

Catalyzing Change: The Impact of Festivals on Bangkok's Pak Khlong Flower Market

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Abstract

This study examines the transformative impact of festivalization on Bangkok's Pak Khlong Flower Market, focusing on design interventions and the experiences of local vendors. The introduction of festivals such as Bangkok Design Week has revitalized the market, drawing new customer groups and injecting energy into the area. However, this shift also has brought challenges, including vendor displacement and potential superficial commercialism. The creative interventions, initiated in response to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's 2016 policy, highlight the necessity of continuous evaluation and adaptive management for sustainable urban regeneration. Despite the positive impacts, these changes risk triggering gentrification, threatening the market's traditional character and leading to the displacement of long-standing vendors. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data gathered through participant surveys and focus group discussions. The findings indicate that while festivals have bolstered the local economy and attracted younger, economically active visitors, the benefits have not been evenly distributed among vendors. The strategic placement of artworks and installations has fostered a collaborative atmosphere but also underscored the limitations of short-term festivalization in achieving long-term urban regeneration.

Key theoretical insights are drawn from urbanism literature, including the works of Jane Jacobs, David Sim, and Nabeel Hamdi, emphasizing the importance of small, incremental changes and reflective practice. The study critiques the potential negative impacts of gentrification, particularly the displacement caused by large corporations and rising rents, juxtaposing this with the positive outcomes of local vendor-driven gentrification, as exemplified by the All Flora shop. The paper concludes with recommendations for ensuring sustainable development, advocating for continuous evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and balanced integration of modern amenities with the market's historical essence. Future research should explore the theoretical dimensions of these phenomena, examining how small-scale interventions can influence broader urban policies and practices. This balance between practical action and critical reflection is crucial for navigating the challenges and opportunities of urban regeneration.

Keywords

Festivalization, Bangkok Flower Market; Pak Khlong Talat; Reflective Practice; Bangkok Design Week; Gentrification, Public space and placemaking

1. Introduction

Pak Khlong Flower Market, a vibrant and historical trading hub in Bangkok's Rattanakosin area, has long been known for its bustling atmosphere and diverse array of flowers. However, recent years have seen significant transformations driven by the introduction of various festivals, most notably Bangkok Design Week. These festivals have injected new energy and aesthetic appeal into the market, attracting both locals and tourists and shifting the market's dynamics from wholesale to a blend of retail and experiential commerce.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA)'s city beautification policy, launched in 2016, aimed to clear footpaths by evicting local vendors from pedestrian walkways. In response to this policy, creative and artistic interventions were ideated and conducted by the author, in collaboration with the local flower market vendors, local authorities, and young designers. These efforts have succeeded in drawing new customer groups, particularly younger generations, but also have introduced challenges such as displacement of local vendors and the risk of superficial commercialism.

This paper explores the dual nature of festivalization in Pak Khlong Talat. It examines how festivals can serve as catalysts for urban regeneration while also addressing the potential downsides they may bring. The study explores a balanced perspective on the impacts of festivalization. By engaging with recent critical urbanism literature and reflecting on the author's own design interventions, this study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the market's evolution.

2. Background: the Rise and Fall of the Bangkok Flower Market

The Bangkok Flower Market, known as "Pak Khlong Talat," is an ancient riverside trading district in Bangkok (Figure 1) with a rich history of continuous development. Originally a fish market, it evolved into a central market for agricultural produce and, eventually, the largest flower market in Thailand. This transformation reflects the broader economic and social changes in Bangkok, particularly in the Rattanakosin area. Despite its historical significance, recent years have introduced new dynamics driven by urban policies and festivalization efforts. In 1995, the Thai government implemented interventions to regulate Pak Khlong Talat, specifically addressing unauthorized parking issues. This pivotal period witnessed the establishment of the first City Law Enforcement Department under Bangkok Governor Bhichit Rattakul's administration. These regulatory measures aimed to limit truck access and reorganize the market space, inadvertently contributing to a shift in trade patterns. Around 2014, another wave of transformation swept through the Tha Tien-Pak Khlong Talat area. Renovations targeted shophouse buildings and the old Tha Tien market, resulting in a notable reduction of the once-crowded and bustling atmosphere. Several wholesale businesses shuttered during this period and the utilization of buildings began to deviate from their original large-scale trading identity. This transformation paralleled renovations conducted by the Market Organization under the Ministry of Interior, the establishment of Yodpiman River Walk in 2016, and the restructuring of pedestrian pathways in the Bangkok Pak Khlong Talat area. In 2016, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) launched a city beautification policy aimed at clearing footpaths by evicting local vendors from pedestrian walkways. This policy further impacted the market, creating both challenges and opportunities for revitalization. In response to these regulatory changes, creative and artistic interventions were ideated and conducted by the author, in collaboration with local vendors, local authorities, and young designers.

Moreover, the year 2020 witnessed an historic global crisis with the prolonged outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This crisis wreaked havoc on the world economy, significantly affecting Thailand as well. Traders in the

Pak Khlong Talat area were particularly hard-hit, experiencing a sharp decline in flower purchases. Contributing factors to the economic impact included the closure of numerous hotels, the suspension or downsizing of weddings and other ceremonial events, and the disappearance of activities requiring flower decoration. In response to the economic downturn, the Thai government implemented various measures, including assistance for the flower industry, to stimulate economic recovery. Despite these efforts, the slow recovery persisted, primarily due to the non-essential nature of flowers in many households. The Pak Khlong Talat area, renowned for its vibrant atmosphere and historical significance, now stands at a crossroads, requiring strategic revitalization, image enhancement, and targeted efforts to attract both customers and tourists. These efforts are crucial for restoring the economic vibrancy of Pak Khlong Talat to pre-pandemic levels.

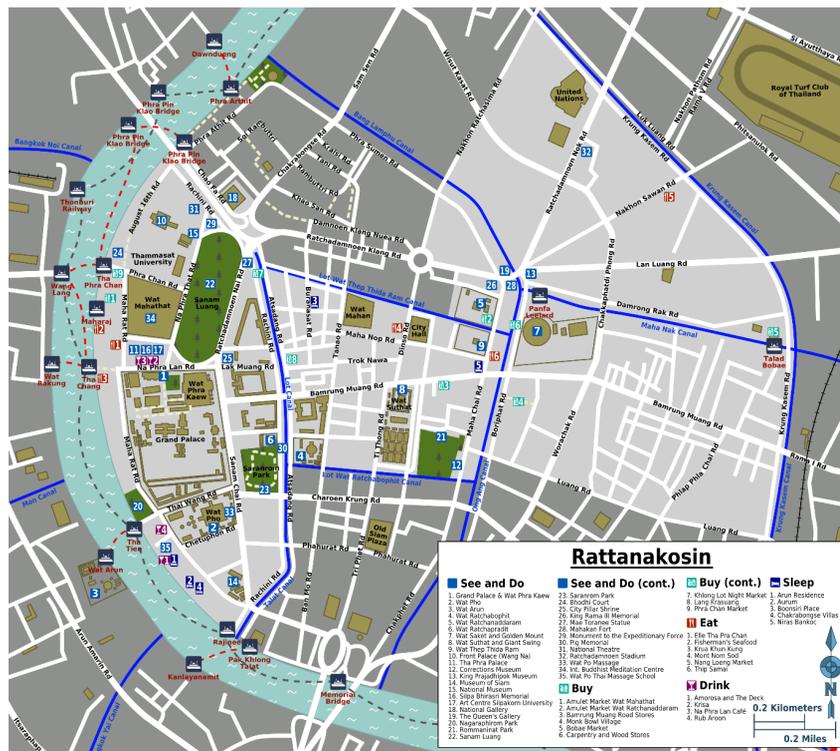


Figure 1. Map illustrating the location of Pak Khlong Talat (on the bottom left) and its surrounding attractions
 Source: Trotter, (2010)

3. Literature Review: Urban Dynamics and Pak Khlong Talat

David Sim's Soft City emphasizes the importance of flexibility and adaptability in urban design, aligning with participatory placemaking efforts that thrive on street-level vibrancy and informal interactions (Sim, 2019). However, these principles clash with the government's stringent policies on urban space management. The 2016 government policy, which sought to clear street vendors from pedestrian walkways, exemplifies this conflict. Under such policies, the spontaneous and informal liveliness that Sim advocates for often is deemed illegal and problematic. The government perceives these informal public spaces as issues to be eradicated rather than assets to be embraced. This contradiction poses a significant challenge to implementing Sim's ideas in areas like Pak Khlong Talat, where the government's approach to urban orderliness directly opposes the flexibility and adaptability essential for creating engaging and dynamic public spaces.

Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, critiques mid-20th-century urban planning and champions diverse, vibrant neighborhoods through mixed-use development and community engagement

(Jacobs, 1961). Jacobs' principles underscore the need to preserve the unique character of the Bangkok Flower Market while fostering a sense of community. However, preserving this character does not mean reverting to the past, where street flower vendors sold their wares on public walkways, despite its nostalgic charm. Moving forward, it is crucial to strike a balance between maintaining order and enhancing the market's unique identity. The design interventions aim to transform Pak Khlong Talat into a more organized and aesthetically appealing space while retaining its cultural essence. This evolution involves challenges such as managing the integration of modern amenities and tourist attractions without eroding the market's traditional appeal. Additionally, fostering community engagement in a way that respects both historical context and contemporary needs requires continuous dialogue and adaptive strategies. By addressing these challenges, the market can evolve into a space where order and charm coexist, reflecting Jacobs' vision of vibrant, community-oriented urban environments.

Sharon Zukin's *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* explores the impact of globalization, consumerism, and gentrification on urban authenticity (Zukin, 2010). This analysis is highly relevant to Bangkok's Flower Market, where the recent design interventions aimed at attracting tourism and enhancing aesthetic appeal may inadvertently lead to commodification of the local culture. While these interventions have transformed the market into a vibrant, participatory space, they also raise critical questions about the long-term authenticity and sustainability of such changes. The influx of tourists and the focus on creating visually appealing installations potentially could overshadow the market's traditional character and disrupt the local economy. Moreover, as the market continues to evolve, there is a risk that increased property values and rental prices could displace long-standing vendors, echoing Zukin's concerns about gentrification. Therefore, while the design interventions have successfully revitalized Pak Khlong Talat, it is essential to continuously evaluate their impacts to ensure that the market retains its unique identity and benefits the local community. This critical reflection sets the stage for a deeper discussion on balancing modernization with cultural preservation in the following sections.

Appleyard's (1981) concept of livable streets emphasizes the importance of streets as public spaces that support community life, safety, and social interactions. This resonates with the changes in the Tha Tien-Pak Khlong Talat area, where design interventions have been implemented to enhance the livability and aesthetic appeal of the market. For instance, the strategic placement of art installations and interactive exhibits during events like Bangkok Design Week transformed ordinary streets and spaces into engaging public environments. These interventions not only attracted visitors but also encouraged local vendors to improve the appearance of their shops, contributing to a more vibrant and welcoming atmosphere. By fostering a sense of community and enhancing the quality of life for both residents and visitors, these efforts align with Appleyard's vision of creating streets that serve as valuable communal spaces, thus improving the overall urban environment of Pak Khlong Talat.

Carmona (2015) redefines contemporary public space, emphasizing its dynamic nature. Bangkok Flower Market's transformation into a participatory and vibrant space reflects Carmona's insights into the fluidity of public spaces and their ability to adapt to meet diverse community needs. Similarly, Cresswell (2004) discusses the multifaceted nature of "place," which is evident in the transformation of Bangkok's Flower Market from a traditional market to a tourist destination. This shift redefines the market not just as a physical space but as a symbolic and experiential one, highlighting the importance of understanding place beyond its geographical aspects.

Madanipour (1996) examines the socio-spatial processes in urban design, highlighting the intricate interplay between social dynamics and spatial configurations. The changes at Pak Khlong Talat vividly illustrate

these concepts. The BMA's policy to clear street vendors from pedestrian walkways showcases how regulatory power reshapes urban spaces, enforcing new spatial configurations that reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. Historically, the market thrived on a chaotic yet charming environment, where tourists enjoyed the exotic messiness of Bangkok, although they rarely made purchases and mainly took photos. Furthermore, Pak Khlong Talat embodies the complex relationship between public and private spaces. Local shops have long encroached upon pedestrian walkways, turning public spaces into extensions of private commerce. This practice, though technically illegal, became an integral part of the market's identity and community perception. The ongoing battle between public rights and private interests has defined the market's character, presenting unique challenges for urban design that seeks to balance these competing forces. The current transformations at Pak Khlong Talat underscore Madanipour's theory of urban change and adaptation. As the market shifts towards a more regulated and aesthetically curated space, it enters a critical phase where the historical battles over power and space, and public versus private domains, are beginning to settle. This moment offers an important opportunity to reflect on these changes and shape a new sense of community for the future. The evolving dynamics at Pak Khlong Talat provide valuable insights into how urban spaces can adapt to contemporary social needs while preserving their unique cultural heritage.

Jan Gehl's *Cities for People* and his collaborative work with Svarre in *How to Study Public Life* emphasize creating urban environments that prioritize human experience and social interactions (Gehl, 2010; Gehl & Svarre, 2013). These principles resonate with the transformation of Bangkok Flower Market through various design interventions aimed at enhancing human-scale interactions and community engagement. For instance, the strategic placement of interactive art installations and public seating areas during events like Bangkok Design Week encouraged social interaction and created inviting spaces for people to gather and engage with the environment. Gehl and Svarre's methodology, including human-scale observation, activity mapping, and social interaction analysis, was applied to understand and improve the dynamics of public spaces at the market. This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how visitors and vendors interact within the space, leading to informed decisions that enhance the overall user experience.

Placemaking, as presented by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), shifts the focus from merely constructing physical spaces to creating vibrant, people-centric places (Project for Public Spaces, 2022). This approach aligns with the transformation of Bangkok Flower Market, which has evolved to cater not only to trade but also to community activities and cultural events. The principles of community-centric design were evident in initiatives like the "Pak Khlong Pop-Up" in Bangkok Design Week 2023 and "I Flower You: Bangkok Flower Market Festival," in Bangkok Design Week 2024 where public art, cultural performances, and community workshops were integrated into the market environment. These events transformed the market into a cultural and social hub, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing economic vitality by attracting diverse customer groups. However, promoting inclusive planning and engaging with local stakeholders also presents challenges. Balancing the diverse needs and expectations of different groups can be complex and ensuring that the benefits of such transformations are equitably distributed remains a significant concern. Additionally, integrating modern design elements while preserving the market's historical and cultural essence requires careful consideration and ongoing dialogue. These challenges highlight the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation in the placemaking process, inviting further discussion on how to create sustainable and resilient urban environments that truly reflect the community's character and needs.

This study examined the transformative impact of festivalization on Bangkok's Pak Khlong Flower Market, particularly through the author's design interventions and the experiences of local vendors. While festivals like

Bangkok Design Week have revitalized the market, attracting new customer groups and injecting new energy, they also have introduced challenges such as vendor displacement and superficial commercialism. The creative and artistic interventions initiated since 2016 in response to the BMA's policy have demonstrated that continuous evaluation and adaptive management can leverage festivals for sustainable urban regeneration. These interventions, by engaging local vendors, young designers, and local authorities, not only have attracted economically active customer groups but also have distributed economic benefits more equitably. Strategic placement of artworks and installations throughout the neighborhood, as shown in the Pak Khlong Pop-Up event, has fostered collaboration and countered the typical short-term impacts of festivalization.

King and Lertnapakun (2019) discuss the ambiguous heritage and the role of tourism in shaping Bangkok's Rattanakosin area. They emphasize how tourism can both preserve and commodify cultural heritage, leading to tensions between different stakeholder groups. This is particularly relevant for Pak Khlong Talat, where foreign tourists often visit but rarely purchase flowers, as their visits typically are brief and part of guided tours to other attractions. This highlights the need to target new customer groups who may come for the tourism experience but also spend money at local cafes and shops. Integrating creative and cultural activities into the market's environment aims to attract these new groups, enhancing both economic vitality and cultural engagement. In Pak Khlong Talat, government-organized cultural and festival events often have been temporary and have failed to bring long-term benefits to the market. These events typically use the area merely as a location without fostering sustainable economic growth or engaging new customer groups. Neef (2021) examines the darker side of the feel-good industry, focusing on issues such as land grabs and displacement that often accompany tourism and festivalization. This perspective is crucial for understanding the broader implications of these transformations on local communities. Design interventions aim to mitigate such negative impacts by ensuring that benefits are more evenly distributed among local vendors, though the challenge remains to create lasting and meaningful economic growth.

Rugkhanan (2022) explores the concept of authoritarian urbanism, discussing how urban planning and development in Thailand can sometimes prioritize state agendas over community needs, leading to social and spatial inequities. Pak Khlong Talat lacks formal community organization and common spaces for locals to discuss and collaborate, which contributes to a competitive rather than a collaborative atmosphere. Efforts are being made to address this by fostering informal networks and encouraging collective activities that can gradually build a sense of community, thereby enhancing the market's ability to adapt to and benefit from festivalization.

Shelby and Renwick (2023) analyze displacement through the commons, exploring how community spaces in Bangkok are reconfigured through socio-political processes. Their findings highlight the complex interplay between community cohesion and spatial order, which is particularly relevant to the transformation of Pak Khlong Talat. The competitive nature of the vendors, exacerbated by the lack of formal community organization, makes it challenging to achieve collective benefits from festivalization. Efforts to create shared spaces and community-focused events are intended to counteract this fragmentation and promote a more unified approach to market development.

Cudny (2016) provides a comprehensive overview of the festivalization of urban spaces, discussing the factors, processes, and effects that shape these transformations. Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011) focus on the creativity and control involved in city festivals, examining how these events can both enhance and constrain urban experiences. These insights are valuable for understanding how design interventions and festivals can be used strategically to regenerate old neighborhoods like Pak Khlong Talat. The approach aims

to leverage these principles to create a balance between innovation and the preservation of the market's unique character, ensuring that festivalization contributes positively to the community.

4. Author's Positionality in the Curation of Design Interventions

The Pak Khlong Pop-Up event in 2023 had an important impact as it was the first time that the whole neighbourhood became an official part of Bangkok Design Week. This event, along with other artistic and creative interventions curated by the author's team, demonstrated how strategic planning and community engagement can transform public spaces. By placing artworks and installations throughout the neighborhood, these interventions ensured a more equitable distribution of economic benefits among local vendors and fostered a collaborative atmosphere. This approach counters the typical short-term impact of festivals and highlights the potential for long-term urban regeneration through continuous reflection and adaptation.

As an outside funded expert involved in the study of Pak Khlong Flower Market, it is essential to reflect on positionality and potential biases. The research is supported by the Creative Economy Agency, which has been hosting the Bangkok Design Week for a decade and funded the role of organizing the festival in Pak Khlong Talat, and the Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University. These affiliations may influence the framing of the study and its outcomes. The author's role in the festival has been multifaceted. Since 2016, when the BMA launched the city beautification policy, active participation in multiple focus group meetings with local vendors, local authorities, and young designers has been undertaken to brainstorm the future of the market. It is important to note that, initially, participation from the local vendors was low because they did not perceive the creative events as beneficial to their income.

The engagement process deviated from standard community engagement methods due to the absence of formal community leaders; the vendors form a theoretical "community of practice" rather than an organized group. The only event where they worked together was a tribute to King Rama IX. Following the King's passing in 2016, vendors spontaneously began decorating their shops and the surrounding streets with flowers as a tribute. This act of collective mourning and respect created a visually stunning and cohesive display, which was driven by a mix of competitive spirit and communal pride. Vendors were motivated by the public and media attention that the initial displays received, leading to a larger, more coordinated effort that temporarily transformed the market area. This insight underscored the necessity of demonstrating tangible benefits, such as increased competition, to foster their involvement in events.

From 2016 to 2020, creative and artistic events gradually attracted a new customer base—the younger generation—initially perceived by local vendors as non-profitable. Although early interventions did not generate significant income, they started to change the area's perception towards a creative and cultural area. The turning point came with the "Form of Feeling @ Flower Market" event in 2021, where visitors purchased flowers as their entrance tickets. The event attracted 4,305 visitors and generated approximately 70 Thai Baht (approximately 2 USD) per visitor. However, post-event analysis from semi-structured interviews with the local vendors revealed that income benefits were unevenly distributed among vendors. This reflective practice, emphasized in this paper, highlighted the need for a more strategic approach.

In organizing Bangkok Design Week 2023, these lessons were applied by distributing artworks and installations throughout the neighborhood to ensure more equitable economic benefits for vendors across different areas. Moreover, involvement in organizing events and conducting surveys provides a unique vantage point, but it also may skew the perspective towards the positive aspects of festivalization. Acknowledging this

bias is crucial for striving towards a balanced view that considers both the benefits and the challenges faced by the local community. Additionally, the position as an outside researcher with funding ties may introduce certain biases in interpreting the data. It is important to be transparent about these influences and critically assess how they may affect the study's conclusions. Engaging with local stakeholders and incorporating their perspectives helps mitigate these biases, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the market's transformation.

5. Methods and Findings

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the impact of festivalization on the Pak Khlong Flower Market. Participant satisfaction surveys were conducted among visitors and local vendors during various festivals, including Bangkok Design Week, aiming to gather feedback on the economic and social impacts of the events. Participants were selected through a stratified random sampling method to ensure diverse representation.

In 2021, the "Form of Feeling @ Flower Market" event was held over nine days, attracting 4,305 visitors. Online questionnaires were distributed, receiving 2,525 responses. Among the respondents, 21.8% were first-time visitors to the Pak Khlong Talat area, 36.24% were aged 25-34, and 35.33% were aged 18-24. Approximately 59.1% expressed interest in revisiting the market and the overall satisfaction rate with the event was 88%. The average amount spent per person was 70 Thai Baht. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with 20 local vendors indicated that their incomes remained unchanged and they recommended organizing the event at different venues around the market, rather than in a single location.

The "Bangkok Design Week 2023" event, held over nine days, saw 31,760 visitors. Online questionnaires gathered 454 responses, with 18.7% being first-time visitors to the Pak Khlong Talat area, 16.3% aged 25-34, and 65.42% aged 18-24. About 80.4% expressed interest in revisiting the market and the overall satisfaction rate with the event was 91.45%. The average amount spent per person was 366.21 Thai Baht (approximately 10.5 USD). To calculate the event's circulating fund, the maximum daily number of visitors at one venue was used to avoid double-counting. Semi-structured interviews with 20 local vendors revealed increased incomes and they recommended making the event an annual occurrence.

In 2024, the "Bangkok Design Week" event again spanned nine days and attracted 37,639 visitors. Online questionnaires received 1,047 responses, with 65.1% being first-time visitors to the Pak Khlong Talat area, 30.85% aged 25-34, and 59.22% aged 18-24. Approximately 96.8% expressed interest in revisiting the market and the overall satisfaction rate with the event was 90.25%. The average amount spent per person was 230 Thai Baht (approximately 6.5 USD). The circulating fund was calculated using the maximum daily number of visitors at one venue. Semi-structured interviews with 20 local vendors indicated income increases, with many recommending the event be held annually and expressing interest in future participation.

In addition to the questionnaires and interviews, focus group discussions were held over the years with local vendors, young designers, and local authorities to explore perspectives on the market's transformation. These discussions provided qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with festivalization, conducted in a semi-structured format for in-depth exploration of key themes.

6. Scaling Up the Festivals to the Neighbourhood Level

The Pak Khlong Pop-Up event in 2023, integrated into Bangkok Design Week 2023, marked an important step in addressing the uneven distribution of economic benefits within the neighborhood. The event strategically spread art pieces across the area, incorporating photo exhibitions, augmented reality (AR) flower filters, and art installations. A photo collection by a local laborer documented the market during the COVID-19 lockdown, offering a visual representation of this historic period. Art installations were placed in locations with latent potential, such as an abandoned park, a neglected building, the underside of a highway bridge, and a mezzanine floor above the flower market. Local vendors were encouraged to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their shops during the event, facilitated by the team mediating with local district authorities to secure permission for utilizing shopfront spaces. The public actively participated in all exhibits, creating a vibrant atmosphere. The event generated approximately 4.87 million THB (approximately 139,000 USD) for local vendors, six times its allocated budget from funding sources to cover expenses. Highlights included interactive art installations by 27 June Studio, such as augmented reality at the abandoned First Post Office Monument and digital flowers beneath a highway bridge, transforming mundane locations into meaningful places.

Building on this momentum, the “I Flower You: Bangkok Flower Market Festival 2024” was incorporated into Bangkok Design Week 2024, aiming to expand community involvement and create new spatial experiences centered around the significance of flowers. The festival generated an estimated 4.91 million THB (approximately 140,000 USD), seven times the investment. Activities included a temporary market for flower-inspired creative products, art installations with lighting designs, storefront decorations, and an interactive media art installation titled “Pak Khlong Collective Blooms” at the First Post Office Monument by 27 June Studio. A photo exhibition featured 36 images capturing the local community’s connection to flowers, showcasing the work of two photographers: a street photographer who has been part of the Pak Khlong Talat university research team since 2016 and a long-time market worker with a passion for photography. This market worker, often seen as part of the underrepresented labor force, was recognized by various media during last year’s Bangkok Design Week 2023 for his impressive photography. The exhibition aimed to give a voice to these individuals, who often are overlooked and whose voices typically are unheard. The theme focused on how local vendors use flowers to express their feelings, highlighting their emotional connection to the flowers they work with every day. By turning the typically marginalized laborers into subjects, the exhibition explored their perspectives and emotions about the flowers, giving them a platform to share their stories. Moreover, local businesses participated with special promotions and activities (Figure 2) and the event garnered extensive media coverage. Collaboration among educational institutions, local communities, designers, youth groups, civil society organizations, and governmental and private entities involved over 30 participating organizations.

Participant satisfaction surveys revealed high ratings across various activities. The “I Flower You Postcard: Stick, Pump, Post!” activity, organized by students from Vernacular Architecture and Built Environment at Silpakorn University (Figure 3), achieved the highest satisfaction rating at 90.77%. This simple yet engaging activity involved sketching flowers on a postcard and sending it to a cherished recipient. The “Pak Khlong Collective Blooms” installation by the 27 June Studio (Figure 4) also received notable acclaim, involving a neighborhood “treasure hunt” for digital flower seeds, rewarding participants with floral bouquets from local vendors. Overall satisfaction with the festival organization scored 90.25%, with specific aspects such as the use of contemporary art and technology (Figure 5) to convey the area’s identity receiving an average satisfaction rating of 91.38%. This event also seemed to increase youth participation (Figure 6).



Figure 2. “I Flower You Postcard: Stick, Pump, Post!” by the MA. and Ph.D. students from the Vernacular Architecture and Built Environment Course at Silpakorn University

Source: The author



Figure 3. “Pak Khlong Collective Blooms” by the 27 June Studio

Source: The author



Figure 4. Street photo exhibition
Source: The author



Figure 5. Decorative local shopfronts
Source: The author



Figure 6. A noticeable rise in youth presence is observed post-event

Source: The author

7. Reflection on Practice: From a Festival to Viral Trends and Challenges

It often is thought that festivals are temporary events which come and go without inducing long-term changes. However, what unfolded after the Bangkok Design Week 2023 and 2024 is noteworthy. An increased number of young individuals continued to visit Pak Khlong to buy flowers and capture moments for their social media, a phenomenon that existed before the festival but gained viral traction afterward (Figure 6). This trend underscores the younger generation's keen interest in returning to the area after experiencing the festival's creative endeavors. The influx of young visitors, both for leisure and shopping, has noticeably increased.

Interestingly, the market has seen a gradual shift from a wholesale to a retail-oriented model, a transformation some shop owners previously dismissed. This shift is exemplified by shops like All Flora, which has become popular among teenagers and on TikTok (Figure 7). The children of shop owners, now in their twenties, are developing their parents' businesses by adapting to retail, thus attracting a younger customer base. This collective increase in footfall has debunked criticisms that young people do not make significant purchases.



Figure 7: All Flora shop, a retail flower shop run by the younger generation of local wholesalers

Source: The author

Shops in the Pak Khlong area have adapted to these changes by diversifying their offerings, transitioning from selling large wholesale batches to providing smaller, retail-priced flower arrangements. This includes flowers that already have blossomed to some extent, which are now sought after by younger customers who want immediate visual appeal for photo opportunities. This shift reflects the evolving preferences of the younger demographic and contributes to changing market dynamics.

Additionally, the transformation of shopfronts has extended beyond visual appeal, becoming a competitive arena for local vendors. Merchants are now engaged in friendly competition to decorate their shops attractively, enhancing the market's aesthetic charm and providing a platform for showcasing creativity and individuality. This empowerment fosters a positive atmosphere where vendors see the market as a canvas for expressing their identity and unique offerings, not just as a place of commerce.

The initiative to beautify shopfronts catalyzes small design interventions that can lead to transformative changes. When embraced by local vendors, these small changes elevate the visual appeal of individual shops and collectively transform the entire market. Beyond immediate visual impact, these improvements open doors to new creative opportunities, attracting more customers and making vendors more receptive to other positive changes. This approach highlights the market as a space for creative expression and entrepreneurship.

Originally, some vendors maintained a neutral or reserved attitude toward customers. However, there has been a noticeable shift, particularly among older vendors, towards friendlier and more engaging interactions with younger customers. This change has contributed to a more vibrant and welcoming atmosphere in the flower market, showcasing the market's ability to respond to changing demographics and consumer behaviors.

The festival served as a catalyst, sparking trends that have transformed the dynamics of the Pak Khlong Flower Market, reviving interest in the area and reimagining the market as a destination for both buying flowers and experiencing its unique ambiance.

The festival acted as a trigger, propelling the flower market into the spotlight of contemporary trends. The younger generation, driven by the desire for aesthetically pleasing and shareable experiences, has become a driving force behind the market's revitalization. The market has become a social and visual phenomenon, embodying the spirit of a renewed and vibrant community. The festival, though temporary, has laid the foundation for a sustained transformation in how people perceive and engage with the Pak Khlong Flower Market.

Examining the transformative processes from a bottom-up perspective and subsequently adopting a top-down policy viewpoint reveals noteworthy implications. The district office, upon observing the potential of vacant spaces and buildings utilized for creative events during festivals, particularly the First Post Office Monument, has initiated the development of a public garden area. This initiative aims to revive space and establish improved connectivity between various vacant areas, enhancing pedestrian and traffic flow. However, it is essential to view these plans as preliminary, necessitating ongoing monitoring to assess their long-term impacts.

In terms of external private sector engagement, entities such as Time Out Bangkok have played a significant role. Recognizing the potential of the Pak Khlong Talat area, they have organized a festival utilizing spaces initiated by the author and the team. This collaborative effort serves as a successful model, inspiring other stakeholders to contribute to the stimulation of creative endeavors within the locale. The positive responses and feedback from these events have fostered increased participation from additional private sectors.

Nonetheless, persistent challenges exist within the paradigm of managing public spaces in Bangkok. The prevailing approach often leans towards excessive organizational frameworks that may not align with the actual dynamics of the environment. While the district expresses contentment and acknowledges the enhanced atmosphere without incurring additional expenses for improvements, there remains a tendency to restrict excessive embellishments of shopfronts beyond their designated spaces, prompting concerns about potential overregulation extending beyond the confines of individual shopfronts.

As a practitioner, acknowledging the potential negative impacts such as gentrification is essential. The approach of implementing "small changes," as proposed by Nabeel Hamdi, is particularly relevant in the context of Pak Khlong Talat. Hamdi's principle of initiating action without the necessity of knowing every detail beforehand emphasizes practicality: "You don't have to know everything before you start something" (Hamdi, 2004). This philosophy has guided the interventions at Pak Khlong Talat since 2016, where small, incremental changes have been introduced, reflected upon, and adapted to foster continual improvement. This iterative process allows for practical action while also providing opportunities for critical reflection and further planning.

While being aware of the serious implications of gentrification, the focus has been on blending practice, theory, and reflection. The challenges of working in a market lacking formal community organization have been significant. Participation, while crucial, is far from romanticized; it necessitated starting with a few interested individuals. Over the years, persistent efforts have cultivated greater collaboration among vendors, gradually building a more engaged community.

This pragmatic approach acknowledges the difficulties and complexities of urban development and community engagement. The focus on small, reflective actions aims to mitigate the risks associated with gentrification while fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. As the market continues to evolve, it is essential

to critically assess the broader implications of these interventions, ensuring that the benefits of festivalization are equitably distributed and that the unique character of Pak Khlong Talat is preserved. Recognizing that these efforts may be the beginning of gentrification, continuous reflection and adaptation are crucial to navigate these challenges responsibly.

8. Challenges and Negative Impacts of Festivalization

While the transformation of Pak Khlong Flower Market through festivalization has brought numerous positive changes, it is crucial to critically examine the negative impacts. Festivalization can lead to gentrification and displacement, affecting the local vendors who have been integral to the market for decades. Since the introduction of BMA's city beautification policy in 2016, former street vendors, who traditionally sold flowers on pedestrian walkways, have faced significant disruptions. Many of these vendors have had to rent small shops in formal markets, imposing new financial burdens due to rent payments. There is a perception among some local vendors that the government's plan was to evict them to benefit wealthier market owners, although this allegation remains unproven. Moreover, the entry of large corporations, whether local or foreign, can lead to rent hikes as property values increase in response to corporate investments. This not only displaces local vendors but also disrupts the community dynamics that have defined Pak Khlong Talat for decades. The market's transformation into a commercialized space could undermine the very essence that makes it special, replacing local charm with corporate sterility.

Since the introduction of Bangkok Design Week in 2023, local vendors have not yet experienced an increase in rent. However, this stability partly is due to the festivals being a recent development and the ongoing economic recovery. The absence of a rent hike now does not guarantee that it will remain unchanged in the future. Festivals have provided a much-needed boost to the local economy, acting as a temporary remedy. However, in the long term, the improved economic conditions might lead to rent increases, potentially making it difficult for long-standing vendors to sustain their businesses. Additional potential negative impacts include the loss of traditional knowledge and practices as newer, trendier businesses replace long-standing vendors. The influx of wealthier visitors also could alter the market's demographic makeup, potentially leading to social tensions between new and existing residents.

The case of All Flora shop exemplifies the positive aspects of gentrification by local vendors. Run by the younger generation of a long-standing flower vendor family, All Flora has successfully opened in a new shophouse, transitioning from wholesale to retail. This shop has attracted a new demographic and become popular on social media platforms like TikTok. This type of gentrification by local vendors can be seen as empowering, since it allows for innovation and adaptation within the community, fostering economic growth and preserving local heritage without replacing the original wholesale business.

In contrast, gentrification driven by large corporations presents greater risks. For over a decade, big Chinese corporations have invaded the market segment in Pak Khlong Talat, even before the BMA policy in 2016 was launched. These corporations often bring substantial financial resources that can outcompete local vendors, leading to a homogenization of the market where unique local shops are replaced by generic corporate entities. This phenomenon raises the question of whether the changes driven by these corporations constitute gentrification in the traditional sense, or if they represent a different dynamic of economic domination and displacement.

Some displaced vendors have relocated to the “New Pak Khlong Talat Market,” a newly constructed area along Phran Nok-Putthamonthon Sai 4 Road. This new market, founded by a group of the evicted vendors due the BMA policy in 2016, is designed to better accommodate wholesale activities. Unlike the original Pak Khlong Talat, which is in the densely populated inner city with narrow roads, the new market features wide roads suitable for truck access, improved sanitation, waste management, and public toilets. Arguably, the new market’s infrastructure is more suited for wholesale activities than the original site. This suggests that the original market, situated in historic Bangkok, might be more effectively repurposed for retail-based trade.

The ongoing efforts to balance modernization with the preservation of Pak Khlong Talat’s unique character are critical. Small, reflective actions have been essential in mitigating the risks associated with gentrification while fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. However, continuous vigilance and adaptive strategies are necessary to ensure that festivalization benefits are equitably distributed and that the market retains its cultural heritage. Recognizing that these efforts might mark the beginning of gentrification, it is vital to critically assess and navigate these changes responsibly. This is why reflection on practice is crucial.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined the transformative impact of festivalization on Bangkok’s Pak Khlong Flower Market, particularly through the lens of design interventions and the experiences of local vendors. The findings highlight that while festivals like Bangkok Design Week have revitalized the market, attracted new customer groups, and infused the area with renewed energy, they also have introduced challenges such as the displacement of vendors and the potential for superficial commercialism.

The creative and artistic interventions initiated in response to the BMA’s 2016 policy have demonstrated that continuous evaluation and adaptive management can leverage festivals for urban regeneration. However, the introduction of these festivals has not been without its problems. Engaging local vendors, young designers, and local authorities has attracted younger, economically active customer groups, but the economic benefits have not been evenly distributed among vendors. The strategic placement of artworks and installations throughout the neighborhood, as seen in the Pak Khlong Pop-Up event, fostered some collaboration but also has highlighted the fragility of these efforts in mitigating the typical short-term impacts of festivalization.

To ensure the continued success and mitigate potential negative outcomes, it is crucial to implement a system of continuous evaluation and adaptive management. Regular assessments of the impact of festivals should be conducted, incorporating feedback from local vendors and visitors to adapt and refine future events. For instance, the success of “Form of Feeling @ Flower Market” in 2021 underscored the importance of integrating visitor and vendor feedback to enhance the economic benefits of subsequent events. However, there is a need to critically reflect on whether these festivals truly benefit all stakeholders or merely serve as temporary boosts.

Engaging diverse stakeholders in the planning and execution of festivals also is essential. While involving local vendors, community members, local authorities, and designers in the festival planning process helps address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, the extent to which this engagement translates into genuine, long-term benefits remains questionable. The focus group meetings conducted since 2016 have shown the value of inclusive planning, but also the limitations of such efforts in fostering sustained community support and participation.

Fostering community collaboration through structured opportunities can enhance the collective efforts of local vendors. Establishing formal spaces and opportunities for local vendors to collaborate and discuss common issues can strengthen the community network and reduce competitive tensions. The absence of a formal community organization has been a clear barrier; creating such structures can enhance collective efforts. Yet, the challenge remains whether these efforts can withstand external pressures and the lure of commercial gains.

Targeting economically active new customer groups is another crucial strategy. Developing strategies to attract customer groups who will contribute economically, such as promoting local cafes and shops alongside the flower market, can boost local commerce. The introduction of events like Bangkok Design Week has shown that attracting a younger demographic can have a positive economic impact, but the long-term sustainability of this approach needs careful consideration.

Balancing short-term festival events with long-term strategic planning is necessary to ensure sustainable development. Combining temporary festival events with long-term urban planning, reflecting on past events, and incorporating lessons learned into future initiatives ensures that short-term successes contribute to long-term goals. This approach, however, requires a critical examination of the assumptions underpinning these plans and the potential unintended consequences.

Promoting cultural and economic sustainability is vital for the long-term success of the market. Ensuring that festivalization efforts preserve the market's cultural heritage while promoting economic growth is crucial. Avoiding excessive commercialization that could detract from the market's historical significance is necessary. The careful curation of events and installations since 2016 has shown that it is possible to balance these objectives, but this balance is precarious and requires constant vigilance.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex dynamics of festivalization at Pak Khlong Flower Market. While the interventions have had positive impacts, the potential for negative consequences such as gentrification and displacement cannot be ignored. Continuous reflection and adaptation are essential. Future research should explore the theoretical dimensions of these phenomena, examining how small-scale interventions can scale up to influence broader urban policies and practices. The balance between practical action and critical reflection remains crucial in navigating the challenges and opportunities of urban regeneration.

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All research procedures involving human participants were done in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Participation in the study was voluntary and informed consent was obtained for all research components that involved human participants, in accordance with standard ethical practice.

Author Contributions

The manuscript titled "Catalyzing Change: The Impact of Festivals on Bangkok's Pak Khlong Flower Market" was authored independently by a single contributor, S.T. Consequently, all aspects of the research, including conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation, were exclusively undertaken by the author.

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