

Mapping Urban Changes: Mapping the Past – Managing the Present

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In 2012 the Urban Research Plaza and the Thai Music and Culture Research Unit of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok published their report of a ground-breaking qualitative field research extensively exploring cultural activities and resources in all 50 districts of Bangkok under the title Living Cultural Sites of Bangkok.

In the introduction the report presents a panorama of the 200 years cultural history of Bangkok, noting how the communities that comprise Bangkok and the city core itself have gone through continual changes since the times of King Rama I, the city's founder. For urban historians the lack of methodical and technical instruments, however, have until recently prevented the necessary insight into the processes of urban change that would allow for scientific analysis and practical follow up (reconstruction, rehabilitation and protection of historic monuments, habitations and cultural spaces).

When the Institute of Arts History at the University of Zagreb, Croatia sent out an announcement and an international Call for papers for a conference on the mapping of urban changes it was on the backdrop of a recent methodological break through

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achieved through the research activities of the DU: CAC (Dubrovnik Civitas et Acta Consiliorum) study group.

Gathering researchers from different disciplines like art history, architecture, archeology and urban culture and development studies the conference set out to discuss recent methodologies in the visualization of urban historical habitats obtained from archival sources, texts and maps, and collected through projecting archival data on maps, processing data with a Geographic Information System (GIS), and developing new data technologies, including and challenging 3D and 4D reconstructions.

The interdisciplinary program included sections on subjects like From Literature to a map, Layers of urban form, Destiny of urban utopias, Integrated sources for urban development research, City in its maps and images, Advantages of GIS, Uncovering medieval Dubrovnik through archival sources, New methodologies and recent projects and Systematizing long-term research.

In times where forces bent on effacing urban history in the interest of “development” are given free rein it seems more urgent than ever to unite forces with urban historians working for urban cultural continuity. Coming up with historical urban charters or government decrees protecting cloistered city spaces could provide us with important tools in the battle ahead.

It is high time not only to record urban change but to detect and disclose the forces at work driving unsustainable and irrevocable urban change. Mapping our urban cultural resources and initiating and continuing basic research in urban history will need a common commitment from researchers and citizens alike.



Figure 1. Professor Cedric Ryngaert making a presentation on human security.