has three main parts: the settlement, market, and night market. The settlement contains densely populated permanent old houses with narrow alleys to be crossed by only pedestrians. Moreover, the settlement and market are directly adjacent to the clock tower. The clock tower is the landmark of Walking Street. “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street is a traditional market where varieties of household items are being sold from Friday - to Saturday starting from 5.00 p.m. till 10.00 p.m. It consists of a row of semi-permanent and non-permanent stalls surrounding the settlement behind it. Also, it contains several accesses between the rows of booths to the settlement for pedestrians. The Walking Street is located on Main Street along Maekhong River in the central city. Chayangkool Street is split by Nittayo Road, which stretches from South to North to form the West and East sections of the street. Trading activities started in the south sections with tents by the sellers who usually sell clothes and accessories on the street from evening to late. The walking street area was divided into five zones, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Physical the space setting for the zone

	Fictional	Structure	Behavioral
Zone A	“ <i>Tha Non-Kon Dern</i> ” Walking Street traders occupy the Chayangkool Street section; thereby, Clock Tower and the traffic flow diverted to another Street the Walking Street is only allowed for pedestrian buyers. At the same time, special parking is provided in the entrance area and	Improves the relationships between the traders, tents, carts, and stalls. Provides benefits for the residents who live around the street and the vendors when they rent out part of their house or yard for migrant traders to store their tents and merchandise. Provides seasonal employment	Weak territory boundaries as observed with the lack of distinct boundaries between business spaces Weak privacy level as indicated by the allowance of buyers into the business space.

	several points in the market for those with motorbikes and cars.	for the residents to work as a motorcycle and car park guards.	
Zone B	The zone is not affected by “ <i>Tha Non-Kon Dern</i> ” Walking Street. The night market traders can open their business from morning to night, although sometimes they do not sell.	Traders in this zone have been selling at “ <i>Tha Non-Kon Dern</i> ” Walking Street for a long time.	Inadequate privacy level as indicated by the allowance of buyers into the business space. Weak territory boundaries are observed with the lack of distinct boundaries between business spaces. Very quiet traders and their behavior show they are sometimes lazy to open their stall because they can.
Zone C	The traffic flow is very dense and busy in this zone.	There is a smooth relationship between traders due to the absence of migrant traders.	Firm territory boundaries as shown by slow-down with dividers and entryways within the places utilized as commerce space; There is a strong level of privacy and only certain people have access.
Zone D	This Street section includes the distribution area of the night market and contains two types of business spaces: the cart and stall.	In this zone, the walking street traders do not close the stalls and public streets, unlike in Zone A and use carts without closing the stalls belonging to the leading market traders.	The stall traders sit cross-legged while waiting or serving the customers while the cart traders sit on their cart benches. The traders are prone to rain and usually prepare tarpaulin materials to cover their merchandise.
Zone E	Zone E is the only zone not used as a business or parking space in the Jiung Market Area. The small dimensions of the bridge and the absence of fences make it difficult for traders to sell and buyers to move around. The bridge is also relatively high from the Street body and only accessed using stairs, making it difficult for motorbikes to pass and park.	It is only helpful for pedestrians to cross Kemayoran Gempol Street from the West to the East and vice versa.	Pedestrians need to be careful on the bridge due to its narrow width and absence of guardrails.

Activities

According to the survey, most tourists would walk and shop on the walking street between 6 and 9 p.m. Vendors selling their wares, visitors shopping, tourists taking photographs, and sightseeing are all part of the pedestrian street activities. However, there are no supporting social spaces in the pedestrian street space, such as chairs or a gathering area. The restaurants and cafés next to the pedestrian street hosted most of the socializing and gathering activities.

Products

According to the survey of products sold on Walking Street, the site is brimming with low-cost knockoffs such as watches, bags, and other accessories. Other well-known items include arts and crafts, souvenirs, gadgets, accessories, clothing, toys, and regional cuisine. Around 60 stalls on Walking Street were not organized into defined zones or product categories. For example, arts and crafts products could be shown alongside gadget stalls or other vendors. The merchants usually display their things by arranging them on the tables in a specified order, hanging them in a bunch, or arranging them in pieces.

Assess the existing qualities of the walking street as a social space for tourist Objective 2

The results show two factors identified to assess the existing qualities of the walking street as a social space for tourists, which are in terms of the atmosphere and the services.

The qualities of the “Tha Non-Kon Dern” Walking Street that create the atmosphere are shown in Table 2.

According to the tourists, the “Interaction between sellers and tourists”, as well as the sense of discovery that led the tourists to discover new things in the market, add to the mood of the strolling street, which can lead to the tourists’ intention to return to the market again. Most tourists ranked the sensation of discovery higher than the other categories.

Table 2. Atmosphere at the “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street

	\bar{x}	SD
Friendly environment	3.25	0.84
Sense of welcoming	3.20	0.82
Sense of comfort	3.43	0.77
Sense of discovery	3.52	0.52
Interaction between tourists and sellers	3.12	0.67

As noted in Table 3, the walking street facilities are comprised of the parking area, seating area, dustbin, eating area, and assembly area. The finding shows that tourists agreed that the walking street has good facilities in terms of eating area (mean=3.41), assembly area (mean=3.28) and dustbins (mean = 3.11). However, most of the eating and assembly area is located at the Mekhong river bank and not within a walking street. The survey also found that the tourists were less satisfied with the availability of seating areas and parking areas.

Table 3. The condition of the existing facilities at “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street

	\bar{x}	SD
Parking area	2.98	0.77
Seating area	2.53	0.86
Eating area	3.41	0.61
Assembly area	3.28	0.66
Dustbins	3.11	0.75

The evaluation of the cultural value and commercial value of “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street

The finding identified the tourists’ perceptions of the factors that strongly contribute to the cultural and commercial value of the walking street. Six criteria represent the cultural value: physical setting, products, local activities, local people, atmosphere, and the design image (Table 4). Most of the tourists agreed that the local activities (mean=4.55) and products and atmosphere (mean=4.36) have a substantial contribution to the cultural value of a space, followed by the local people (mean=4.32) and physical setting (mean=3.5) respectively.

Table 4. The perception of tourists on the cultural value

	\bar{x}	SD
Physical setting	4.23	0.56
Products	4.36	0.73
Local activities	4.55	0.64
Local people	4.32	0.82
Atmosphere	4.36	0.93
The design image	4.02	0.58

The top three cultural experiences at the “Tha Non-Kon Dern”

Walking Street that tourists agreed on are the presence of atmosphere reflecting local culture, attractive physical setting and product variety (Table 5). The finding found the same perception towards the cultural value and how they experienced the “culture” itself on the walking street. The experience of the atmosphere reflecting a local culture that reflects the cultural image was ranked the almost among tourists. This showed that the cultural design image of the walking street meets the expectations of tourists in terms of experiencing the cultural value. On the other hand, the result shows the products cannot reflect the cultural value, which may be explained by the evidence that there were repetitive products sold and a lack of socializing area within the walking street itself. Almost all the shops along the walking street, the stalls displayed similar items, and there was a lack of unique and authentic traditional products.

Table 5. Visitors’ experience of the cultural values at “Tha Non-Kon Dern” Walking Street

	\bar{x}	SD
Attractive physical setting	3.97	0.64
Local activity attraction	3.43	0.51
Atmosphere reflecting local culture	4.12	0.93
Product variety	3.66	0.82
Interesting product display	3.47	0.58
Traditional products	3.21	0.63

As seen in Table 6, there are no different patterns on the products and items tourists buy or intend to buy. Most tourists tend to appreciate things that reflect their accessories and experience and consider the places they visit, and are willing to purchase products. Clothes, bags, shoes and accessories, gadgets and art and craft were the preferred items. On the other hand, the least preferred things are typical food and beverages and local food and beverage. They were usual products that were unimportant and less memorable to their experience of the “Tha Non-Kon Dern” Walking Street.

Table 6. Products that were bought or intended to buy among visitors at “Tha Non-Kon Dern” Walking Street

	\bar{x}	SD
Local food and beverage	3.63	0.64
Common food and beverage	3.69	0.75
Art and craft	3.70	0.63
Clothes, bags, shoes and accessories	3.75	0.54
Gadgets	3.72	0.91

At the end of the survey questionnaire of this section, the respondents were asked to evaluate the exciting experience that “*Tha Non Kon Dern*” Walking Street offered for them (Table 7). The evaluation was made based on four aspects, which are the commercial activities, social activities, landscape setting and physical setting there. The result shows that the tourists agreed that the “*Tha Non Kon Dern*” Walking Street offered an excellent experience in terms of physical setting and landscape setting. There seems to be a definite correlation between the physical setting and landscape setting. Previous result showed that most of the leisure or social activities were supported by the site context area. The Walking Street itself located by Mekhong River and around by old bulging historical site as a result, setting the spaces for tourists to sit and stop can function to encourage people to socialize, watching and listening to other people or enjoying the sight, sound and smell, instead of just having social interaction between sellers and tourists. It can be determined that the value of the walking street did not depend on its commercial activities, but depend on the social activities and physical setting as well as landscape setting. Indirectly, the atmosphere and social activities there are represented the cultural activities of Nakhon Phanom Province as the walking street.

Table 7. Interesting experience that “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street offered for Tourists

	\bar{x}	SD
Commercial activities	3.94	0.96
Social activities	3.47	0.43
Landscape setting	4.12	0.63
Physical setting	4.36	0.72

It is imperative to understand the essential factors to attract all categories of tourists. Figure 2 concludes from the finding that improving the role of walking streets as a cultural space enhances tourism in urban areas.

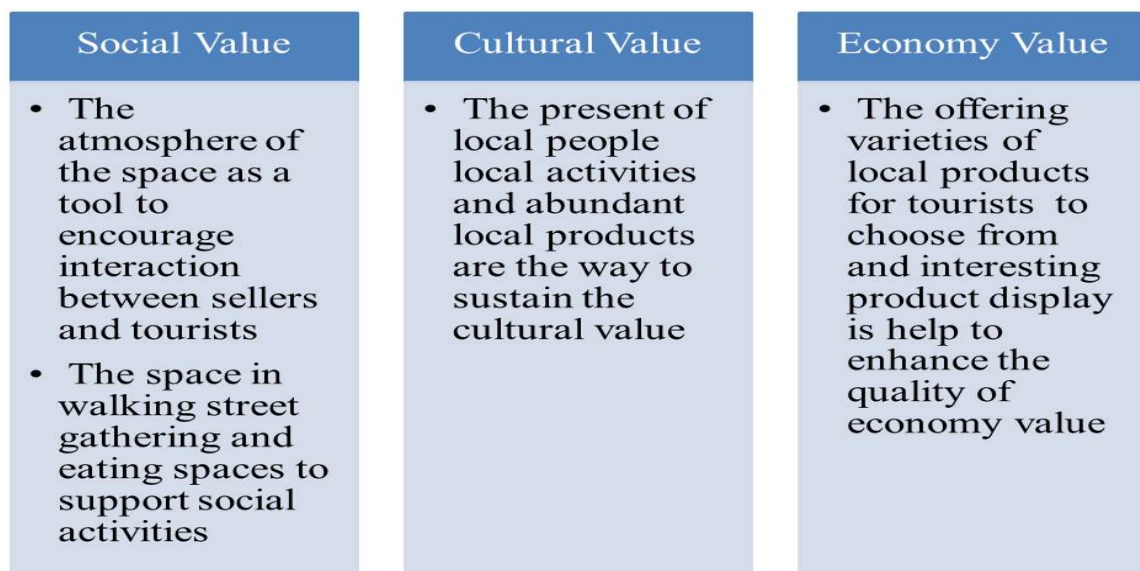


Figure 2. The Value of “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street

Knowledge from Research

It is crucial to understand the tourists’ perspectives towards the Night Market in order to serve as a reference for further development of the place and other tourist night markets in the future. Walking Street serve as a tourist attraction should be planned not only to satisfy the needs of local people, but also the needs of tourists. Thus, it is essential to understand the critical factors to attract both categories of visitors.

This study concludes by suggesting that in order to improve the role of the street market as an urban cultural space (Zhang et al, 2019), it needs to possess these qualities:

1. **Social value:** The atmosphere of the space needs to encourage interaction between seller and tourists, friendly environment and evoke a sense of discovery (An, et al, 2021). The area also requires gathering and eating spaces to support social activities within it for it to be livelier.
2. **Cultural value:** In order to sustain the cultural value, the walking street needs to be vibrant with the presence of local people, has enjoyable local activities and abundant local products (Farhan and Anwar, 2016).
3. **Commercial value:** Since visitors look for products that represent the local place, the walking street should offer varieties of local products for tourists to choose from and exciting product display can further enhance the quality of commercial activities.

It is interesting to note that such commercial activities on the street bear extraordinary values (De Marchi et al., 2018). In other words, walking street is a visible urban culture which bears the city’s wealth of public life (Mumford, 2016; Carmona, 2021). Thus, conserving “the life” on the streets is crucial for the city’s image while providing for the needs and satisfying for locals and tourists.

Conclusion

This study identifies numerous gaps to fill, such as insufficient seating areas, the similarities of the products sold, the arrangement of the sellers, and less parking. Based on the findings from the analysis, several issues have been listed to develop the “*Tha Non-Kon Dern*” Walking Street with more values and functions to provide the walking street as a cultural value space for the tourists and visitors. For the topics that guide the design recommendation at the street market, most tourists and visitors suggested better facilities and organized arrangement of the booths, providing better facilities such as parking and seating areas. The tourists and visitors would have a more favorable visit, and the market would become more engaging also exciting, which could inspire tourists to enjoy walking in the walking street.

Recommendation

The recommendations are based on the limitations identified from the findings, such as the walking street should provide more seating areas, and local crafts need to develop. By providing better facilities such as parking, seating, and signage, tourists would have a more

advantageous visit, and the walking street will become more engaging and exciting. This could also encourage tourists to enjoy walking in the walking street.

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