

Special Issue on Sustainability in Southeast Asian Cities

Introduction ▪

This issue of *Urbana* presents research at the confluence of environmental planning, sustainability, and urbanization in the Asian context. In terms of urbanization, it is a special moment in Asia. While the level of urbanization varies widely from country to country, as whole the region has just in the last several years crossed the threshold from being more rural to being more urban. At the same time, environmental issues, prompted by health concerns, increased appreciation of environmental services, and the looming concern with climate change, along with other motivations, continues to draw increased attention. Finally, the concept of sustainability, despite being has been popularized to buzzword status, does offer a three pillar (economic, social, and environmental) framework for placing urbanization and development activity.

Just as Asia is a dynamic region for cities, urbanization, and development, it has also become a dynamic setting in terms of the academy. Increased demand and funding for a wide range of academic institutions, greater availability of funding for research, the widened availability of the internet, and the existing human and intellectual capital in the region has generated a vibrant culture of academic exchange. Coincidentally, and fortuitously, a series of Asian urbanization conferences has been convened, with the last three meetings within Southeast Asia. The conference series, organized biennially since 2005, attracts scholars and practitioners across a kaleidoscopic range of countries, development settings, and institutions where they can engage in intellectual and practical conversations and dialogue. Indeed, the three papers of this issue are the refined and finished products of research initially shared in rough and preliminary form for discussion at the 14th Asian Urbanization Conference held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2018. Each of the three exhibits facets of environmental planning and sustainable development at several scales within in Southeast Asia. All three papers present research from Southeast Asia with two focused largely at the large city scale (both focusing on Bangkok) and the other at the metropolitan-regional scale (Ho Chi Minh City).

Both Bangkok centered papers illustrate an environmentally-oriented grassroots engagement in planning issues. Judith Bopp's paper on civil stakeholder engagement related to the organic food movement is less traditional planning in a manner much like the newly popular food systems planning initiatives in the United States. Like efforts in the US, the factors driving the initiatives are multi-faceted and impact a wide range of stakeholder motivations. Refreshingly, grassroots micro-level forces seem to be driving policy changes, various governmental initiatives, and ultimately may even be giving rise to more incremental but momentous changes to the legal landscape, institutions, and social systems.

Similarly, bottom-up engagement in the informal waste sector (IWS) offers opportunities for more sustainable or at least environmentally conscious municipal solid waste management (MSWM) systems. Nguyen and Nitivattananon examined the interplay between the formal MSWM activities and the informal sector. Indeed, some actors, most notably the municipal garbage collection crews, are simultaneous working in both the informal and formal sector. Their informal sector "side gig" of collecting, processing, and selling recyclables provides a supplemental income to their formal sector employment as waste collectors. It is a model of IWS / MSWM integration that may offer possibilities in other settings. The viability of this

system is challenged, however, by changes in the nature of the waste stream over time and by health threats that come with being waste pickers.

The third paper is concerned with land use planning at the metropolitan scale. Ha and Nguyen consider the implications a static and dated urban planning regime have for regulating urbanization and land use change in a very fast-moving and dynamic economic development environment. In fact, some aspects of metropolitan-scale land use planning, such as using land develop fees to fund general governmental operations, even serve to feed greater amounts of sprawl type development as a revenue enhancement tool. One suggestion would be to prepare and adopt master plans and a zoning scheme informed by improved analysis. In addition, the authors suggest an incentivized system that will improve land management and facilitate more innovative planning.

As noted at the outset, a unique confluence of factors may facilitate community and land use planning activities that are informed, innovative, and tailor made to the problems of cities in Southeast Asia. In turn, this planning model may inform efforts in the wider Asian and international realm.

Guest Editors of the special issue:

George Pomeroy, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, USA

Amorn Kritsanaphan, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology – Ladkrabang (KMITL),

Bangkok, Thailand

GMPome@ship.edu