

# The Bangpakong Mangrove Eco-Museum

*A secondary school in the Chacheongsao province of Thailand is developing and establishing an eco-museum, and water culture and sports centre among its community and in its vicinity of mangrove plantations, natural vegetation and maritime habitat*

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*Developing the area into a fishing village model, displaying houses, boats, and fishing tools*

'Eco-Museum' may seem to be a new term and type of museum, but the concept is not; it is believed that the word emerged in 1971, and refers to a museum dedicated to the environment (the idea was developed in France and Algeria). The eco-museum, evolving from the 'open-air' museum model, is essentially made up of two inter-related museums – a spatial, unconfined, no-walls museum; and an enclosed temporal one. This kind of museum has a role in the education and culture of a very wide audience, and a community that can see its past, feel its present, and be involved in its future (which the museum can contribute toward – for a local, regional, national and international public).

During the past three years, SPAFA (Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts) has been working closely with the administration and the Alumni Association of the Bovorn Witthayayon School to provide the Bangpakong community there and the general public just such a museum. Bangpakong Bovorn Witthayayon Secondary School is located in Chacheongsao Province (to the east of Bangkok), Thailand. It is one of the ninety-two schools established (1897) in what was then called Siam during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). The school (having been distinguished as a centre for environmental studies), with about eight hundred school children and eighty teachers, covers eleven hectares of land, and is situated near a mangrove area. SPAFA has been extending regular technical and academic assistance\* to the school on the development of programmes on culture and ecology, and to establish the Bangpakong Mangrove Eco-Museum, and Water Culture and Sports Centre.

Surrounding the Bovorn Witthayayon school and the community are mangrove plantations, natural vegetation and maritime habitat, and the Bangpakong River along it. Primarily to preserve its pristine environment and culture, SPAFA began a community involvement project to create an eco-museum out of the area, and to make it a precedent of museums that are different from the closed, huge buildings which house collections of objects of beauty and



*food cycle chart*



*walkways of eco-museum*



*Bangpakong River*

history. Here, the school mangrove *is* the museum. It can accommodate between forty and



fifty visitors at a time. There are elevated walkways, over the water, leading to the view and study of various kinds of plants, marine life-forms, a collection of boats (donated by members of the Bangpakong fishing community), all of which provide the visitor with information substantial enough for understanding their types, physiography and functions. There is also a pavilion which provides scientific information on

plants, animals, etc.. that highlight the relevance of the mangrove to the community, and raises awareness whilst instilling a sense of communal protection of it. Scientific information is presented on signboards, in an easily comprehensible format; and focuses on various aspects of the mangrove community: the ecology of mangroves and its importance, effective practices in management of its preservation and restoration, the uses and functions of mangroves (emphasizing the long-term economic yield to be obtained for the improvement in mangrove dwellers' quality of life, etc.). Naturally, as an ongoing project, the eco-museum is evolving, and is not entirely complete in its present form and state.

Opened on 17 November 2001, this extraordinary museum also concentrates on maritime history of the world through stamps and pictures (with clear captions in simple English and Thai languages), and the Water Sports Centre there will organise activities such as swimming in the river (especially for students and children), and boat-rowing too, under the supervision and care of professional trainers. Teachers and students are being trained in the management of the museum and ecological resource centre. The museum has become a mirror where people can watch and better recognise themselves, and where they are able to look for the important values in which they are settled. As a paramount means of improving understanding and preserving the environment itself, The Bangpakong Mangrove Eco-Museum is possibly the first of its type in Southeast Asia.



*Museum officially opened by Dr. Kasama Varavarn, Director-General, Dept. of General Education, M.O.E. Thailand.*

*\* Since its inception in 1996, the SEAMEO Community Involvement Project has adopted under its ambit five primary schools in the Philippines, Thailand, and Brunei. It has been regularly providing technical, academic and other assistance through the adopt-a-school programme initiated by the SEAMEO Secretariat, and implemented by Innotech, Searca, Voctech, and Spafa. Other SEAMEO Centres have also participated by supplying training scholarships for teachers in adopted schools, and are in the process of formalising their adoption of schools.*