An Architectural Approach to Studying the Neighborhood

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In an architectural approach, we “read” and “learn” about the neighborhood by mapping, by visiting for sketch observations, and by conducting measurements and interviews. Through SEANNET’s pedagogy with students covering roundtable sessions and workshops as in-situ investigations, it has been an interesting process over the four years of the program.

We adopted an interdisciplinary analysis based on architectural, urban, and socio-archaeological approaches that have been developed from the French-Thai Student Workshop, thereby suggesting new methodological approaches to neighborhood and urban studies. The lessons learned from the neighborhood became the basis for our pedagogical approach in response to the series of workshops. This led to the new idea of “a forum within a forum” where the students organized workshops within the neighborhood forum. Thus, the integrated interplay between the residents and students, enables voices as well as the voices of students involved in the work of measuring local heritage houses, to be heard. It also reflects the need of the silver village to sustain its craft heritage status and to respond wisely to future economic challenges and the changing urban condition.

At the heart of the intensive workshop in Chiang Mai, the students were assigned to conduct a survey of inhabited spaces. Each group comprised between five and eight students. The students explored a neighborhood and made sketches of the timber houses that were selected by the teachers, who had received the homeowners’ permission in advance to access these houses. Then, there was a transitional stage that brought the students from the urban to the domestic scale, measuring the wooden houses (of silversmith masters) around the neighborhood. Its realization allowed the students a new way of reflecting upon and imagining their study project.

The survey becomes “a tool of understanding” the neighborhood’s essence. It is our intention to get the students into the reality of a residential area, allowing them to understand the complexity of the building structures, their specific materiality (in particular wood), the uses, and the context to which it responds and maintains with the outside, the garden, the street, and the neighborhood.

Moreover, the exercise allows the students to observe, to look at the world of the neighborhood. Drawing by observation is, then,

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