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Neighbourhoods as sites for Imagineering the city: A witness account from Bangkok

By

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In the Western world, mediatisation of public and private spaces, negotiation of citizenship and identity and the ageing of the previously predominantly Caucasian population stand out amongst the most talked about transition processes affecting neighbourhoods in global and local contexts.. Underlying them are delicate issues of a multi-ethnic society on the rise and the need to manage the coexistence of religions, life styles and cultures.
By contrast, urbanisation in most countries of Asia has taken place in a thoroughly multi-ethnic context and under conditions of extreme cultural diversity. It is marked by vast demographic pressures, and unprecedented speeds of social change.

This paper offers an insight in the way neighbourhoods emerge and grow in an Asian context. It focuses on a *soi* neighbourhood, i.e. typically residential developments along side-streets off Bangkok's main thoroughfares. Based on archival research and longitudinal observation and participation[iii] in the life-world of this neighbourhood, the authors trace the emergence of the side-street neighbourhood and link its successive waves of "colonisation" to broader urban trends and developments. While the historical reconstruction covers a period of one century, starting from the late 1890s, the second part of the paper discusses a recent intervention at the very heart of this neighbourhood. It concerns a conversion from old educational and home-industry buildings into a small scale residential development that caters for the lower-income residents of the *soi*. Issues addressed are: the role of local residents and global actors in imagineering their dwelling and the role of neighbourhoods in global and local urban systems.

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