

# Revitalizing urban vernacular architecture: placemaking through participatory action, a case study of the abandoned new world department store in Bangkok

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## Abstract

The academic exploration of "Urban Vernacular Architecture" remains limited due to its emerging nature, resulting in definitional debates and a reliance on visual data collection. This study seeks to enrich the concept of "Urban Vernacular Architecture" through Participatory Action Research (PAR), wherein researchers and collaborators employed design intervention and curated contemporary exhibitions/festivals within the abandoned New World Department Store in Bangkok's historic Bang Lamphu district. Over a three-year span, two events aimed to invigorate the area's physical, social, and economic dimensions.

The study of urban vernacular architecture intersects seamlessly with the methodology of participatory placemaking. Both emphasize community engagement in shaping the built environment. Urban vernacular architecture acknowledges the organic evolution of urban spaces, often influenced by local residents. Participatory placemaking empowers communities to actively contribute to the design and development of public spaces. Together, they promote inclusive, culturally resonant environments, where communities have a direct hand in creating spaces that reflect their identities, values, and needs.

This case study emphasized robust community engagement, encompassing problem formulation, design, execution, and evaluation. The department store grappled with challenges stemming from government intervention, exceeding legal parameters, partial demolition, and ensuing accidents. Its lengthy closure adversely affected the district's vibrancy, rendering it less conducive to effective placemaking.

The exhibitions/festivals effectively breathed life into the building and its surroundings. The inaugural 2020 event catered to the local community, fostering shared experiences and rekindling connections with the building and district—essential elements of successful placemaking. The subsequent 2022 event targeted a younger demographic and the public. The findings demonstrated that design intervention and exhibitions/festivals significantly bolstered local awareness, community ownership, and potential economic rejuvenation—a vital aspect of placemaking.

Nevertheless, challenges persist in transforming the building from its problematic past into a constructive force. The study advocates for a pragmatic approach, centering on harnessing the building's latent potential for both its own betterment and the district's enhancement— an approach that aligns seamlessly with placemaking principles. This reflective stance encourages a comprehensive exploration of the building's impact and its symbiotic relationship with the district's overall character and aspirations.

**Keyword:** Placemaking, Participatory Action Research, Urban Vernacular, New World Department Store

### 1. Introduction: Defining Urban Vernacular Architecture

Bernard Rudofsky introduced the term "architecture without architects" in his book, "Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture" (1964). This phrase underscores the organic development of architectural forms through local traditions and pragmatic necessities, often devoid of formal professional intervention. It encapsulates the essence of vernacular architecture, which arises from indigenous practices and serves as a testament to the ingenuity of communities in responding to their specific environmental, cultural, and functional requirements. Rudofsky's articulation highlights the significance of acknowledging and valuing vernacular architecture as a vital component of the built environment, offering insights into culturally rooted and contextually sensitive design solutions. While vernacular architecture studies have predominantly centered on rural contexts, emphasizing natural materials and ethnic groups, it is imperative to redirect scholarly attention towards urban settings. Urban vernacular architecture encapsulates the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and modern urbanism, offering invaluable insights into the evolving fabric of cities. Examining adaptations, materials, and spatial organization in urban environments not only enriches our understanding of architectural evolution but also informs contemporary urban planning and design practices. Acknowledging the significance of urban vernacular architecture heralds a critical shift in architectural discourse, addressing the pressing challenges and opportunities of urbanization in the twenty-first century.

The term "urban vernacular architecture" encompasses a rich tapestry of architectural expressions rooted in the cultural, social, and historical contexts of urban environments. Emerging definitions and studies of this term highlight both differences and similarities, reflecting diverse perspectives and methodologies within the field. Urban vernacular architecture extends this notion to urban settings, where the built environment responds to urbanization dynamics, yet retains elements of the vernacular. Paul Oliver (2008)'s research accentuates cultural dimensions, asserting that urban vernacular architecture negotiates universal human needs and local identity. Oliver posits that understanding this architecture requires decoding the ways in which culture influences spatial arrangements and design solutions.

David Rodwell (2003)'s work shifts the focus to urban preservation. He highlights the interplay between historical continuity and adaptive strategies within urban vernacular contexts. The term's evolution reflects a growing appreciation for sustainability and cultural heritage. Balkrishna Doshi (1983) adds a sociopolitical perspective, emphasizing how urban vernacular architecture can empower communities and contribute to nation-building. Doshi's lens positions urban vernacular architecture as an agent of social change and cultural preservation. Anthony D. King (2004) addresses globalization's impact on urban vernacular architecture. King argues that while globalization may lead to homogenization, local expressions endure, giving rise to hybrid urban forms. This perspective underscores the dynamic nature of urban vernacular architecture within a global context. Robert Venturi (1966)'s ideas further enrich the discourse. Venturi's notion of the "decorated shed" challenges traditional architectural hierarchies, suggesting that urban vernacular architecture can engage with symbolism, history, and communication in unique ways.

The emerging definitions of urban vernacular architecture reveal both differences and similarities. While diverse scholars emphasize cultural, preservation, sociopolitical, and global dimensions, a unifying thread exists in acknowledging the intimate relationship between architecture and its urban context. This relationship underscores the need to examine how urbanization, cultural dynamics, and functional necessities shape architectural forms while also acknowledging the enduring influence of local traditions and identities. In conclusion, the study of urban vernacular architecture is a multifaceted endeavor. Scholars explore the nuanced interplay between urbanization, culture, heritage, and architectural design. These divergent perspectives contribute to a holistic understanding of urban vernacular architecture's significance within the evolving urban landscape. The absence of a unanimous agreement is exemplified by several prominent approaches that have primarily directed research into urban vernacular architecture:

- **Cultural Analysis:** Scholars such as Paul Oliver (2008) underscore the paramount significance of cultural analysis, delving into how urban vernacular architecture serves as both a mirror and a sculptor of cultural practices, social norms, and communal identities within urban milieus.
- **Historical Preservation:** David Rodwell (2003)'s seminal contributions pivot towards the preservation of historical urban landscapes. His scholarship delves into adaptive strategies that ingeniously sustain the authenticity of urban vernacular architecture while adroitly accommodating the exigencies of contemporary life.
- **Sociopolitical Context:** Balkrishna Doshi (1983)'s lens discerns the potent role of urban vernacular architecture in the tapestry of sociopolitical dynamics. Doshi discerns its latent capacity to embolden marginalized communities and proffer a participatory avenue for nation-building endeavors
- **Globalization and Hybridization:** Anthony D. King (2004) expounds upon the ramifications of globalization upon urban vernacular architecture. He accentuates the coalescence of local expressions and global forces, delineating the emergence of hybrid urban forms amidst the encroaching tide of homogenization.
- **Architectural Semiotics:** Inspired by Robert Venturi (1966)'s pioneering insights, scholars delve into the semiotic underpinnings of urban vernacular architecture. Venturi's nuanced proposition of the "decorated shed" unfurls an avenue for deciphering the semiotic intricacies wherein symbolism, communication, and historical narratives are intricately interwoven within architectural configurations.

These exemplary paradigms underscore the multi-faceted nature of urban vernacular architecture study, exemplifying diverse trajectories that align with cultural, preservationist, sociopolitical, globalizing, and semiotic vantages. While these trajectories delineate discrete foci, they collectively enrich the burgeoning discourse surrounding urban vernacular architecture, mirroring its intrinsic complexity within the urban panorama. While these approaches shed light on urban vernacular architecture, the field's ongoing emergence has limited comprehensive exploration. As the field matures, interdisciplinary collaborations and innovative research methodologies will likely contribute to a more nuanced and holistic

understanding of urban vernacular architecture. The topic encompasses a multidimensional concept influenced by diverse factors. While a universally accepted definition may still be emerging, several key components can be identified that collectively contribute to the identification of urban vernacular architecture.

- **Cultural Embeddedness:** Urban vernacular architecture is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of a place. It embodies the values, traditions, and way of life of a specific community or society.
- **Adaptation to Context:** Urban vernacular architecture responds to the specific urban context, considering factors such as climate, topography, available materials, and functional requirements. This adaptation reflects the principle of "fit" between architecture and environment.
- **Local Materials and Techniques:** The use of locally available materials and construction techniques is a hallmark of urban vernacular architecture. This practice ensures sustainability and is emblematic of the concept of "architecture without architects."
- **Functional Efficiency:** Urban vernacular architecture is designed to meet the practical needs of its inhabitants. It prioritizes functionality and utility, often resulting in spatial layouts and design solutions that are optimized for daily life.
- **Community Involvement:** Urban vernacular architecture is often a collective endeavor, involving the participation of the local community in design, construction, and adaptation processes. This communal engagement fosters a sense of ownership and cultural continuity.
- **Evolution Over Time:** Urban vernacular architecture evolves organically over time, reflecting changes in societal, economic, and cultural dynamics. This concept aligns with the idea of living traditions that adapt and persist through generations.
- **Visual Identity:** Urban vernacular architecture may exhibit distinct visual characteristics that contribute to its identification within an urban landscape. These visual cues often result from a combination of historical influences and local design preferences.
- **Narratives and Symbolism:** Symbolic elements and narratives embedded within architectural forms contribute to the cultural richness of urban vernacular architecture. Robert Venturi (1966)'s notion of the "decorated shed" emphasizes the role of symbolism and communication in architectural design.

In conclusion, urban vernacular architecture refers to the traditional, locally rooted architectural styles and techniques that have developed organically in urban environments over time. It is the architectural expression of a particular place, influenced by the local culture, climate, available materials, and socio-economic context. Unlike formal, standardized architectural styles that may be imposed or designed by professional architects, urban vernacular architecture evolves through the collective efforts and needs of a community. It often embodies a deep understanding of local conditions and reflects the practical solutions developed by generations to address specific challenges. Urban

vernacular architecture can be seen in various aspects of a cityscape, including residential buildings, public spaces, markets, and other structures. These buildings often exhibit distinctive features that are adapted to the urban environment. As cities evolve and modernize, urban vernacular architecture may face challenges from urban planning, zoning regulations, and economic pressures. However, it remains a crucial aspect of a city's cultural heritage and can contribute to a sense of identity and continuity within rapidly changing urban landscapes. Studying and preserving urban vernacular architecture is important for understanding the history and character of cities and for promoting sustainable, culturally rich urban environments.

The study of urban vernacular architecture intersects seamlessly with the methodology of participatory placemaking. Both emphasize community engagement in shaping the built environment. Urban vernacular architecture acknowledges the organic evolution of urban spaces, often influenced by local residents. Participatory placemaking empowers communities to actively contribute to the design and development of public spaces. Together, they promote inclusive, culturally resonant environments, where communities have a direct hand in creating spaces that reflect their identities, values, and needs. This collaborative approach fosters a deeper sense of ownership and belonging, resulting in vibrant, sustainable urban areas that truly serve their inhabitants. Moreover, this study attempts to enhance the conceptual framework of "urban vernacular architecture" through the application of participatory action research. In this methodological approach, the author and collaborators engaged in design interventions and orchestrated contemporary exhibitions and festivals within the disused premises of the New World Department Store, situated in the culturally significant Bang Lamphu district of Bangkok.

The overarching objective of this paper was to reanimate the physical, socio-cultural, and economic facets of the locality over a comprehensive three-year timeframe starting in 2020. By combining participatory action research with architectural intervention and community engagement, this study sought to explore and reimagine the multifaceted dimensions that define urban vernacular architecture within an evolving urban context. This endeavor aligns with the perspectives of Rapoport (1969), who accentuates the integration of local traditions and functional adaptations within vernacular architecture. The participatory nature of the research resonates with Doshi (1983)'s emphasis on communal involvement and empowerment in architectural processes. Moreover, the engagement with historic urban spaces and the conceptualization of events within them reflect Rodwell (2003)'s notions of conservation and adaptability. The initiatives undertaken within the New World Department Store embrace the principles of cultural analysis advocated by Paul Oliver (2008), where architectural interventions are envisaged as mechanisms to reflect and catalyze cultural expressions. Furthermore, the exploration of symbolism and narratives embedded within the design interventions echoes Venturi (1966)'s semiotic perspective. In summary, this study's utilization of participatory action research and its amalgamation of architectural intervention and community engagement serve as a comprehensive approach to enrich the understanding of "urban vernacular architecture." By drawing from the scholars' viewpoints, the research seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on the interplay between architectural heritage, community dynamics, and urban revitalization.

## 2. Methodology: Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) plays a crucial role in the realms of urban rehabilitation and participatory placemaking, offering a collaborative approach to understanding and transforming urban spaces. Grounded in the principles of co-creation and community engagement, PAR facilitates the active involvement of stakeholders, contributing to more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and sustainable urban interventions. It is characterized by its collaborative approach, empowering communities through active involvement in research, decision-making, and intervention implementation (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This methodology operates under a bottom-up perspective, prioritizing local residents and stakeholders, and thereby shaping urban spaces based on their knowledge, experiences, and aspirations (Kendon et al., 2007). Informed by critical theory, PAR addresses power dynamics, social inequalities, and structural challenges inherent in urban rehabilitation and placemaking (Lewin, 1946; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The theoretical paradigms of "participatory planning" proposed by Friedmann and "insurgent citizenship" advanced by Holston offer valuable frameworks guiding PAR's application in urban contexts (Friedmann, 1987; Holston, 2008). The PAR process involves distinct stages:

- Problem Identification: Collaborative identification of urban challenges and opportunities through open dialogues and community discussions.
- Planning: Co-designing interventions and strategies aligned with local needs, cultural values, and aspirations.
- Action: Implementing planned interventions while continuously engaging stakeholders in decision-making and adaptation.
- Reflection: Regular assessment of intervention outcomes and impacts, facilitated through ongoing dialogues and critical reflection.
- Knowledge Sharing: Disseminating insights and lessons learned to inform wider urban rehabilitation and placemaking endeavors.

Methodologically, PAR employs qualitative tools like participatory mapping, visual storytelling, and focus groups to capture diverse perspectives and experiential insights (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Complementing this, quantitative indicators, such as improved community well-being, enhanced social cohesion, and increased access to amenities, offer measurable outcomes for evaluation (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). In summation, PAR emerges as a transformative catalyst in urban rehabilitation and participatory placemaking. Through engagement, co-creation, and reflection, it nurtures a sense of ownership, empowerment, and sustainability within the urban environment, reflecting the evolving aspirations of communities it serves.

In the context of the case study focusing on the revitalization of the abandoned New World Department Store in Bangkok, themed "New World x Old Town," the author and her team, acting as curators, applied the five key stages of Participatory Action Research (PAR) - problem identification, planning, action, reflection, and knowledge sharing - with varying degrees of emphasis (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). From 2020-2022, two events were organized to invigorate the physical, social, and economic dimensions of the area. The study notably prioritized robust community engagement, encompassing problem definition, design, execution, and assessment. This case study is underpinned by the theoretical framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR), emphasizing democratic engagement,

collective knowledge construction, and transformative praxis. The seamless integration of PAR principles and its practical application in the case study exemplifies the synthesis of academic insight and real-world impact.

In the specific case of the New World Department Store, an abandoned commercial complex, this study examines its intricate dynamics through legal and physical lenses. The department store was opened in 1984. Within these frameworks, the structure assumes a multifaceted role, embodying various facets of transgression. Once a pivotal entity in the local trade precinct, the store's significance waned following a state-mandated closure due to lease violations. Subsequent unauthorized alterations resulted in the expansion of the building beyond legal limits, culminating in prolonged legal proceedings and the eventual partial demolition of overextended sections, resulting in accidents and fatalities in 2004. Consequently, the abandoned edifice remained vacant for over two decades, casting a sustained shadow of desolation. Furthermore, compounded by the lack of a roof, the building's interior suffered from flooding during rainfall, leading to the proliferation of mosquitoes. In response, local vendors introduced fish into the submerged lower levels to mitigate the mosquito population. Over time, these fish multiplied, occupying the lower spaces of the decaying structure, creating a dystopian tableau reminiscent of a world ensnared in decay. This transformation encapsulates a confluence of legal transgressions, tragic occurrences, incongruities, and dystopian undertones. The abandoned New World Department Store, prior to the New World x Old Town interventions, serves as a compelling case study that can be reframed as an example of urban vernacular architecture within the provided theoretical framework.

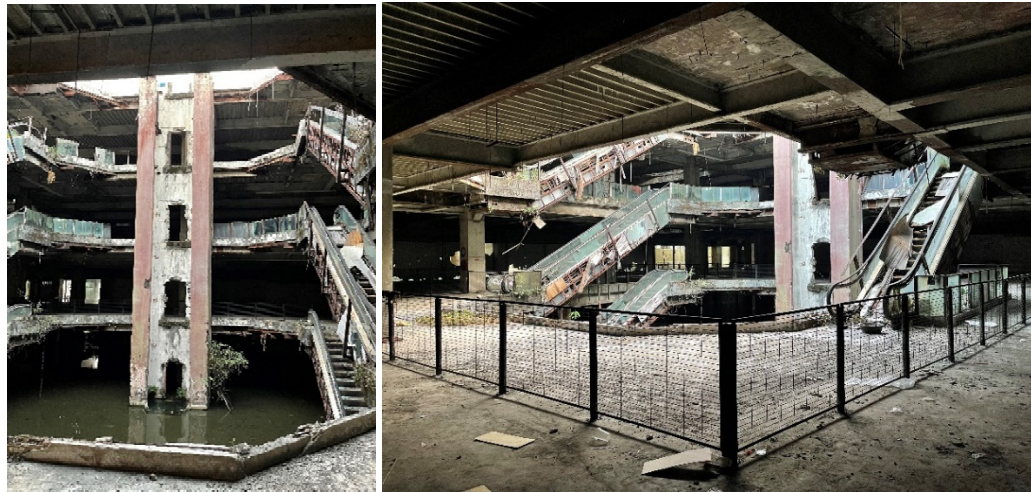
- **Cultural Embeddedness:** The New World Department Store was deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of its locale, serving as a significant commercial hub, and gathering space. Its historical importance and association with the community's way of life exemplify its cultural embeddedness.
- **Adaptation to Context:** The store's construction and expansion responded to the evolving urban context and economic needs of the time, albeit sometimes exceeding legal limits.
- **Local Materials and Techniques:** The abandoned New World Department Store epitomizes urban vernacular architecture by repurposing its remains as a testament to the adaptive use of local materials. highlight the significance of the existing structure as an intrinsic element of the urban vernacular.
- **Functional Efficiency:** Despite its ruinous state, the abandoned New World Department Store stands as a notable void in the bustling expanse of Bangkok's old district, symbolizing both its historical significance and its potential for transformation. This vacancy, amidst the urban density, highlights the adaptability and evolving role of urban vernacular architecture beyond its initial commercial function.
- **Community Involvement:** While not explicitly documented, historically, the New World Department Store was a thriving hub where the community actively shopped, worked, and socialized. It symbolized prosperity and held deep neighborhood significance, reflecting a strong sense of collective



ownership, and underscoring its potential for urban vernacular revitalization.

- Evolution Over Time: The store's transformation from a bustling commercial center to an abandoned structure signifies its evolution over time, shaped by economic, social, and regulatory factors. This evolution mirrors the concept of urban vernacular architecture as a living tradition.
- Visual Identity: The store's architectural features, prior to deterioration, likely contributed to its visual identity within the urban landscape, making it recognizable and distinctive, even amid changes.
- Narratives and Symbolism: As the store underwent various phases, it accrued layers of narratives and symbolism associated with its rise, decline, and eventual abandonment. These narratives are etched into its physical and cultural history, reflecting the complexities of urban development.

The New World Department Store, with its historical, cultural, and functional dimensions, presents a unique case for understanding urban vernacular architecture. While its adaptations, evolution, and community interactions echo the principles of the theoretical framework, the subsequent interventions under the New World x Old Town initiative further underscore its potential as an urban vernacular artifact. This analytical approach enriches our perception of the abandoned store and positions it within the discourse of urban vernacular architecture



**Figure 1:** New World Department Store has been abandoned for more than two decades.



**Figure 2:** Faced with flooding and mosquito issues, vendors introduced fish at the New World Department Store, but they have since been removed by local authorities for public hygiene. **Source:** <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/474997>

### 3. Process and Output: The Making of “New World x Old Town” Design Interventions

In organizing the New World x Old Town exhibition for the first time in 2020, the focus was limited to the residents of certain communities and the general public with memories related to the department store and the neighborhood. The emphasis was on individuals living or working within the seven communities, namely "Wat Sangwet Community, Wat Sam Phraya Community, Wat Mai Amatarot Community, Ban Phan Thom Community, Buwarrangri Community, Jakraphong Mosque Community, and Khian Niwas - Trok Kai Chae Community," in addition to the Bang Lamphu neighborhood, Khaosan Road area, and Phra Athit Road area, where the exhibition could be accessed. The organizing team, from the Faculty of Architecture at Silpakorn University including the author as the key curator, prioritized the local people over external audiences, who might have perceived the New World Department Store based on what is commonly displayed on social media, such as negative news coverage, legal violations, the unusual sight of numerous fish inhabiting the ruins of the building rather than the water, and the visual eyesore of the deteriorated structure. This exhibition aimed to serve as a platform for collaboration where locals could share their stories related to the New World Department Store. This is because memories of the department store during its operational period were scarcely documented online, with only the local community members possessing the ability to contribute their diverse narratives based on their personal recollections.

The organizing team aims to integrate the building as an integral facet of the locality. To achieve this, they propose curating content encapsulating the essence of Bang Lamphu through 20 curated artifacts. The selection process involved close collaboration with the Bang Lamphu Community and "Gaesorn Lamphu," a youth guide group actively engaged in the neighborhood's rejuvenation. The final 20 items, to be displayed on plastic chairs, were chosen collectively. Some items epitomize Bang Lamphu's identity, such as symbolic costumes and artisanal goldsmiths, while others reveal intriguing insights, like the unique profession of pushcart vendors, previously undisclosed. The assortment also encompasses ready-made school uniforms, highlighting their lesser-known origin in Bang Lamphu. In addition to the "Everyday Bang Lamphu" exhibition that presents 20 ordinary items narrating the essence of Bang Lamphu, there is also a lighting installation featuring images of

swimming fish projected onto the core of the department store's elevator. This installation aims to transform the ambiance of the dilapidated building, rendering it more inviting and captivating. Moreover, in conjunction with the youth group "Gaesorn Lamphu," currently engaged in researching 40 prominent individuals within the Bang Lamphu community. The team curated an exhibition featuring projected images and corresponding quotes of these individuals on the building walls. This dynamic presentation contributes another dimension to the exhibition, encapsulating the actions and ethos of the community.

The inaugural New World x Old Town exhibition in 2020 achieved significant success and garnered substantial attention across various dimensions. Notably, the active participation of the youth group as a key stakeholder and organizing team member played a pivotal role. Local community members, showing heightened engagement, registered through the youth group, solidifying a sense of trust and ownership. The youth group's oversight of registration fostered a genuine sense of community involvement, resulting in a deep appreciation for the exhibition. This perception of co-organization by "their" own community members resonated strongly, elevating the event's resonance within the local context. Moreover, the exhibition's outreach extended beyond the community, receiving widespread media coverage, and becoming a notable point of focus during the Covid-19 lockdown, highlighting its broader significance and impact.

Two years later, in 2022, the New World was reinvigorated with vitality through the exhibition "New World x Old Town Part 2: The Reflection from the Light Source." This exhibition, following the triumphant inaugural presentation in 2020, served as a pivotal juncture in the revival of the New World site. Notably, both the organizing team and the youth group, which may not have come into existence or flourished during the department store's operational period, gained valuable insights into the historical significance of New World within the Bang Lamphu area. Leveraging the collaborative prowess of the organizing committee, the local youth group, and an expanded cohort of designers and partners. Renowned concert designer Pol Huiprasert was invited to assume the role of exhibition director. This endeavor showcased a remarkable trajectory of accomplishment. Unlike the first exhibition, the second iteration targeted a wider external audience to communicate the essence of Bang Lamphu's revival. The art exhibition creatively conveyed the multifaceted narratives of Bang Lamphu. The objectives of the "New World x Old Town Part 2 " exhibition are as follows.

- Collaborative exhibition process: The exhibition facilitates collaboration among designers, educational institutions, and the community, utilizing the exhibition process as a medium for active engagement.
- Art and design for contemporary identity: Integrating art and design, the exhibition conveys the contemporary identity of Bang Lamphu, portraying its essence within the context of the present era.
- Commemorative and inspirational: Through visual and spatial elements, the exhibition preserves collective memories of Bang Lamphu and the New World Department Store, offering inspiration to future generations and designers by fostering historical awareness and creative inspiration.

In summary, the feedback received from the exhibition was highly favorable, capturing the interest and engagement of both the general public and the primary target audience of the younger generation. The exhibition itself was selected to be a part of the prominent Bangkok Design Week 2022; an annually renowned festival hosted by the Creative Economy Agency. Over the course of the 9- day event, the exhibition drew a total of 5,294 visitors, with subject to rigorous regulations and stringent density control measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with evaluation results from 1,755 administered questionnaires. The findings revealed that most attendees were young individuals aged 18-34. Remarkably, this event attracted a significant percentage of first-time visitors to the Bang Lamphu area, amounting to 21.65%. Notably, a substantial portion of participants expressed a keen interest in revisiting the Bang Lamphu area. Among the recurring suggestions, the desire for future iterations of similar exhibitions emerged as a prevailing theme. Furthermore, the exhibition garnered widespread admiration and commendation for its exceptional organization. Beyond physical attendance, an analysis of online media behavior unveiled an impressive cumulative awareness, with the exhibition being perceived through various digital platforms. The exhibition, presented in the form of artistic expression, deeply resonated with both attendees and the local community, effectively portraying the essence of the Bang Lamphu district, its way of life, and its products from an innovative perspective. The dynamic portrayal effectively captured the historical narrative of Bang Lamphu and its contemporaneous affiliation with the New World Department Store, thus igniting substantial inspiration among the younger generation. Consequently, the insights gained from this exhibition serve as valuable input for shaping future event formats and activities.

Based on the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the TOWS Matrix was employed to propose strategic recommendations for future iterations of the exhibition. For example, first, in relation to Strengths-Opportunities (SO) Strategies, there are fostering continuous collaboration with the local community to establish enduring partnerships for district development. ; extending partnerships to encompass governmental and private entities, promoting diversity in event planning; identifying additional venues within the district for sustained and widespread activities. Second, in relation to Weaknesses-Opportunities (WO) Strategies, there are collaborating with stakeholders to develop versatile event concepts that enhance visitor participation; publicizing guidelines for attending the exhibition and venue limitations to ensure responsible engagement. ; securing financial support from public and private sectors to ensure sustainability beyond historical backing.



Figure 3: Lighting installation at the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2020



Figure 4: 'Gaesorn Lamphu' highlights 40 community figures at the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2020

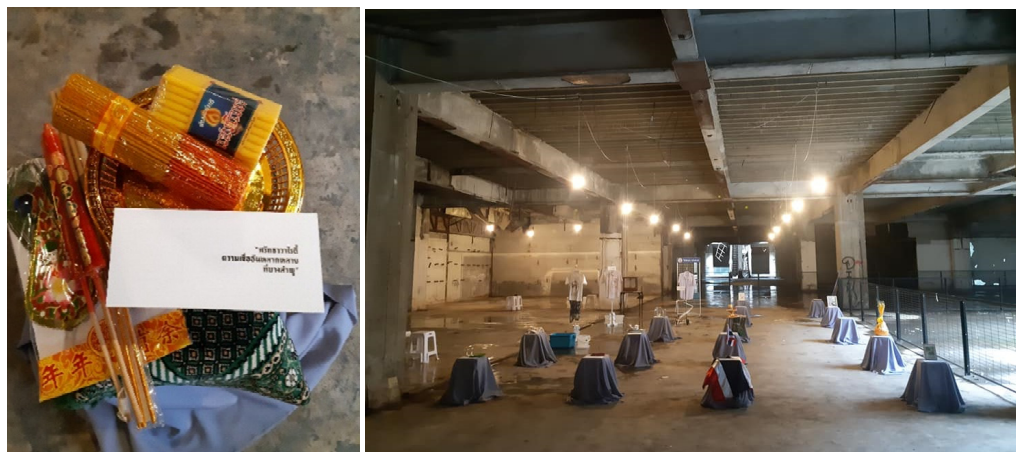


Figure 5: "Everyday Bang Lamphu" presents 20 ordinary items narrating the essence of Bang Lamphu at the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2020



**Figure 6:** Lighting installation at the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2022



**Image 7:** Lighting installation at the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2022



**Figure 8:** After the New World x Old Town interventions, the local authority planned to repurpose the building into a public space, but the project was later stalled due to unresolved details.

**Source:** <https://www.facebook.com/pranakorn>

#### 4. Summary

Participatory placemaking embodies a collaborative and community-centric paradigm within urban design and development. It actively engages local residents, stakeholders, and users in co-creating and revitalizing public spaces. This inclusive practice is driven by the objective of cultivating dynamic and purposeful environments that resonate with the community's distinctive identity, requisites, and aspirations. Unlike conventional top-down planning, it underscores the significance of collaborative decision-making, co-creation, and the integration of indigenous knowledge and cultural values. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2021) underscores that participatory placemaking endeavors to empower individuals as proactive catalysts in reshaping their built surroundings. This approach fosters communal interactions, fortifies community bonds, and amplifies the attachment to and ownership of these spaces. Its evaluation encompasses a multi-faceted assessment, encompassing parameters like community involvement, social unity, economic ramifications, and cultural safeguarding. The measurement of participatory placemaking involves a spectrum of qualitative and quantitative indices to evaluate community engagement, social interconnectivity, and the placemaking process's influence on a particular locale. These measurements may include the following –Community Participation Levels, Social Interaction and Cohesion, User Surveys and Feedback, Physical Transformation, Economic Impact, Long-Term Sustainability, and Cultural Preservation and Expression. (Amin, 2002; Gehl, 2010; Whyte, 1980; Jacobs, 1961; Florida, 2002; Punter, 2003; Low, 2000; Brown & Reed, 2019) The framework for evaluation presented above offers a comprehensive methodology for assessing the ramifications of participatory placemaking, thus rendering it highly pertinent for the analysis of the New World x Old Town design interventions in 2020 and 2022.

- Community Participation Levels: The New World x Old Town interventions actively engaged the local community, particularly the youth group and other stakeholders, in the planning and design processes. The project's claimed success can be illustrated by quantifying the great number of community members who enthusiastically participated in exhibitions, meetings, and interviews to contribute their memories and ideas for future development of the building and the neighborhood.
- Social Interaction and Cohesion: The project succeeds in enabling social interaction among local residents, fostering a sense of community and belonging. However, the direct interaction between local residents and external visitors remains limited. The youth group's integral role contributes significantly to social cohesion within the community, as their intermediary role bridges the gap between locals and visitors, enhancing social connections.
- User Surveys and Feedback: The project employed a systematic approach to gather user feedback, engaging both local residents and visitors, along with other pertinent stakeholders. Employing a combination of questionnaires and interviews, the initiative sought to discern and capture their perceptions of the revitalized space, wherein a notable consensus emerged regarding the aspiration for the reopened building to serve as communal or public commercial facilities. Evidently, the response conveys a marked degree of contentment and approval concerning the project's outcomes. Nevertheless, identified

challenges pivot upon the enduring continuity and extension of orchestrated events within a comprehensive neighborhood-wide developmental framework.

- **Physical Transformation:** The project has orchestrated a judicious alteration of the physical realm. In the short term, the derelict structure was meticulously cleansed and transitorily metamorphosed into an inspiring exhibition venue. In the intermediate term, the proprietor undertook renovations to preserve its state due to public exposure during the exhibitions, leading to numerous inquiries for the space's temporary utilization, such as for film sets or commercial advertising production studios. In the long term, the local district office has conveyed an inclination to refurbish specific sections of the edifice to inaugurate a novel public expanse within the district. Furthermore, the proprietor has outlined plans for an all-encompassing renovation to materialize a novel mixed-use commercial domain harmoniously interwoven with the local environs.
- **Economic Impact:** The project's direct economic ramifications remain somewhat constrained due to the temporality of the events. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the exhibitions have induced modest economic ameliorations, characterized by augmented pedestrian activity, elevated commercial proceeds, and the potential prospect of appreciating property valuations over time.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** The project has taken measures to establish a degree of perpetuity for the design intervention, facilitated by sustained involvement with local youth groups, ongoing collaboration with the local district office, and continued participation in community events. These enduring interactions have fostered ongoing community engagement and nurtured a foundation of trust. However, the salient task of ensuring the steadfast and enduring sustainability of the transformed space warrants heightened attention. The pivotal appraisal of the extent to which the revitalized area sustains community resonance and preserves its vibrancy over an extended period is paramount.
- **Cultural Preservation and Expression:** The New World x Old Town initiative has remarkably achieved a profound metamorphosis in its portrayal of the New World Department Store, transcending its prior perception. This intervention, exemplified through artistic exhibitions and engagements, has garnered unprecedented acclaim from the local populace who collectively attest to its extraordinary impact, hailing it as an astonishing and unparalleled source of inspiration that defied all expectations. The events of 2020 and 2022 have not only revitalized the site but have engendered an entirely novel narrative, one that symbolizes an imaginative renaissance and serves as a compelling testament to the transformative potential of participatory placemaking.



The New World x Old Town interventions have significantly repositioned the abandoned New World Department Store building, shedding light on its latent potential. The intervention endeavors to extract and optimize the concealed capacities within what was once perceived as problematic – a derelict and unattractive concrete structure laden with adverse historical associations. The complex task of imbuing this edifice, burdened with negative connotations, with renewed purpose proves intricate. The architectural and legal limitations of the building defy facile romanticization, necessitating a pragmatic approach. The endeavor grapples with the formidable challenge of transitioning the building from its troubled historical context into a transformative agent. This study underscores the value of adopting a pragmatic paradigm, one that strategically leverages the dormant potential of the building for both its individual rejuvenation and the broader district's advancement.

This approach resonates harmoniously with the principles of participatory placemaking, signifying an alliance between architectural innovation and communal engagement. This reflective standpoint engenders a holistic exploration of the building's influence, intricately interwoven with the district's overarching identity, aspirations, and socio-cultural fabric. Drawing inspiration from the tenets of urban vernacular architecture, the intervention exemplifies a conscious fusion of adaptive reuse and community engagement. It encapsulates an ardent endeavor to instill fresh vitality into an architectural relic while aligning with the placemaking ethos of harnessing local insights and shared aspirations. The transformation of the building into an aspirational locus of engagement embodies the symbiosis between participatory placemaking principles and the rejuvenation of urban vernacular architecture. In this intersection, the New World x Old Town interventions emerge as a dynamic testament to the potential of collaborative design innovation to reshape both physical landscapes and collective perceptions.

Key insights gleaned from the execution of the New World x Old Town exhibition in 2020 and 2022 underscore the effectiveness of initiating engagement with local residents. Their invaluable contributions, enriched by memories and narratives associated with the New World Department Store, substantiated this approach. The positive reception from the community, particularly the engaged local youth group, affirmed the significance of prioritizing their involvement. This rapport, cultivated in 2020, played a pivotal role in the triumph of the subsequent 2022 exhibition. The deliberate shift in focus towards a broader public audience for the latter event was strategically sound, recognizing that the vitality of a neighborhood hinges not solely on indigenous residents. This broader perspective aligns with the imperative to stimulate economic activity, often pivotal in the advancement and safeguarding of urban vernacular architecture. The persisting challenge lies in devising strategies for the sustained and enduring continuity of such initiatives in the future.

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