

# **Living and Sustainability: An Environmental Critique of Design and Building Practices, Locally and Globally**

## **1. Proposal title**

Participatory Housing Processes: A Study of the Karen in Thailand

## **2. Format**

Conference Presentation and Written Papers

## **3. Author**

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## **5. Abstract**

Many Karen dwellers in the forests of the Thai Kaeng Krachan National Park (KKNP) were forcibly evicted from their village homes by armed Thai forces and KKNP's officials in 2011. They were relocated to new areas further from the Thai-Myanmar border where they constructed temporary dwellings in new villages. In 2014 the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) approved funding for the first Karen Housing Project to improve their dwellings and the author of this paper was appointed as coordinator of the project. The project was performed cooperatively with workshops and meetings to enable the Karen people to be the core actors and to decentralize the solution-finding process.

This paper offers insights into the change of the indigenous houses and how the Karen have managed to create and adapt their houses within the strict regulations of the National Park. Empirical research was carried out between 2013 and 2016 to document the functional and structural changes to the new dwellings.

Participatory methods were used throughout the project, with a focus on housing design workshops which were a key approach of this participatory study. Such methods are more than a way to collect data, but also have a human dimension which engages in the processes to adapt and change their houses. These systematic participatory processes brought the researcher closer to understanding what will work better and to encourage the indigenous people to explore what good practice is in their context.

The empirical findings in this study enhance our understanding of re-housing processes. The change of the indigenous houses relates to not only the common conditions, such as climate, materials, technology, economics or culture, but also to the pressures from the National Park's policies. The study confirms that houses are more than physical structures, but are also the soul and body of the dwellers which connects them to modern society. Such adaptation processes of the indigenous people can bring significant benefits as well adverse impacts.

## **6. Author(s) Biography**

I am doing a Ph.D in architecture at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University. I am also working as a lecturer in Bangkok University. Most consider me to be the creative type as I am always drawing and painting when I am home or travelling.