International Sustainable Development Studies Institute  
Expedition Field Course

Cities: Urban Design and Sustainability  
Geography/Ecology  
Spring Semester 2015

OVERVIEW

In both Chiang Mai and Bangkok, this course will examine specific examples of sustainable design and architecture, and what challenges there are for creating a truly sustainable city. Students will identify a problem of urban sustainability, develop a method for quickly collecting data on the problem, and work on a solution through design and architecture.

OBJECTIVE

This course will explore key issues of urban sustainability in the context of two Thai cities: Chiang Mai and Bangkok. In particular, we will look at environmental issues, transportation, the informal economy, and the origins of Bangkok. Good governance and community participation are crucial factors in developing sustainable cities, so we will pay great attention to how city planning is carried out and the challenges in making city planning more participatory in the Thai context.

Our exploration of urban sustainability will not start and end by seeking how to mold the physical reality of our study sites to environmental ideals. We will explore theories of globalization, urbanization, and nation-building and the role these processes play in Chiang Mai and Bangkok particularly. We will explore the particular histories of Bangkok neighborhoods through their development as networks of waterways and later as networks of roads and alleys. Finally, we will study historic and contemporary buildings and monuments and the roles they play within competing Thai visions of a prosperous and auspicious city.

Students must integrate their understandings of these two particular urban histories and the contemporary political dynamics with the emerging literature that highlights the urgent need for urban development that is sustainable, resilient, and environmentally just. Though this is a challenging theoretical task alone, this course further requires students to apply their ideas by designing and executing a study in Chiang Mai of an urban sustainability indicator and present their results to a panel of residents.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students on the course will demonstrate competency in the following:

• Understanding of the key issues concerning sustainable urban development on several scales, from building design to infrastructure to city planning

• Understanding the development patterns of Chiang Mai and Bangkok, the relationships between centers of commerce, ethnic neighborhoods, slums and informal sectors, etc.

• Understanding of the political dynamics of urban and environmental policymaking in Thailand

• Rapid studies of urban sustainability indicators

• Mapping of key urban features (transportation, infrastructure services, formal and informal use, sacred spaces, green spaces, etc)

• Interview methods, including competency in surveys of city stakeholders from (architects, NGO workers, city planners, slum dwellers, etc)

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Participation 20%

Seminar Week Activities 20%
Module 1 Essay: Bangkok’s history 10%
Module 2 Essay: Bangkok’s infrastructure 10%
Module 3 Essay: Bangkok’s slums 10%
Module 4 Sustainability Indicator Study in Chiang Mai 30%

FIELD NOTES

The essays, and your journal in general, need to be legible and neatly presented. Instructors must be able to easily read and grade it within the constraints of time and environment of the course. If the instructor can’t read it, it will not get graded! Please do not write in pencil (it will smudge). Use waterproof ink in your journal.

CITATIONS

The essays, and your journal in general, need to be legible and neatly presented. It is VERY important that the instructor can read it with no difficulty within the constraint of time and environment during the EFC. If the instructor can’t read it, it will not get graded! Please DO NOT write in pencil (it will smudge) and use waterproof ink in your journal.

Citing your sources gives credit to the published and unwritten (verbal, observed, experienced) sources that contribute to your writing. Just as you normally cite written sources in research papers, it is especially important in field-based course to acknowledge the people who have contributed to your learning.

Using field citations also allows you and your readers to easily trace your ideas back to their origins in specific field experiences and to locate them in your field notes. This is an essential skill to develop in every academic discipline.

Essays are to have in-text citations of written and unwritten sources. A list of works cited is not necessary.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

In order for a course like this to be a success, it requires the full participation of all members of the course. While it is true in any context, given what we are studying, the phrase “you get out what you put in” is especially relevant. Learning about sustainability in this context will be an interactive, on-going learning process. Please show your fellow students the courtesy of only contributing to discussions if you have read the material.

During class and in the field, students are expected to ask questions during guest lectures, field activities and other learning opportunities. Active learning—asking questions, taking notes, exploring new ideas and concepts, talking with local people—are all required to do well in this course. During the course, students are also expected to follow these guidelines:

- Attendance and active participation in the expedition and field activities are required.
- Students are expected to demonstrate leadership and teamwork.
- Students are expected to manage their time well. You should have completed the reading assignments before class meetings and turn in assignments on their due dates.

Rather than mediated through reading a prepared text, you will be involved directly in learning the subject matter. This will be challenging, as direct learning is more difficult—there is no author who has pre-formatted or organized the material for you. Part of what you will be learning in this course is how to collect and analyze information yourself.

SEMINAR WEEK

During the first week, seminar is 1-4pm M-Th and 9am-12pm on Friday. Please be prompt.

Monday Intro
Tuesday  
Urban development worldwide and in SE Asia


Douglass, Mike, Kong Chong Ho, and Ooi Giok Ling. "Civic spaces, globalisation and Pacific Asia cities."


Wednesday  
Three new urban concepts: sustainability, resilience, and environmental justice

Douglass, Mike, Kong Chong Ho, and Ooi Giok Ling. "Civic spaces, globalisation and Pacific Asia cities."


Just sustainabilities

Thursday  
Bangkok


Friday  
Measuring Urban Sustainability

UN-Habitat, "The relevance of street patterns and public space in urban areas" UN-Habitat Working Paper, April 2013.
Introduction and chapter(s) from Hayden, Dolores. The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History

Cities: Urban Design and Sustainability


SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Sustainable architecture techniques

Sustainable architecture theory


Architecture and urban planning in Thailand


FIELD ITINERARY

23 Mar to 27 Mar  Module 1: Bangkok’s history

Consider Bangkok’s spatial development through the lens of ethnic immigration and settlement, with special focus on Chinese merchants and the early canal systems.

As we consider Bangkok’s rise to commercial and political power, we will consider how elite actors - royal and commercial - have shaped urban planning to reflect and reinforce changing cultural ideals and their own power.

Read Bangkok: A Cultural History to frame and inform your experiences in the context of how other foreigners have experienced historical and contemporary Bangkok. Compare and contrast your impressions - and the cultural expectations they reflect - with those presented by O’Neil.

28 Mar to 30 Mar  Module 2: Bangkok’s infrastructure

Consider Bangkok’s infrastructure sustainability in the context of both urban and suburban development: transportation (mass transit, walking, bicycling, driving, boating), clean water, wastewater, energy (electricity and gas), waste disposal, and flood mitigation.

31 Mar to 2 Apr  Module 3: Bangkok’s slums

We have considered the role of elites and the citywide infrastructure, but now we turn to how informal markets and slums shape and respond to the formal sector. We will consider the geography of slums and how it reflects creativity within severe constraints.

Our interviews with NGO workers and slum dwellers will enhance our understanding of how informal housing reflects nationwide issues of citizenship and land tenure.

Cities: Urban Design and Sustainability
Chiang Mai provides the final site for our consideration of urban planning and development.

Use the theory of sustainable urban development, your experiences analyzing Bangkok from several perspectives, and your growing familiarity with Chiang Mai to develop and execute a rapid study of a sustainability indicator of your choice.

On Thursday, April 1, you will present your study to our instructor team and a panel of public guests with experience in Chiang Mai.