

PREFACE

This book is the product of work performed in Thailand by the editors and the authors of its chapters over a period of four years, between 1994 and 1998. The idea for it evolved as the University of Cincinnati Sustainable Development Group was embarking on some of its initial sustainable development projects. It matured while Michael Romanos was an Asia Foundation Fellow at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, Thailand in 1994, and a Fulbright Senior Scholar at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Indonesia in 1995. During that time, the first exploratory project was conducted in Chiang Mai by Romanos and Dr. Suwattana Thadaniti of Chulalongkorn University. The project focused on the city's approaches to municipal development management and the role of public sector management in promoting sustainable development (Romanos and Chifos, 1996). During the project, many useful contacts were established, and it became obvious that a larger project focus would be of use to the municipal administration.

As a result, a collaborative team of faculty from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and the University of Cincinnati developed a proposal for a joint project to study aspects of sustainable development, and to assess the implementation of sustainable development programs and plans in the cities of Southeast Asia. The United States Information Agency's College and University Affiliations Program funded the project in 1996, and several other grants supplemented the initial award in subsequent years, including a major grant from the University of Cincinnati Faculty Development Council. Part of the project's planned activities were to design and run a series of field projects that would give faculty from the three collaborating academic institutions the opportunity to work jointly on applied research and field training activities. Between 1996 and 1997 the outline of one such field project, to be conducted in Chiang Mai as a continuation of the exploratory research initiated by Romanos and Thadaniti earlier, gradually took shape, with participation of all three academic institutions.

By the early spring of 1998, a two-month field project had been designed to take place in Chiang Mai that summer. The project was based on an interdisciplinary team composition, representation of all three academic institutions, collaboration with local academic institutions and NGOs, and the full participation of the Chiang Mai municipality. During several months of preparatory ground work, Dr. Thadaniti mobilized faculty and students of Chulalongkorn's Department of City and Regional Planning and Social Research Institute, and helped organize the logistics of working in Chiang Mai as a group for an extended period of time. Through her efforts, strong connections were established with faculty from Chiang Mai University and officials from the municipality of Chiang Mai. This latter relationship resulted in an invitation to our team from the lord mayor of Chiang Mai to conduct an exploratory field research project as means for moving the city towards sustainable future development. At that time, additional funding and in-kind support was also secured

from Gadjah Mada University's Capacity Building Program, Chulalongkorn University's Faculty Support Program, and the Municipality of Chiang Mai.

As a result of this preparation, an interdisciplinary and international team of scholars and graduate students assembled in Thailand during the summer of 1998. It consisted of faculty from the United States and Indonesia, joined by several Thai colleagues from Chulalongkorn. The team members represented a wide range of disciplines, including geography, biology, economics, philosophy, nursing, photojournalism, urban design, business, education, and urban planning. Because of the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the team and its cooperative arrangements with the local government agencies, the project is referred to as the Joint Study throughout this book.

The Joint Study had several objectives. Its first objective was to identify and assess the capacity of the Chiang Mai economy, municipal administration, and regional setting, to support a long-term sustainable development program for the city. Recognizing that a number of foreign scholars working in the field for a short period of time could not possibly produce complete solutions and recommendations for Chiang Mai's government and people, we limited ourselves to uncovering and describing the significant issues that would affect the ability of the city to sustain itself in the future. In doing so, we made a special effort to build real and mutually beneficial collaborative linkages with the local government and all the public and private partners on which we depended for information and exchanges of ideas. In fact, our effort all along was not to supply prescriptions for perceived problems, but rather to provide systematic information and decision tools so as to assist the local planners and decision makers in addressing service provision and development issues and in devising their own approaches to such solutions.

A second objective of the project was to provide an educational environment for the faculty and student participants to gain experience with field research. Chiang Mai offered nearly ideal conditions for this. On the one hand, it is a growing city experiencing demographic and economic pressures as well as rapid tourism growth and uncontrolled physical expansion. On the other hand, it is a relatively small urban area, and its citizens and local government are protective of their cultural and environmental resources and keenly aware of the dangers represented by globalization and its resultant growth pressures. As such, the many forces at play in the city effectively constitute a microcosm of the dynamics of growth and modernization present in the intermediate and large urban areas of Southeast Asia, and thus provided an excellent laboratory for study and training. In fact, "educating the educators" became a significant by-product of the field project, as demonstrated by the participants' enthusiasm for that opportunity (Auffrey and Romanos, 2000).

A third objective of the project was to become a catalyst for its participants to learn and become comfortable with the difficulties and shocks associated with living and working in an international environment and with a multi-cultural group of collaborators. It did not become apparent until well into the first month of the project how powerful the cultural experiences and differences of the various members of the group were, and how easy it was to misunderstand or misconstrue intentions, notions, ideas, attitudes, and behavior. The observations of the editors about these

group dynamics have been published elsewhere (Auffrey and Romanos, 2000), but we feel that it is useful to summarize this particular effort in Chiang Mai.

The period of our stay in Chiang Mai and the collaboration among scholars from three different countries, with a variety of disciplinary training, and with different ways of thinking about development and sustainability was for all of us an invaluable learning experience. In the time span of about eight weeks, our group met with and interviewed literally hundreds of individuals in positions with the central, provincial and local governments, the industry, the local business, private organizations and formal and informal interest groups, in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Lampung, and other locations in Northern Thailand.

The field project proved to be an important educational experience for all members of the international, interdisciplinary team, though for a variety of different reasons. And, many aspects of the experience for the Thai and Indonesian colleagues differed substantially from those experienced by the American faculty, though the experience in a number of areas transcended country and disciplinary boundaries.

Working closely with U.S. colleagues was a new cultural experience for many of the Thai and Indonesian members of the group. They found the Americans to be intensely focused on their work, impatient about delays, and concerned about delays in acquiring data and other information. The Americans' interpretations of global events, particularly those taking place in Asia during the project period, were often seen as naïve and simplistic. But working together, the Thais and Indonesians discovered much in common between their two countries, cultures, and approaches to economic development planning.

The field project provided many of the U.S. faculty with their first experience in working with other disciplines in a non-U.S. setting. This exposure to field research in a different place and culture provided useful insights for integrating a global perspective into the educational and research process. Initially, many of the U.S. team members believed that conducting research overseas would be the same as at home. They were quickly dissuaded of this once in Thailand. Most of the local officials and NGOs, for example, while polite, felt no stake in our project and had no major expectations from it. This had repercussions: evidence that certain data existed did not mean they would be made available; questionnaires left with businesses and NGOs did not mean they would be correctly completed; and, requests for meetings, visits, questioning, and information gathering had to be made frequently through a seemingly endless bureaucratic maze. Along with the frustrations that these conditions caused, the experience was educational. By the end of the project, U.S. faculty members had gained a better understanding of what globalization was and how it impacted local development, and a better appreciation of how it could be meaningfully connected to their research and teaching.

All team members learned through direct experience about the relationship of globalization to the Thai economy, local politics, development priorities, growth pressures, and potential for solutions. Likewise, all members came to better appreciate the impact of globalization on democratic institutions, social justice and human rights, as well as on local politics, attitudes, and actions of the NGOs and citizens. An international team of academics, sponsored by the municipal government office, was interpreted as a political statement, and the related visits and

interviews carried that baggage. The interdisciplinary composition caused friction initially, as some participants were frequently unresponsive to issues and approaches they did not recognize. Yet, the strength of the interdisciplinary approach was eventually recognized, and a period of intellectual cross-fertilization took hold. It was at this point that team members were able to explain to each other how disciplines related to globalization and sustainable development, and came to a better understanding of the broader nature of these topics.

At the completion of the project, the team produced and submitted a report to the municipality of Chiang Mai, in which the exploratory research and its findings were summarized, several priority issues were identified, and a number of warnings or suggestions were inserted. The municipality adopted this document and has been using it as one of the guidelines for the tracing of its sustainable development future (Sustainable Development Group, 1998).

In the years following the fieldwork in Chiang Mai we worked on the individual chapters that constitute this volume. Our book does not intend to be a comprehensive coverage of the work we did in Chiang Mai – no one book could contain the amount of material generated during the field study – but it selectively presents what we considered some of the most critical development issues, especially as they pertain to a practical, applied model of sustainable development. We must note here that the whole notion of sustainability, while it provided the thinking, analytical and operational framework of our group, was not in the forefront of the priorities of either the government of Thailand or the municipal administration of Chiang Mai in the summer of 1998. With the country in the middle of the Asian financial crisis, the order of the day was survival, and the subtleties of sustainable development, with its strong emphasis on the preservation of the environment, the conservation of natural resources, and social justice, were very secondary in official minds. Even so, both government officials and the public recognized that the economic slump would eventually pass, and that thinking about the long-term future of their communities and regions was the logical thing to do. To a certain extent, this recognition is also reflected in the choice of topics for the book chapters, as well as the treatment of the subjects themselves.

As such, this volume is not a treatise on sustainability or sustainable development. Rather, it looks at sustainable development as a desirable normative model, and explores the circumstances, conditions, and restrictions under which it can be applied to the intermediate size cities of Southeast Asia. Indeed, the project itself was an exploratory effort. As such, we do not offer prescriptions here, but rather have intended to provide useful information about the conditions in Chiang Mai, the dangers threatening its development, and the potential solutions for shaping a sustainable future. We hope that, if nothing else, this effort will help the wonderful people of Chiang Mai, a city full of warmth, good cheer, and amazing cultural resources, to plan its future in a sustainable way. Anything less would be a loss, not only for the citizens of the city, but for all of us.

Michael Romanos and Christopher Auffrey
Cincinnati, May 2002

REFERENCES

- Auffrey, Christopher, and Michael Romanos. (2002). Educating the Educators: Global Dimensions of Collaborative Fieldwork in an Urban Region of Southeast Asia. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 353-64.
- Romanos, Michael, and Carla Chifos. (1996). Contributions of the Urban Informal Sector to Environmental Management. *Regional Development Dialogue*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 122-55.
- Sustainable Development Group. (1998). *Sustainable Development in the Chiang Mai Metropolitan Region*. Chiang Mai: Municipality of Chiang Mai.

Managing Intermediate Size Cities
Sustainable Development in a Growth Region of
Thailand

Romanos, M.; Auffrey, C. (Eds.)

2002, XX, 338 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0818-4