

Social Design Enterprises in Thailand: Potentials and Challenges

ธุรกิจการออกแบบเพื่อสังคมในประเทศไทย: ศักยภาพ และความท้าทาย

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Abstract

Design professions have generally connected to the commercial world rather than being a socially conscious practice. This paper aims to explore ideas and operations of social design practices that combine the value of social responsibility with designers' day-to-day practices. This study examines social design enterprises in the field of advertising and architectural design in Thailand: Choojai Creative for Good(s) and Openspace. Although potential clients, products, and production time required by these two design businesses are relatively different in nature, they share similar design philosophy and process which is participatory applied at the beginning of the project until the production process. Thus, these professional social design groups are able to embed social responsibility values into their design projects which are illustrative of a social model of design enterprise that serves specific groups of people and Thai society more broadly.

In-depth interviews with co-founders, designers and partners/ clients of the selected social design firms were employed to explore ideas, aspirations and needs. Moreover, to examine values embedded in their social design, discourse analysis of media release and reviews of their successful design projects were also undertaken. Findings have shown that social design firms have emerged and become part of Thai design industry when designers and architects can balance between idealism with pragmatic management of limited resources. The discussion has illustrated potential and challenges of social design firms as a business model by concluding that designers' past reputations, social networks and broader community engagement through media releases are essential for social design firms to succeed their social design projects and to survive as business firms in the real market.

บทคัดย่อ

วิชาชีพทางการออกแบบมักถูกมองว่าเชื่อมโยงกับโลกทางธุรกิจมากกว่าทางสังคม บทความวิจัยนี้มีเป้าประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจแนวความคิดและการปฏิบัติการทำงานออกแบบเพื่อสังคม (Social Design Practices) ที่สามารถสร้างคุณค่าความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมให้กับงานออกแบบโดยนักออกแบบวิชาชีพ การศึกษานี้ได้เลือกทำการตรวจสอบธุรกิจการออกแบบเพื่อสังคมด้านโฆษณาและการออกแบบสถาปัตยกรรมในประเทศไทย ได้แก่ บริษัทซูโจ กะ กัลยาณมิตร (Choojai Creative for Good(s)) และกลุ่มสถาปนิกและออกแบบสิ่งแวดล้อมที่เรียกตัวเองว่า โอเพนสเปซ (Openspace) ถึงแม้ว่ากลุ่มลูกค้า ชี้นงานออกแบบ และเวลาในการผลิตผลงาน มีความแตกต่างกันโดยสิ้นเชิงระหว่างธุรกิจการออกแบบของสองบริษัทนี้ ทั้งสองบริษัทนี้มีปรัชญาการดำเนินธุรกิจ และกระบวนการออกแบบที่เหมือนกันคือการสร้างสรรค์เพื่อสังคมผ่านกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วม ที่เริ่มต้นตั้งแต่การคิดโครงการออกแบบไปถึงขั้นตอนการผลิตชิ้นงาน ดังนั้น นักออกแบบและสถาปนิกเพื่อสังคมจึงสามารถใส่คุณค่าของความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม ในโครงการออกแบบของพวกเขา ซึ่งก็เป็นตัวอย่างของการดำเนินธุรกิจการออกแบบเพื่อสังคมที่ช่วยเหลือคนในกลุ่มเฉพาะและท้ายสุดส่งผลดีต่อสังคมไทยในวงกว้าง

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้ใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ร่วมก่อตั้งบริษัท นักออกแบบ และผู้มีส่วนร่วมในโครงการออกแบบ เพื่อการสืบหาแนวความคิด แรงบันดาลใจ และความต้องการที่แท้จริงของทั้งนักออกแบบ และกลุ่มเป้าหมายที่ใช้งานออกแบบ และเพื่อสืบเสาะและสังเคราะห์คุณค่าต่างๆ ที่ฝังอยู่ในชี้นงานออกแบบเพื่อสังคม งานศึกษานี้ได้ใช้การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมจากสื่อสาธารณะต่างๆ ที่นำเสนอโครงการการออกแบบและผลงานการออกแบบที่ประสบผลสำเร็จ ผลจากการศึกษาพบว่าบริษัทที่ดำเนินธุรกิจทางการออกแบบเพื่อสังคมได้กำเนิดขึ้น และกำลังกลายเป็นกลุ่มหนึ่งที่มีจุดยืนในอุตสาหกรรมการออกแบบของประเทศไทย เมื่อนักออกแบบและสถาปนิกเพื่อสังคมสามารถสร้างสมดุลระหว่าง อุดมคติในการทำงานเพื่อสังคมกับการจัดการทรัพยากรที่มีอยู่อย่างจำกัดได้ดี และการศึกษานี้ยังแสดงให้เห็นถึงศักยภาพและความท้าทายของธุรกิจด้านการออกแบบเพื่อสังคม โดยสามารถสรุปได้ว่าชื่อเสียงที่ผ่านมาของนักออกแบบ เครือข่ายการทำงาน และการมีส่วนร่วมกับชุมชนวงกว้างผ่านการใช้สื่อประชาสัมพันธ์สาธารณะที่หลากหลายเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งสำหรับบริษัทออกแบบเพื่อสังคมที่จะประสบความสำเร็จในการทำโครงการออกแบบเพื่อสังคม ทั้งยังสามารถที่จะอยู่รอดในฐานะบริษัทที่ดำเนินธุรกิจทางด้านการออกแบบได้ในตลาดในความเป็นจริง

Keywords (คำสำคัญ)

Social Enterprise (ธุรกิจเพื่อสังคม)

Social Design (การออกแบบเพื่อสังคม)

Participatory (อย่างมีส่วนร่วม)

Community Engagement (การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชน)

Design Industry (อุตสาหกรรมการออกแบบ)

1. Introduction

Design is usually connected to economic and cultural contributions (Julier, 2008). As designers and architects have been questioned about social responsibility in the design profession, they have raised the issue with their design communities. The inclusion of social responsibility in the business practices of designers and architects tends not to survive because of the limitation of resources. Nevertheless, they seek strategies to work socially and professionally without losing their souls (Shaughnessy, 2010). Margolin and Margolin (2002) propose a 'Social Model' that balances socially conscious works and commercial design practices. This research aims to reveal possible solutions for working on social design in the real competitive market.

This research examines two case studies of design enterprises whose works focus on social design. The selected design firms are Choojai Creative for Good(s) and Openspace. The former is an advertising agency which was formed to produce ethically good advertisements. Its design works aim to enhance happiness and improve quality of life in Thai society. The latter is an architectural and environmental design studio, working with and for local communities in order to provide a better livelihood for unprivileged residents. Both case studies are examples of successful social enterprises in Thailand which show similarities and differences in their philosophies and working styles. This paper is divided into five sections: Introduction, Background, Choojai Creative for Good(s), Openspace, and Discussion and Conclusion.

2. Background

2.1 Overview of social design

While design practice is widely understood as a problem-solving activity (Grillo, 1960; Koberg & Bagnall, 1974; Lawson & Dorst, 2009; Rowe, 1987; Trottier, 2011), design theorists attempt to consider more facets of it. Sommer (1983), for example, introduced the concept of 'Social Design' into the architecture

arena. He suggested that architects could not disconnect themselves from occupants and environment. Architecture was required to be suitable for human behaviour, which was Sommer's main argument during the 1980s. Subsequently, McCoy (2003) added that the value of design for a community should be the priority rather than considering the design artifact itself. Designing for human society has become a new design application. Thus, social responsibility should not be considered only as voluntary, but an integral part of design professions.

Social design has been interpreted in various ways in the past 50 years, including the obligation of designers to society (Heller & Vienne, 2003; McCoy, 2003; Papanek, 1972; Shea, 2012; Sommer, 1983). However, social design in the 21st century has become more connected to business and industry. In the past few years, the trend has been for social design enterprises to attempt to balance design philosophy and everyday design practices. This means that designers and architects are able to survive in their professions while also devoting their lives to improving their society.

Three main criteria distinguish what social design may cover. First, it has to be design work for people (more than one person) or a community (Armstrong & Stojmirovic, 2011; Smith, 2007; Sommer, 1983; Thorpe & Gamman, 2011). Target audiences, the users or occupants of social design projects, should also be vulnerable groups of people, so the design work can solve their problems and/or improve their quality of life. Second, the impact on society and the environment is a part of the project and design process (Papanek, 1972, 1985; Whiteley, 1993). Cultural awareness, ethical and environmental issues should also be taken into account. Finally, social design should employ human-related methods in its design process (Akama, 2012; Lee, 2008; Peters, 2011). These include being human-centred and using a participatory, co-design or co-creation approach. These are pragmatic methods that can help design teams to identify problems in real situations and to

acquire direct information from end users. Even if these might require more complicated procedures and time, they can result in effective design solutions. These three criteria of social design were employed to select the case studies for this paper.

2.2 Socially conscious design movement

A socially conscious design movement has been underdevelopment since the middle of the 20th century. Initially, idealistic attitudes and ethics were brought by design thinkers to design professions. Design activists from the 1960s to the 1990s tried to introduce social responsibility as a code of practice for designers in all design disciplines. The designers were encouraged to give a social contribution in the USA and Europe during that period. This was because design professions were generally assumed to be wasteful for society. Whiteley (1993, p. 1) admitted that “‘Design’ as a noun or verb was daily intoned... that was going to deliver us from all economic evils. ‘Designer’ as an adjective connoted prestige and desirability, sometimes desperately so; and ‘designer’ as a noun was the new celebrity profession...”. In 1964, Ken Garland published *First Thing First Manifesto* which was the first call for social responsibility from graphic designers and art directors who worked for commercial design projects (Heller, Bierut & Drenttel, 2002). In architectural and industrial design areas, theorists promoted the importance of working with people which was later called ‘participatory’. Sommer (1983) as an environmental psychologist, for instance, suggested that behaviors of occupants and users should be considered as a part of the design process. He believed that human rights, poverty, malnutrition, disease and standard housing should gain attention from designers and architects.

One of the most critical arguments on social design is provided by Papanek. He contends that design must not only solve real problems, but stop causing more problems (Papanek, 1974). He criticizes those design professionals who damage human lives and the environment. There are concerns about the

social obligation of design professionals from other theorists who support Papanek’s views (Heller, 2003; Roberts, 2006; Whiteley, 1993). For example, Whiteley (1993, p. 2) highlights that what is at stake is not economics but culture, and not the standard of living but the quality of life. At the beginning of the 21st century, the ideology of social design has been further developed, thus being able to be applied in real design practices. Collaboration between social designers and other stakeholders was introduced as an essential procedure to develop social design projects. Social design practitioners are advised to collaborate with a community or organization (Armstrong & Stojmirovic, 2011; Jégou, Manzini, & Bala, 2008; Manzini, 2007). A good example of socially conscious design is *Design for the other 90%* (Smith, 2007) that raises an awareness of design for humanitarian use. The design objects and plans aim to improve the quality of life and save human lives by providing basic needs such as fresh water and shelter.

It is generally accepted that the primary purpose of market-led design is commercial. However, Margolin and Margolin (2002, p. 25) strongly argue that the foremost intention of social design is the satisfaction of human needs. They propose a ‘Social Model’ that combines business management with social contributions in real practice. A ‘Social Model’ illustrates possibilities for design professionals who still need to work in a commercial market-based environment. Margolin and Margolin’s proposed strategies differing from Papanek’s because the model is a compromise between market-led and social-led design. However, the social model proposed in 2002 still asks for more concerns from design communities to develop the model for real design practices. For instance, Shea (2012) recognizes that the argument of design for social responsibility might not be pragmatic for the designers’ everyday practice. He argues that social designers require collaboration with their design communities and networks. He also states that many projects are unsuccessful as they lack community engagement and project continuity.

From the movement of social design from 1980 until 2010, it can be seen that collaboration and social networks are important for its development. This paper argues that social design projects may require connections to a community, an organization and a market to proceed the projects. In this paper, through two case studies, Thai working culture will be discussed in order to highlight cultural inputs that shed light on Buddhist belief, connections and social networks, thereby influencing social design works in Thailand.

2.3 Thai value and Thai design working culture

Interpersonal relationships in the Thai context are an important factor to indicate Thai behavioral patterns (Komin, 1990). Similar to other Asian working cultures, Thai designers and architects are also working within personal and professional networks. Patronage is valuable and considered as capital for a design professional's life. The patronage can be from a shared educational background. Designers and architects graduating from the same university tend to have a common bond. A sense of 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' is incubated throughout their undergraduate study which subsequently assigns social obligations to the graduates who become the designers and architects in the Thai design industry. Support from other members in design communities is essential for non-profit projects as social design projects tend to serve a large number of people rather than only one client.

In addition, Thais are culturally related to Buddhist teaching and belief. Doing good things for not only themselves but also others and society are conceived by Thais to be good Buddhist citizens. The trend of contributing time or skill to solve some social problems has increasingly become popular among young generation including business sectors. Corporate Social Responsibility program (CSR) is a good example which both small and big companies can contribute their time and professional skills to society. Moreover,

within those CSR programs in Thailand, partners with a number of institutions including educational institutions, NGOs, some governmental agencies, play a key role to make CSR programs even more collaborative and engaged to a broader society. Even though CSR practices cannot be directly related to the value of Buddhist practices, good Thais in all professions tend to contribute their time, skills, and resources to help improving the society.

Focusing on social design, this study highlights the patronage and social networks embedded in Thai culture that manifest themselves in the two case studies. In order to examine the values and practices of Thai-styled patronage and social networks, the next section discusses methods used in this study.

3. Methodology

This study employed two research methods, including in-depth interviews of important agents in running businesses and designing social design works and discourse analysis of media releases and reviews of their successful design projects. This is to unearth ideas and aspirations, raising their social concerns and giving messages to Thai society through their social design works.

Participants involved in this present study include co-founders, social designers and partners/ clients of the two selected design teams. First, interviews with the co-founders can unveil their past experiences and aspirations when and how they have become interested in producing socially conscious design. This would also help underline social values and identify the ways how they utilize their social networks and connections for their social design projects. Second, interviews with social designers help to understand their design processes, opportunities and obstacles they faced when doing social design works. Finally, talks to their partners who can also be their clients provide information relating to needs, concerns and limitations required for social design works to accomplish.

Discourse analyses of media releases and social design projects was employed in order to read underlying messages and values provided by social designers for clients and society more broadly. Media releases generally provide contents that draw attentions from the general public. These can also convey messages to audiences who may later be inspired by social design works to voluntarily participate and/or give hands and resources for those social design works. Also, awards given by well-established institutions can present levels of success of both companies and design works. The following two sections discuss the two case studies encompassing their history, design philosophy, social design projects and processes as well as the ways they have become social enterprises.

4. Choojai Creative for Good(s) Agency (Choojai)

Choojai is an advertising agency focusing on socially conscious design. Choojai means 'fulfilling heart by producing good creative works' described by the five co-founders who had previously worked at Lowe Worldwide: Thailand, a top international advertising agency based in Bangkok. Choojai was identified as a successful business model for social enterprise by the Thailand Creative Design Centre (TCDC) in 2012. Leading design magazines such as Computer Arts Thailand and A Day Magazine describe Choojai as a creative enterprise which combines voluntary practices with Buddhist beliefs in a competitive business arena. This has brought a social model of business to the Thai advertising design industry.

4.1 History

Choojai was born from a close relationship between its co-founders who had worked together for many years and shared a similar attitude towards their design profession. The starting point of Choojai was at Suan Mokkhabalaram, a Buddhist monastery in a forest in Surattani province. Prasit Vittayasamrit

(Meng), one of Choochai's co-founders, took a break from his professional work and was ordained as a Buddhist monk at the monastery. He practiced as a Buddhist monk for some time and thought that he would be a monk for the rest of his life. However, this expectation changed when his former close colleagues, who were still working at the advertising agency in Bangkok, visited him at the temple. They discussed their careers and their futures intensively throughout their first night together and made some significant decisions.

The friends all agreed that they were no longer satisfied with their profession as art directors despite their success in winning a number of international advertising awards and becoming prominent in the industry. They were discouraged to realize they had become slaves to consumerism and as such they had lost their creativity and motivation to create good designs. During the discussion, Meng introduced his friends to the Buddhist teaching of work as a practice which promotes 'doing good' or 'good Karma' and that for them this means creating good advertisements. Meng and his four colleagues made the decision to leave their current company and form their own advertising agency, Choojai Creative for Good(s) Agency.

4.2 Philosophy & aspiration

Having made the significant decision to leave the big and successful advertising companies, the co-founders of Choojai became more confident in combining social responsibility with their creative profession in order to contribute to society as well as deriving commercial benefit. Influenced by Buddhism, they believe that they can work as art directors while devoting themselves to the society. The root of Choojai is from a Buddhist belief of doing good karma in a modern context. Buddhist activities are traditionally related to gaining merit; for example, giving alms or donations. Rather than considering the traditional means of giving alms, Choojai uses design skills to offer social benefits to the community. 'A Good Idea

is Beautiful (Ethically and Morally)' is a core philosophy of Choojai. The co-founders believe that a good idea can be beneficial for humankind and society as well as being commercially profitable.

An interesting concept of Choojai's philosophy is how 'beauty' is interpreted. 'Beauty' in Choojai's creative works does not refer to shapes or forms of the design. Rather, 'beauty' in this sense refers to how much social benefit can be created through design projects. To show their strong positioning to the industry, Choojai has announced its manifesto which highlights its way of thinking and working culture. Its manifesto draws a clear picture of this social design enterprise which works only for ethical commercial projects or where it can make a social contribution. In addition, the manifesto encourages collaboration with other organizations, designers or participants who share similar attitudes towards works. Choojai highlights that the most important profit for this enterprise is its members' happiness and the satisfaction of the general public. Figure 1 was taken in 2012 with Choojai's co-founders for a Day Magazine, a Thai well-known inspired and creative magazine. The photo-shoot site was at the top of a huge trash heap at an On-noot garbage dump site. The idea of selecting a garbage dump site for photo shooting was to present an analogy, illustrating how much design works contributes to an accumulation of trash and waste in society. It is noted that the far right person standing at the rear was Meng who at that time was still a Buddhist monk and part of founding of Choojai.

4.3 Successful projects

Socially conscious design projects by Choojai vary from a graphic design for a book on flooding in Thailand to designs for environmentalists working for Greenpeace. Mom-Made Toys (MMT) is one of its most successful projects and is discussed in this article. MMT is a project designed for children with autism. Examining this project will illustrate how



(Source: Courtesy of Prasit Vittayasamrit)

Figure 1. Choojai's co-founders at Onnuch dump (published in A Day Magazine)

Choojai applies its philosophy through idea generation and the design process. MMT is a long term project in association with both the private and public sectors and has been underway for more than two years.

4.4 Idea generation

Human empathy is the first inspiration of the MMT project. The idea of working with the autistic community came from a personal relationship with the mother of an autistic child. Mae Nok, literally mother Nok, is a colleague of one of the Choojai founders and this relationship thus connects Choojai with the social issue of autistic children. Even before Choojai came to help, Mae Nok had facilitated workshops and social gatherings of parents with autistic children at her home. Choojai's design team was interested in the activities and visited the group to experience the network of this particular social group. After participating in the activities, the team was motivated to help because they were impressed by the mothers' love and they recognized the lack of support for autistic children.

Choojai launched this project with the main slogan of 'A mom can be the best toy designer for their children'. As they had not received any community or government support at this stage, the Choojai team launched the project themselves, aiming to raise

awareness and give information to the general public about the plight of autistic children. They also provided free educational materials to autistic children to help their cognitive development. As the team has been already well respected in the design industry, the project received good attention. Their proposal was well received by clients who agreed to sponsor the project. At this point, an international toy company, Plan Toys, came to give support. This was how Choojai began to connect to several organizations to shape and run the Mom-Made Toys project.

4.5 Design process

The social design process is not only design for people, but also design with people, the community and organizations. For the MMT project, Choojai designers became facilitators working collaboratively with groups of people and organizations. A participatory method was employed in this project by letting mothers and fathers design toys for their autistic children. Figure 2 shows a participatory workshop among parents to identify needs and solutions to design toys for their autistic children.



(Source: https://www.facebook.com/mommadetoy/photos_stream)

Figure 2. A participatory workshop among parents of autistic children.

Subsequently, a toy design competition was held for targeted participants to introduce the MMT project to the broader society. The first group of participants was from Mae Nok's existing network. Mae Nok was the main connector to the other parents.

After gaining great attention at the press conference, the Choojai team received a large number of toy design submissions. Plan Toys, the main sponsor, helped at this point. Three toy design sketches were selected and sent to professional toy designers at Plan Toys. The toy designers developed the chosen sketches to meet safety requirements and made them more suitable for mass production. In other words, Plan Toys developed the selected design sketches as real toys for autistic children. After making the toys available for the market, Choojai gained further support to develop the Mom-Made Toys project so it would be beneficial for autistic children around the country.

Choojai continued the project by finding other potential supporters. The Office of Knowledge Management and Development (OKMD) and the Thailand Creative & Design Centre (TCDC) became sponsors for press conferences, project promotions and events. This was a shift of the project from focusing only on a small group of families to a nationwide project. OKMD and TCDC provided areas for exhibitions, press conferences and workshops for Mom-Made Toys events and activities (Figure 3). Another supporter for the MMT project is Thailand Post which provided a toy delivery service. The toys produced by Plan Toys were sent to the children in autistic child care centers nationwide. Choojai plans to continue the project in the future. The next plan is to educate the general public to be able to recognize an autistic child at home. Being diagnosed at an early stage of the symptoms might provide a better quality of life for children with autism in Thailand. Figure 4 shows an exhibition collaboratively organized by Plan Toys, TCDC and other partners to illustrate a success of the MMT project to the general public.

4.6 Media release

Choojai has increasingly become well-known among emerging social and creative businesses through so-called news media, including print media such as magazine, broadcast news and the Internet. For examples, Creative Move – creative solutions for social innovation, Facebook – facebook/choojaiand-friends, and TCDC website are among online media that draw public attention to promote Choojai as a creative agency which embed social values into their creative works. Many of these media channel are initiated and organized by Choojai themselves in order to expand their networks and be more engaged to the public. These popular online media have become a powerful tool, highlighting social design works by Choojai as a social innovation both to meet business satisfaction and promote social responsibility.

To continue a delivery process of the MMT project in 2013, Choojai initiated a small online project namely Santa Volunteers to deliver toys provided by Plan Toys for autistic children all over Thailand with no cost. Figure 5 shows an infographic presented in Facebook fanpage of the Mom-made Toys project to illustrate toys distribution to families with autistic children in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Choojai used online media including Facebook and Youtube channel to attract people who planned to travel to countryside during Christmas and New Year holiday to help in delivering those toys to families with autistic children registered during the previous MMT events. This has shown the use of media and creativity to manage skills and limited resources in order to succeed a social innovation project.

Moreover, by voluntarily producing VDO clip namely 'Roo Su Flood', literally meaning 'know to flight flooding' in 2011, Choojai was given an award called IP Champion 2013 by Ministry of Information and Communication Technology of Thailand as a company that successfully applies their intellectual property for commercial purposes. This VDO clip hits over one million views. All of these media and communication channels have shown a certain level of



(Source: <http://www.tcdc.or.th/src/17619/Article/5-22-58/ซูโจ-กะ-กัลยาณมิตร-ความสร้างสรรค์เพื่อสังคมที่ดีกว่า>)

Figure 3. An exhibition of the Mom-made Toy project held at TK Park.



(Source: <http://www.tcdc.or.th/src/17619/Article/5-22-58/ซูโจ-กะ-กัลยาณมิตร-ความสร้างสรรค์เพื่อสังคมที่ดีกว่า>)

Figure 4. A media press conference, 11 August 2011 at TK Park.



(Source: https://www.facebook.com/mommadetoy/photos_stream)

Figure 5. An infographic presenting names of the volunteers and locations they help delivering toys in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region.

success to connect the company to a broader society whereby media plays a key role to inform the general public and promote new type of social innovation as successful businesses.

4.7 Growing as a social enterprise

At the beginning of Choojai's formation, the five co-founders were still working full-time at Lowe Worldwide: Thailand but one by one they resigned to join the new agency. The close relationship between the co-founders provides a trustworthy working team that has built a strong organization. Although the Choojai team members earn less than they did previously their social obligation has become the most valuable part of their professional lives.

Financial tension is faced by all enterprises and Choojai is no exception. The co-founders need to balance their philosophy with business strategies. First, Choojai was formed as an advertising agency so the art directors and designers can work for both commercial and social purposes. Thus, Choojai still works on commercial projects if they meet the philosophical criteria and in this the company is therefore different from other advertising agencies. Its manifesto shows a clear social focus to their working processes and these persuade potential clients to work with them.

Second, the Choojai co-founders accepted the difficulties of establishing and managing a new business but their experience and reputation have stood them in good stead within both the advertising industry and with clients. Recent clients of Choojai are Greenpeace, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, and the existing clients such as Plan Toys.

Finally, Choojai prefers to work with government and non-government organizations running projects that contribute to society but they are not limited to non-profit campaigns. The Choojai manifesto clearly states the criteria for project selection. Selection is based on whether the project meets the criteria not on whether it is for-profit or not-for-profit. Choojai

survives in the advertising industry in Thailand by setting clear ethical guidelines and instituting processes and procedures to ensure they are followed.

5. Openspace

Openspace is a group of architects whose work focuses on design for local communities, mainly relating to architectural and environmental design. Working with public organizations and NGOs across Asia, senior architects of Openspace have been recognized both locally and internationally.

5.1 History

Prior to the formation of Openspace as a design firm, there were a small number of 'community architects' whose design philosophies were cultivated from social consciousness especially for underprivileged citizens. It is believed the emergence of community architects in Thailand probably came from Pattama Roonrakwit. Around 1997 she introduced a participatory design technique for Thai architects to work with community members within their communities. Along with the need for community architects to work with the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), a public organization funded by Thai government, Pattama's working style has since influenced young architects looking for a new approach to architectural design. The major work of CODI was a state-funded housing program called the Baan Mankong (BMK) project, and Pattama had run a number of BMK projects across Thailand through her design firm, CASE studio. Therefore, there were an increasing number of newly graduated architects who worked with Pattama in their early careers and have since identified themselves as community architects.

Openspace began with two architects and one journalist in 2007. The initial mission of Openspace was to create an open ground for interdisciplinary collaborations working for/with local communities. Kasama Yamtree, one of the senior designers of

Openspace explained that she had known two of the co-founders for a long time and had worked with them in a number of social architectural design projects. She became the fourth member of Openspace in 2010. A decade before her engagement with Openspace, she was an architectural student in her college and was inspired by Pattama who introduced her to the way in which architects could work for society. Early projects of Openspace include planning and designing the BMK low-cost housing solution for low-income citizens throughout Thailand. Depending upon state funds and public organizations, Openspace in its early years was a mere casual working team with no office space and no employee.

5.2 Philosophy & aspiration

Social architectural and community design projects were normally run by architectural educators and independent architects with substantial support from CODI or local and international NGOs. Architects who worked on these social design projects tended to have a main job and in addition worked casually for local communities. It could be assumed that their aspirations were adopted from Baan Mankong (BMK) projects, which was the foremost social architectural design project, publicly launched to Thai society by CODI in 2003. Moreover, an increasing number of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects have opened up a new window of opportunity for community architects.

For Openspace members, their desire and passion to work for underprivileged people was fostered when they were young professional architects. One of the senior members of Openspace, explained why she 'fell in love' with design for the community. She said she did not believe she could design things for someone by herself alone as design works are usually always complex and related to a wide range of human and environmental issues. Therefore, her main design principle was participatory, allowing users,

designers and anyone else who can be related to a project to participate in the design process. Although she had had nearly a decade of experience as a community architect, Openspace has further provided her with a greater opportunity to extend herself within the design community.

As participatory design work always needs concerted efforts from various stakeholders, it always takes time to accomplish. Openspace architects always need to embed themselves in local communities in order to build trust and friendship. They will then open discussions with community residents on design projects through various activities and design tools. Those activities and design tools include participatory map making, walking demographic survey and model making (Figure 6). These techniques are used to open discussions among community members to let them understand both their neighbors and their shared living environment. Design processes might take weeks, months or even years to determine what needs to be done. After the participatory design processes are complete, construction can be pursued. However, it depends on the financial support and resources that normally comes from various sources. In reality, there seems to be no definitive formula to clearly explain how to design with people. This is because social design projects tend to be contextual depending upon people, environments and limitations.



(Source: The Authors)

Figure 6. Participatory model making as part of participatory design process for low-income housing

5.3 Successful projects

One of the recent projects designed by Openspace is 'Samakkee Lee-rat House' (SLH) in Nang Loeng, one of the most well-known historic districts in inner Bangkok. By working on a number of community-based development projects, Kasama as a leading team member of Openspace has been appointed to work as a community architect by various public organizations. One of those is the Red Bull company that runs a number of community development projects in response to its CSR policy. In 2012, Red Bull asked Openspace to initiate a new community development project that would help to regenerate community activities in art and culture. Several areas in the historic districts of Bangkok were considered; however, Nang Loeng was chosen because of its background as a well-known entertainment center 60 years ago.

5.4 Idea generation

The beginning of the SLH project was to survey Nang Loeng to find the potential for development. Conversations with local residents took place in order to identify interesting points and ideas. Pee Daeng, a community leader of Nang Loeng community explains when Kasama came to talk about the community-based development project, she was both anxious and excited. She was skeptical what Kasama wanted from her because, at that time, the community was facing evictions for a new development of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station. However, Pee Daeng felt if this project is good and becomes successful, it would be the first concrete development project in terms of physical improvement that shows a cultural value of her community. Thus, this project would help somehow to raise an awareness of a cultural heritage to the general public. Therefore, an abandoned and deteriorated house was found to be a potential site because it was a popular private dance school during the 1960s. Ownership had passed through several generations but it had been

unoccupied for decades. Openspace architects saw this house as a great opportunity to regenerate art and cultural space for not only local people, but also others from outside the community. Red Bull agreed to provide funds for a renovation project to bring the dance school to life again. Figure 7 shows a community meeting after the first renovation phase finished in order to acquire ideas and genuine needs from Nang Loeng community members to plan for the next phase of renovation.



(Source: https://www.facebook.com/openspacebkk/photos_stream)

Figure 7. A community meeting at 'Samakkee Lee-rat House'.

5.5 Design process

An initial design proposal was not easily completed because consensus had to be reached among influential community members. By holding a number of meetings to build residents' trust in community architects and vice versa, the majority of the community leaders and the owner of the house allowed the renovation project to begin. The initial design stage was to recall memories of the old dance school. Old photographs were collected and old stories were narrated. Openspace architects also helped communities and partners to hold several public events not only to ask for more community engagement, but also for fund raising from the public. For instance, an exhibition 'Pa Tid Pai Tor', literally meaning 'to connect to continue', was held as the main public event from 16 August to 15 September 2013. Figure 8 shows a poster illustrating multiple photographs to recall memories of place, inviting the public to be part of the 'Pa Tid Pai Tor' event. The event aims to



(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/openspacebkk/photos>)

Figure 8. A Poster of “Pa Tid Pai Tor”

raise public concerns about conserving Nang Loeng communities as a major root of a Thai classic performance culture. The first cinema in Thailand, the private dance school, and houses of Thai traditional dance masters were considered and included in the event in order to illustrate social, cultural, and architectural values to be conserved.

There were three major activities held for this public event. First, a public seminar was held to tell old stories of the area by long-established residents and to discuss an on-going community-driven development which is the renovation project of the dance school mentioned above. Second, an exhibition was presented which showed public life in Nang Loeng in the past and in the present. Third, fashion and dance shows were undertaken at the end of the event. The event drew considerable attention from locals and outsiders, evident from a public TV channel that came to film and broadcast the event.

It is noted that although this event was initiated by Nang Leong community with considerable help from Openspace, there were a number of other people involved. Most of those who helped to run the events were academics, Bangkok tourist officers

and independent architects and artists. It is worth noting that they are from the existing networks of the Openspace and local residents. Kasama, as a leading architect in this project, said that the longer the process to develop the project, the more engaged people become. This helps to create a momentum of development and a sense of ownership.

Furthermore, being a visiting lecturer in numerous architectural schools in Thailand, Kasama also uses Nang Loeng intentionally as a learning milieu for architectural students for community design projects. A not-yet-finished Samakkee Lee-rat house has been used as a community building to hold talks, lectures and presentations for those students (Figure 9). Kasama believes that continuity is crucial; not only to keep working on the SLH project, but also to open up new opportunities for the community as well as making locals more aware of what is happening within their living environment. This technique is also to keep up the momentum of the SLH project.



(Source: The Authors)

Figure 9. Students present their design project at Samakkee Lee-rat house

5.6 Media release

Although Openspace has a very little relationship with media compared to Choojai, the partners involving in the SLH project such as Bangkok Tourism Division and the sponsor, Red Bull company, can play an important role in distributing news and promoting events to the public. For the SLH project, for instance, a public TV channel, Thai PBS, came to record and promoted the project in August 2013 (Figure 10). The

event was also promoted by using involved parties' social networks. Through online media including Kratingdaeng Spirit, a Red Bull website for promoting its CSR programs, and blogs posted by people involved, the event received considerable attention. Even though social design works by Openspace seem to be reached within particular groups of academics, public organizations, and local communities, these networks have been expanded and online social media now plays a decent role to promote and give information to the public.



(Source: <http://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/เปิดบ้านสามัคคีสถาปัตย์-รวมพลนักเดินร้านย่านนางเลิ้ง>)

Figure 10. Samakkee Lee-rat House on a daily entertainment news program via TPBS, a Thai public channel.

5.7 Growing as a social enterprise

The initial capital to establish Openspace as a design firm was from its co-founders. Having extended experiences in community planning and design, two co-founders were able to provide a social platform and an initial fund to run Openspace as an enterprise. Two years after the start as a design studio, Openspace could manage income that covered rent and operation costs as well as the cost of employing architects. It is significant that none of the co-founders of Openspace work full-time at the office; only one senior member of the firm manages the office. This is because all the Openspace senior architects work as project-finders and fund-seekers; they provide the office with the social design projects. The idea of establishing a proper design firm is to create a core but loose

platform for an existing network of community architects. Also, in this way their presence in the broader society is recognized.

Although the number of Openspace members has varied from time to time, eight permanent members were there in 2014. From these members, five work full time. The rest are partners who work occasionally for social design projects run by Openspace. They are from both private and public sectors such as independent architects and artists, student trainees, and university lecturers, etc. Most of Openspace's revenue is generated through NGOs and CSR projects and funds are received from both local and international sources. The Openspace architects receive their monthly salary at the normal rate for architects working in the Thai mainstream architectural industry. This was stated by one of the Openspace senior architects who has attempted not only to recruit young architects to join the firm, but also to satisfy parents of those newly graduated architects.

Finally, one of the main difficulties in running a social design enterprise in the Thai architectural design field is to recruit a suitable workforce because social design workers need a variety of experiences. Also, college-trained architects seem to have less chance to experience social architectural design as they are normally trained to serve a mainstream design industry.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

The last section discusses three issues that present similarities and differences between an advertising agency and an architectural design firm. Potentials and challenges in social design businesses in Thailand will also be discussed. First, considering leaders' reputation and connections as capital. Second, recognizing that collaboration and participation are indispensable. Third, media to promote social design works and keep up continuity of social design projects. Albeit three separate issues, they are interconnected and have an impact on each other.

The reputation and networks of the leaders of social design enterprises are crucial and should be considered as capital. In both case studies, reputations and existing networks of the co-founders, which they built throughout their professional lives, are invaluable not only for acquiring projects, but for gaining help and support from their peers and networks. Choojai's leaders have established themselves as successful art directors who can guarantee the delivery of quality design work. Being in the advertising agency industry, the past reputations of Choojai's leaders have become strong capital, bringing attention from the media, organizations, clients and the public. Their previous clients are also potential customers who could support Choojai in their new field of social design works. Plan Toys, for example, has continuously provided financial and technical support to the Mom-Made Toys project. Plan Toys has seemingly seen creative works designed by Choojai as an opportunity both to give social contribution and build up its firm reputation. As a result, Choojai's strong intention to work for society has been supported by their professional networks.

In contrast, the Openspace come from the field of architectural design, working as community architects. Community architects in the mainstream architectural design industry seem to have little voice even though this practice has existed in the Thai architectural arena for over a decade. Thus, the networks of Openspace are relatively limited, mostly linked to NGOs and particular socially focused groups of public organizations. This is congruent with the statements made by Armstrong and Stojmirovic (2011), Jégou, Manzini, & Bala, 2008, Manzini, 2007, and Shea (2012), who content that successful social design needs networks and community engagement. Nevertheless, extended experiences of Openspace architects have brought them to be under spotlight when referring to their previous successful community projects. Therefore, the reputation and connections of Openspace senior architects still help to recruit potential sponsors and partners even though these groups of people seem to be limited within some particular groups of interest.

Collaboration and participation are vital in undertaking social design works. They are required not only from potential users as stated by Sommer (1983) and Armstrong and Stojmirovic (2011), but also from partners and sponsors as suggested by Shea (2012). For the Mom-Made Toy project, Choojai, its partners and sponsors work collaboratively to run the project and host the media events. Moreover, Plan Toys as a sponsor in the MMT project has also become a partner, who collaborates with Choojai and groups of parents with autistic children in design workshop. Therefore, Plan Toys was able to help in manufacturing toys in response to real needs from the target groups. In addition, Thailand Post and TCDC as well as OKMD as the project's partners also provides free delivery services and organizes the media aspects, respectively.

Similarly, Openspace has also obtained considerable help and support through its social networks. For instance, linked by personal connections, the leaders of the Nang Loeng community invited Bangkok Tourism Division to provide information relating to past activities in the Nang Loeng area. Therefore, the Openspace architects were able to take these into account when formulating design considerations for the Samakkee Lee-rat House project. Moreover, Red Bull provided the initial funds to run the SLH project, so the Nang Loeng area has been used to host a number of social activities organized by Red Bull such as cultural revitalization in the Nang Loeng campaign. In other words, Red Bull has become more than a sole sponsor, but a partner which helps with the developmental momentum in the Nang Loeng area which goes beyond the SLH project. Also, the personal connection and social networks of the Openspace have brought architectural educators and students to the Nang Loeng community. Thus, they can learn and help the community as well as the SLH project. Nevertheless, what is different between the MMT and SLH projects is that the former project can be done within a certain period of time and rerun as an ongoing campaign in the future, whereas the latter

would take more time in the construction phase because it requires considerable financial investment and resources to complete the renovation process. In this paper, both case studies have shown that connections and social networks are valuable assets in encouraging participation and sponsorships. Connections to other co-creators and stakeholders can also keep up the momentum when working on social design projects.

As the nature of social design projects is not for maximizing profit, resources and funds for such design works tend to be limited. In this regard, the media can play an important role in promoting the projects to the general public in order to attract potential parties to be involved. This extends the potential for further help and support. Choojai, for instance, can take advantage of their place in the advertising market. Therefore, various kinds of help and support can be easily obtained through their professional networks. By comparison, Openspace has fewer connections to the media; therefore, their social design works tend to be known only by their existing networks. In this sense, partners and sponsors should play a supportive role in disseminating news and activities of social design projects. However, as large scale social architectural design projects tend to take time and consume considerable resources, there seem to be a smaller number of sponsors interested in funding those projects at the present time. Accordingly, this paper argues that it is possible for social design firms to survive if a variety of parties, such as users, participants, local communities, sponsors, co-workers, partners, and co-designers are included in social design projects.

To run social design projects as a business model, both advertising and architectural design studios seem to experience similar challenges. First, the management of all kinds of resources needs to

be well-balanced. For example, Openspace needs to run a number of social design projects simultaneously in order to maintain their financial status while Choojai promotes itself as accepting both market-led advertising and social design projects. Second, expanding their networks is important in order to expand institutional and individual partnerships. Both Choojai and Openspace always look for opportunities to be in the media. This seems to be an effective tactic to find their place in a broader society. It is equally important that social design works prove themselves to the society to show that they can contribute a great deal to humankind.

To conclude, three issues including (i) leaders' reputation and connections as capital, (ii) collaboration and participation with partners, and (iii) media to promote and keep up continuity of social design projects, are all essential in order to run social design enterprises in Thailand. Even though social enterprise in the design business in Thailand still sounds idealistic and has yet to be widely recognized, the case studies discussed in this paper have shown some evidence that this type of design business has been growing. Wider public acceptance and support is still needed in order for such enterprises to survive with dignity in the design industry.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the co-founders and designers of Choojai Creative for Good(s) and Openspace for their personal information and their kind explanation of work experiences and social design projects. Thanks to the partners and the communities involved in both the Mom-Made Toys and Samakkee Lee-rat House projects for their thoughts and insights towards social design works.

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