

SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL WATER- BASED SETTLEMENTS IN BANGKOK METROPOLITAN AREA.

Ranjith Perera

Department of Civil & Architectural Engineering, Sultan Qaboos University, Al Khodh,
Oman

ABSTRACT

Water-based settlements and the ways of life associated with waterways are unique characteristics of some civilizations. The traditional settlements of Bangkok Metropolitan area are mostly water-based. Hence Bangkok was once known as the 'Venice of the East'. These settlements mostly consist of houses located partially or fully on waterways and built on stilts or raised earthen mounds. Traditional Thai settlements are amphibious habitats. This unique cultural landscape has changed dramatically with the introduction of land-based transport systems in 1960s. Although some traditional settlements in interior areas survive the wave of urbanization brought by these new roads, they are physically and functionally getting blighted due to lack of a threshold population. This is due to the out migration of people who move to inner city areas in search of urban jobs and modern life style. There had been attempts to bring life back to these settlements by promoting them as tourism spots. Traditional floating markets have been revitalized and new economic activities such as home stay and agro-tourism introduced. Although the wave of tourism brought new vitality to these settlements it also brought ill effects like land-use conversion, waterway encroachment, alien architectural features, and ecological destruction. Tourism has also accelerated the morphological changes brought by the wave of urbanization. Hence this paper questions tourism as a mean of revitalizing traditional settlements. It also attempts to identify sustainability challenges of water-based settlements from social, economic, environmental and governance perspectives. The paper is based on case studies conducted in two water-based settlements located in inner and outer metropolitan area of Bangkok. Key informant interview technique was used to collect information for the case studies. Among its findings, the paper highlights the changes in property ownership and lapses in rule of law as perils for the long term sustainability of water-based settlements.

Key words: water-based settlements, agro-tourism, sustainability