



**American Planning Association**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

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## 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!



*Main administration building at the university's Gløshaugen campus. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*A field work presentation by UEP students. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*

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.

## The First Field Work Project



*A view of Kampala slums and Hilton Hotel. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*A view of Kampala slums. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*

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."



*Students meeting with the Kisenyi slum community in one of the Kisenyi's primary schools. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*With the local community at the iron workshop in Kisenyi. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*A view of the Kisenyi slum. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*An excursion to visit low-cost housing in Jinja, a two-hour drive northeast of Kampala. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*

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.



*Students presenting to professor Nabeel Hamdi (seated at right), a teaching associate, emeritus professor of housing and urban development in the U.K., and member of the UEP board. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*Students presenting to key stakeholders. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*The last day in Kampala with local students. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*

## 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.



*A view of Trondheim from the Tyholt tower. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



*Norwegian Constitution Day parades. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*

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.



*UEP student graduation, June 2013. Photo Ayda Ayoubi.*



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 Baudhanath 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.*

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