



Conserving Heritage In South East Asian Cities: Planning For Continuity and Change

BUILT HERITAGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND TRAINING INITIATIVE

TEACHING NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The Built Heritage in Southeast Asia: Conservation Education and Training Initiative (SEAI) aims to respond to three significant, regional conservation needs identified as a result of an assessment conducted by the GCI between 2004 and 2006. This study, undertaken in cooperation with conservation practitioners and institutions in Southeast Asia, identified the following priorities for the region:

- more effective conservation and management of archaeological sites;
- better integration of conservation practices with urban development policies and institutions; and
- the development of more educational resources and opportunities to support the conservation and management of the built heritage.

To address these priorities, the SEAI has developed a number of strategic activities designed to enhance the capacity of professionals in the region to deal with urgent conservation issues. These activities have included the delivery of [two field-based training workshops](#) for practicing conservation professionals as well as [two experts meetings](#) (a Directors' Retreat for Conservation Education in June 2008; and the Siem Reap Forum in October 2008).

As part of its efforts to support the development of conservation education, the GCI's Education department is making available some of the didactic resources produced for our courses. The didactic materials presented here are products of the SEAI and were specifically developed to support the two-week on-site training workshops of the initiative. The first of these workshops—"From Risk Assessment to Conservation: Safeguarding Archaeological Complexes in the Mekong

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Region" — occurred at the World Heritage site of Vat Phou, Lao PDR, in 2008. The second — "Conserving Heritage in Southeast Asian Cities: Planning for Continuity and Change" — took place in the historic settlement of Chiang Saen, northern Thailand, in 2009. The selection of Vat Phou and Chiang Saen for the two workshops was based on how well these sites embodied the workshops' objectives, topics and learning strategies.

The SEAI workshops for field practitioners were designed to be highly interactive. While the purpose of each workshop was to convey specific content related to particular skills, concepts and methodologies, a strong emphasis was also placed on pedagogy that encourages diverse modes of critical thinking. The workshop pedagogy was guided by four foundational principles:

- Consideration of audience
- Didactic use of the site
- Problem-based learning
- Team teaching and interdisciplinarity

AUDIENCE

The SEAI workshops were primarily designed for mid-career field practitioners, most of whom are architects or archaeologists responsible for the conservation and management of sites. Occasionally, the participant group has included an engineer, planner or chemist. This diversity of expertise has often enriched the learning experience and exemplified the value of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Because the language of instruction for the workshops was English and the participants were non-native English speakers, careful attention was paid to the selection of key readings, some of which were discussed first by participants in their native language. This was followed by a classroom discussion of key principles and terminology.

SITE

The archaeological site where each workshop was based played a pivotal didactic role by illustrating the relevance of the workshop's content. Each site embodied the ideas discussed in the classroom while also reflecting the conditions and problems that participants faced at their own sites. Through successive field exercises the site became the staging ground for the

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application of the workshop's methodological approach. In this way, participants were able to contextualize more easily the information and skills they were acquiring in the workshops.

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

Conservation is an applied field and problem based learning puts theory into practice. In the past half-century, ever since "problem-based learning" was initiated in medical education, many other disciplines (including conservation education) have adopted this robust approach to teaching and learning, founded on the principle that learning is most effective when it is both actively acquired and set within a context similar to that where it will ultimately be applied. In the two SEAI workshops, classroom lectures served as a theoretical base; theory was then applied in the form of practical exercises that drew upon the site to illustrate commonly-encountered problems and the scenarios for effectively addressing them. The series of lectures, field exercises, group discussions, and participant presentations were intended to build upon one another throughout both workshops, challenging participants to consider how new conservation approaches could be adapted to the sites in their home countries. Participants learned by analysing problems, collaborating with each other in small group settings, and then sharing their conclusions with the group as a whole. The workshops each ended with a final group exercise that synthesized the key elements of the curriculum.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND TEAM TEACHING

Conservation of the built environment is an inclusive endeavor requiring the integration of complementary expertise. Team teaching allowed the SEAI workshops to demonstrate how complementary disciplinary perspectives can enhance conservation practice. The core group of instructors consisted of conservation professionals who represented the range of disciplines relevant to the conservation and management of archaeological sites, from conservation architects and field archaeologists to sociologists and conservators. Working as a team, instructors engaged in interdisciplinary problem-solving and collaboration thereby exemplifying how inter-related professions and skills can join to develop viable conservation solutions— a critical objective of the workshops.

A [video](#) about the Vat Phou workshop describes the teaching objectives and strategy employed for the SEAI workshops.

USE OF THE MATERIALS

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