

JOURNAL OF URBAN CULTURE RESEARCH 1, 2010

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A new journal of urban anthropology has been published, generously designed in content and appearance (large format: A4). If you looked for its publisher among American or (Western) European universities, you would be mistaken. It is published by a university in Thailand – Bangkok – in cooperation with Osaka City University. Its editor-in-chief is Kjell Skyllstad, professor of musicology in Oslo, Norway; on its editorial board are scientists from Thailand, Australia, Vietnam, Slovenia, the USA and Japan. According to its editorial, *(the) emphasis on the relationships between the arts and urban cultures is the main focus of the journal*. The composition of the editorial board corresponds to this broad view: on it are ethnomusicologists, specialists in fashion design, choreography, art history and urban studies.

If someone is surprised at the publication of an urban journal in Thailand, Kjell Skyllstad immediately explains in the editorial: *Asia has more than a half of the world's largest cities, including 10 megacities... Southeast Asia is steadily urbanizing... This rapid process of urbanization is accompanied by equally rapid cultural changes affecting all aspects of life (which are perceived very often negatively)... So acknowledging these negative consequences of rapid urban growth, why do city planners not come with programs for sustainable development that*

would also promote cultural continuity? The answer is that cities and towns in the region are largely self-organizing instead of planned. (p. 6) This self-destructive situation is, to a certain extent, related to the issue of grave environmental degradation... *these problems have motivated and propelled a movement to implement intra- and interdepartmental city planning initiatives...in this vision, cultural workers and institutions, artists and art educators have a definite role to play.* (p. 7)

From the above statement, it is clear that the journal is intended mainly as a platform for applied science and/or interdisciplinary discussion.

The topic of this first volume (one volume is expected to be published yearly) is broadly formulated: *The Art of Development: Exploring the Role of Culture and the Arts in Sustainable Community Development and Social Transformation*. Within its framework are six thematic spheres which differ both by their representation and by the character of the contributions. The first thematic sphere – *Sharing Arts across the Continents: Art, Dialogue and Development in the Time of HM King Chulalongkorn* – contains only one historical-musicological paper – by Philippe de Lustrac of France about the Siamese composer living in Paris, Eugène Cinda Grassi. The second sphere – *Developing Creativity – Theoretical Discourses* – is also represented by just one paper: “Shaping a Creative Milieu.” Here, Tom Borrup (USA), using as an example two art schools, identifies ten characteristics found to be common in the formation of a creative milieu.

On the contrary, the next two spheres contain numerous papers. *The Art of*

Development – The Development of Art includes a report on the vast Norwegian-Thai project *Transposition* (Geir Johnson, Norway); “The Progression of Art in Bangkok’s Public Spaces” (Kamol Phaosavasdi, Thailand) discusses the developmental process of art projects in Bangkok; Thanh To Nhoc (Vietnam) describes the situation of “Traditional Folk Arts in Conditions of Recent Society.”

Arts and Transformations – Models of Art Outreach Program for Individual and Social Rehabilitation and Development includes two comparative case studies – “Dance House: European Models of Folk Music and Dance Revival in Urban Settings” (a comparison of Hungarian and Slovenian phenomena of “Dance Houses”) by Svanibor Pettan (Slovenia) and also a comparison of programs for persons with disabilities in Thailand, Canada and the USA by Frances Anderson (USA). The sphere is supplemented by a reflective essay by the British Dan Baron Cohen now living and working in Brazil, “Dialogic Performance: Toward a Pedagogy of Transformance.”

The next sphere – *Music and Well-being in the City – Developing Urban Health Care in Asia* – contains two case studies: “Beyond Entertainment: Music

and Health Care in Urban Parks” by Busakorn Binson (Thailand) derived from Thai material and “Community Music Therapy in Action: Healing Through *Pirit* Chanting in Sri Lanka” by Lasanti M. Kalinga Dona (Sri Lanka), in which the author describes the history and contemporary function of *pirit*, an important public Buddhist ceremony.

Victoria Vorreiter (USA), the only author in the last sphere, *Art and Survival – Our Endangered Cultures*, reports in her rather nostalgic text “Vanishing Echoes” about her attempts to record mainly intangible cultural elements of small communities in Southeastern Asia.

In addition to information about several research projects, mainly in Japan, there are a few conference reports. The most impressive of them is from the Singapore World City Summit (June 2010); its main topic is the rebirth of Bilbao, the basis of which is the establishment of the Guggenheim Museum in the center. At the Singapore summit, Bilbao was awarded the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize. Thus Bilbao is an example of successful intervention of art in a city. The Journal of Urban Culture Research attempts to be one of the voices helping similarly successful interventions.

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