DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS' PRODUCTS IN UBONRATCHATHANI'S OLD TOWN AREA: FROM CANDLE-MAKING WISDOM TO ECONOMIC VALUE ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract - This article is part of a research project aimed at enhancing the cultural capital of candle-making in UbonRatchathani to generate additional and new value within the creative economy framework in the old town area. The objectives are to study the potential of cultural entrepreneurs and develop prototypes for cultural entrepreneurship in the Old Town of UbonRatchathani. This qualitative research employed in-depth interviews, focus groups, and workshops as methods. The study involved five cultural entrepreneurs, including Sri Pradu Candle Learning Center, Mok Restaurant, Ban Prathum Community Enterprise, Na Ubon Souvenirs, and Darasilp Shop. The findings revealed that these entrepreneurs successfully designed and developed 12 cultural product prototypes. Moreover, all participants received training in sales and marketing to enhance their capabilities in these areas.

Keywords - Cultural Entrepreneurs, Candle-Making, Cultural Products, Candle Festival

I. INTRODUCTION

UbonRatchathani, Thailand, is one of the largest provinces in the northeastern region. Historically, it was once the capital of the lower northeastern area, with the term "Ratchathani" meaning "capital city." In the past, UbonRatchathani encompassed the present-day provinces of UbonRatchathani, Amnat Charoen, and Yasothon. The province is renowned for its numerous temples, which historically served as centers for education, moral development, and community guidance. Consequently, people of the past formed a deep bond with temples, resulting in the emergence of long-standing cultural traditions, most notably the Candle Festival.

This festival, held annually during the Buddhist Lent period, has become widely recognized by both Thai and international tourists.However, studies on the sustainability of this cultural tradition indicate risks to its continuity. Key issues underlying this research can be summarized as follows: 1) The lack of enhancement and development of cultural capital, such as the absence of innovation in candle-making traditions, storytelling for cultural capital, and support for cultural entrepreneurs in the Old Town area.2) The absence of initiatives to empower cultural entrepreneurs in the Old Town of UbonRatchathani, particularly in acquiring skills and knowledge necessary for creating distinctive and innovative products and services that meet modern market demands.Recognizing these issues, the researchers conducted this study to harness local cultural values and transform them into innovative cultural products. The aim is to generate income and improve the quality of life for the people of UbonRatchathani.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Concepts of Culture, Cultural Entrepreneurs, and the Commodification of Culture: Greenwood (1982) described culture as a social transmission process through which individuals gain knowledge, understand practices, develop beliefs, and appreciate artistic creations, preserving or adapting them as appropriate over time. Hofstede (1980) further emphasized that culture encompasses shared ways of thinking within a society.Cultural entrepreneurs are those who recognize the importance of art in fostering local economic development. They bridge the world of art and commerce, often characterized by enthusiasm, creativity, and a willingness to take risks. According to Klamer (2011), cultural entrepreneurs exhibit unique traits: 1) Success in business, 2) Interest in art,and 3) Responsibility and commitment to invest in their ideas.Many organizations have increasingly emphasized the importance of cultural industries due to their economic significance (Konrad, 2013). Understanding the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship is crucial for local development and strategic planning (Ferreira et al., 2016). However, cultural entrepreneurs often require support from both public and private sectors (Acheson et al., 1996), as their work is deeply connected with various business services.The commodification of culture refers to the application of valuable cultural resources to create economic value, whether in the realms of creative industries,

cultural tourism, or conservation efforts. The researchers plan to apply these concepts to enhance the potential of cultural entrepreneurs in UbonRatchathani's Old Town area.

2. Concepts for Enhancing the Potential of Cultural Entrepreneurs: To explore the potential of cultural entrepreneurs, the researchers used SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This approach informed the development of prototype products and the capacity-building of cultural entrepreneurs.Relevant studies include those by Jankingthong et al. (2020) and Nawakanworrakul&Suepakdee (2021), which examined methods for enhancing the capabilities of cultural entrepreneurs and operators in various contexts.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, emphasizing participatory action research (PAR) within the Old Town area of Mueang District, UbonRatchathani Province. The research population consisted of five cultural entrepreneurs, including operators of souvenir and gift product stores, restaurants, textile shops, and the Sri Pradu Candle Learning Center.To achieve the study's objectives, the following qualitative research tools were utilized:1) In-depth Interviews: These were conducted to understand the operations, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges faced by each entrepreneur. The insights gained were used to develop cultural products.,2) Focus Groups: These were used to analyze the current potential of cultural entrepreneurs and to identify strategies for enhancing their capabilities., and3) Workshops: These sessions were designed to transfer knowledge and improve the skills of cultural entrepreneurs in the Old Town area.The researchers collected data through on-site surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and workshops. Documentation from related sources was also reviewed. All data were analyzed using content analysis to derive meaningful insights.

IV. RESULTS

The presentation of the research findings is divided into three sections:1) Analysis of Entrepreneurial Potential and Development of Cultural Product Prototypes,2) Workshops to Enhance the Capabilities of Cultural Entrepreneurs, and 3) Showcasing Cultural Products Inspired by Candle-Making Wisdom.

1. Analysis of Entrepreneurial Potential and Development of Cultural Product Prototypes

1.1 Mok Restaurant: The analysis revealed that the entrepreneur excels in marketing due to a strong understanding of customer needs, unique product offerings, and well-defined target groups. However, creativity in developing recipes is limited to the owner, with no system for knowledge transfer or succession planning. In this research, the restaurant developed a product prototype called “The Story of The Candle Art City”, inspired by UbonRatchathani's candle-making heritage. These creative dishes were sold during the 2022 Candle Festival, allowing customers to pre-order them as shown in Figure 1-4



Figure 1-2:Food items from candle making wisdom.



Figure 3-4:Bongkotmas dessert.

1.2 Ban Prathum Community Enterprise: This textile group demonstrated strong product development capabilities, incorporating local motifs such as native flowers and leaves into their designs. However, the group lacked knowledge in online marketing and content creation. In this research, their prototype products feature handwoven cotton fabric embroidered with candle patterns and motifs derived from the local candle festival, creating a unique and culturally significant product as shown in Figure 5-8.



Figure 5-6: Hand-woven cotton fabric with wax embroidery.



Figure 7-8: Hand-woven cotton fabric with flower embroidery.

1.3 Sri Pradu Candle Learning Center: The center's strength lies in its expertise and experience in candle carving, with products often winning awards for their intricate designs. They have successors ready to continue the craft but lack online marketing skills. In this research, the center developed a cultural learning product, the Candle Kit, to teach candle-making techniques to interested individuals as shown in Figure 9-10.



Figure9-10: Product set for promoting candle wisdom learning (Candle Kit)

1.4 Na Ubon Souvenirs: This souvenir shop has clear target groups and innovative ideas for product development. However, the business faces challenges in workforce availability, funding, and packaging design. The shop collaborated with the research project to create products inspired by the candle-making tradition and local lifestyles, including keychains, notebooks, screen-printed shirts, and tote bags, with patterns derived from traditional festival activities as shown in Figure 11-12.



Figure11: Line drawing used as a pattern



Figure12: Keychain

1.5 Darasilp Shop: Specializing in candle carving, the shop owner is highly skilled but lacks a successor, threatening the sustainability of the business. Packaging for their carved candles also needs improvement. The shop created prototypes inspired by iconic Buddhist and cultural figures, such as Phra Chao YaiInPlaeng and Tao Wessuwan candles, designed as meaningful souvenirs and spiritual items as shown in Figure 13-16.



Figure 13-14: Carved candles in the shape of Phra Chao YaiInthaPlang.



Picture 15-16: Carved candles in the shape of Thao Wessuwan at Wat Si Pradu.

2. Workshops were organized to improve management and marketing skills. Topics included: 1) Content marketing 2) Storytelling and branding and 3) Online sales through platforms like Shopee and

TikTok.Participant satisfaction was assessed, with overall results indicating a high level of satisfaction (average score of 4.32 out of 5).

3. Cultural product prototypes were presented in various events, such as: The UbonRatchathani Candle Festival 2022, The 40th National Chamber of Commerce Seminar and The Cultural Capital Development Fair along the Moon River Walking Street.Evaluation results showed that the products were highly appreciated for their uniqueness, cultural identity, and craftsmanship, with an overall satisfaction score of 4.57 out of 5. It is shown in Table 1.

Evaluation Criteria	Average Score	Satisfaction Level
1. Cultural products are unique and distinctive, showcasing intricate craftsmanship, wisdom, and artistry.	4.62	Highest
2. Cultural products reflect the identity and wisdom of candle-making.	4.72	Highest
3. Cultural products feature diverse designs.	4.54	Highest
4. Cultural products are available at a range of prices.	4.63	Highest
5. Cultural products are of high quality.	4.25	Highest
6. Cultural products are reasonably priced in relation to their quality.	4.32	Highest
7. Cultural products include engaging and meaningful stories.	4.78	Highest
8. Cultural products meet customer needs effectively.	4.55	Highest
9. Development of cultural products utilizes skilled craftsmanship and creativity.	4.67	Highest
Overall Average	4.57	Highest

Table 1 Evaluation Results of Cultural Products

V. CONCLUSIONS

The enhancement of cultural entrepreneurs' potential and innovation in the Old Town area was achieved through various activities and analyses. The researchers conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of businesses and entrepreneurs. The study utilized the cultural identity and wisdom of candle-making in the Old Town community as cultural capital to design and develop innovative cultural products.Five cultural entrepreneurs participated in the development of 12 cultural product prototypes:Sri Pradu Candle Learning Center, Mok Restaurant, Ban Prathum Community Enterprise, Na Ubon Souvenirs and Darasilp Shop.To enhance the entrepreneurs' capabilities, a series of workshops were conducted. These workshops covered business and marketing management, storytelling, branding, and online sales. Overall, participant satisfaction with the workshops was rated as "very high."Furthermore, cultural products inspired by the wisdom of candle-making were showcased in various exhibitions and events, including the UbonRatchathani Candle Festival and other regional fairs. Feedback from buyers and attendees indicated a high level of satisfaction with these cultural products, contributing to the sustainability of this cultural tradition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Practical Applications

1. 1.Other cultural entrepreneurs or relevant agencies, such as provincial tourism and cultural promotion offices, UbonRatchathani's Department of Commerce, and UbonRatchathaniMunicipality, can adopt this cultural capital enhancement model as a framework for organizing activities that create jobs, promote tourism, and support local cultural entrepreneurship. Expanding these efforts to nearby areas will help prevent over-centralization and empower local communities to independently develop their cultural enterprises.
2. Partnerships among public, private, and community sectors focused on preserving and promoting UbonRatchathani's candle-making wisdom can utilize the prototype cultural products developed in this study. This can include marketing initiatives and standardization efforts to broaden the distribution of cultural products, thus generating more income for local communities and cultural entrepreneurs.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies on candle-making cultural heritage should expand to include other communities in

Mueang District, UbonRatchathani Province, to understand broader regional impacts.

2. Long-term studies or annual research should be conducted to analyze social and environmental costs, as well as the value created through cultural business operations. These findings can be used to compare social return on investment (SROI) and assess the broader benefits of sustaining cultural entrepreneurship.

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