Urban Ecological Planning at Norwegian University of Science and Technology

By Ayda Ayoubi

The Urban Ecological Planning (UEP) Program at Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway, is an interdisciplinary and practice-based program that largely focuses on planning issues of the "global south" (Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and developing countries of Asia).

The program teaches its students the benefits of bottom-up approaches, team work, and field work studies. International and local students bring their diverse experiences and backgrounds to the program and benefit from professors and facilities of the program as well as the rest of the university. The limited number of students makes it easy to have contact with professors. Additionally, the program provides an international network through its partner universities, international projects, and visiting professors. And the program has no tuition fee!

The UEP program raises awareness about development trends in developing countries, urbanization, marginalization, sustainability, and livelihoods. In my experience, the program provided a chance to experience urban planning issues of the global south in a real context, offering insight into sustainable approaches to planning such as public participation, community engagement, and equity.
In September 2011, my classmates and I flew to Uganda’s jammed capital, Kampala, to undertake a two-month field work project in Kisenyi, one of the city’s central slums, where residents face poor housing, infrastructure, and sanitation conditions as well as continuous evictions. This trip was a project for the course on "Urban Ecological Planning in Developing Countries."
During the Kampala field work, we worked on a land sharing project intended as a strategy for slum upgrading. Combining theory and practice, our ideas and consequently our physical plans were shaped through various workshops and interviews we held with the core community and other stakeholders. There were not only classroom-oriented lectures; every day, we were in the field having interactions and observations with the community. In addition, we had the chance to collaborate with local students from Makerere University, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Slum Dwellers International (SDI), and ACTogether Uganda.

The Second Field Work Project

A few months later; the summer break was the time to perform master’s thesis field work. Each of us chose a geographical area and a topic to work on based on our interests, background, and opportunities. My classmates did field work-based research in China, India, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Norway. As my master’s thesis field work research, I chose to go to Nepal to work on community-based conservation of sacred living heritage. This later became my main area of interest. (See "Conserving Buddhist Living Heritage Sites: Eastern and Western Approaches" in the Summer 2013 edition of The New Planner.)
The City of Trondheim

Living in Trondheim is a fantastic experience. With a population of 181,513, Trondheim is the third most populous city in Norway. The colorful wooden houses in the city center and on the hills give the city an authentic identity. One can easily find cultural activities, musical events, concerts, and performances throughout the year in Trondheim.

In my opinion, the UEP program provides students with unique field-based experiences that change their perceptions of how to involve local communities in the planning process. It widens the sights of these future planners and practitioners to involve communities in planning and decision-making and to create sustainable solutions for today's urban issues.

Ayda Ayoubi has a master's degree in Urban Ecological Planning from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway. Her thesis was on "Community-Based Conservation of the Living Sacred Heritage," for which she did a two-month field project at the Bauddhanath Monument Zone in Kathmandu, Nepal. She is also currently completing a Master in World Heritage Studies degree at the Brandenburg University of Technology (BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg).

In addition to her studies, she recently undertook an internship with the UN-Habitat Liaison Office in New York, where she participated in several inter-governmental
meetings including those of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

She is currently an intern with the “Promoting People-Centered Approaches to Conservation: Living Heritage Programme” at the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome, Italy.

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