

Thailand in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS): border-towns internationalization strategy and regional integration control

Case studies of twin-cities across thai-lao border.

Elsa Laine, July 2008, MSSRC

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Educational background

- ▣ Master of Development Studies, IEP, France
- ▣ Specialization in Urban Environmental Management, AIT, Thailand
- ▣ Specialization in Urbanism, Asian-Pacific Cities, France

- ▣ Internships in Vientiane, Lao PDR

- ▣ 2008: PHD student integrated in a team research project

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Team Research Project: TRANSITER



- ▣ Objectives: studying cross-border and transnational dynamics
- ▣ Scope: 3 areas
- ▣ Interdisciplinary and comparison approach

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Research topic's presentation



- ▣ Central position of Thailand in the GMS
- ▣ Border areas and cross-border movements redefined by this transnational program
- ▣ New roles for urban centers integrated in the corridors, more especially bordertowns as crossing border points

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Expected outcomes and side-effects of the GMS at different scales

- Subregional scale: economic growth through connectivity, competitiveness and community
- National scale: different strategies depending on the country
- Provincial or local: infrastructure promotion and impacts on cross-border movements, local environment and living conditions of the residents along the corridors.

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Problem Statement

- How and to what extent the transnational GMS program is likely to modify the selected twin cities across the border?
- How the Thai state actors will try to use/create these modifications to serve their strategies vis-à-vis national building and regionalism?
- To what extent these strategies will enter in conflict with local realities and other stakeholders' interests?

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Scope of the study



- Mae Sai-Tachilek
- Chiang Saen
- Chiang Khong-Houexay
- Mukdahan-Savannakhet
- Chong Mek

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Justification of the selected areas Mae Sai-Tachilek/ Chiang Saen/ Chiang Khong-Houexay

- Location on the NSEC, integrated into a common SEBZ.
- Specific characteristics:
 - Mae Sai-Tachilek: conflict border, natural border (Sai River), economic disparities
 - Chiang Saen: historic town, inland sea port (2002), interactions with Yunnan province
 - Chiang Khong-Houexay: international bridge project, deep-water port (2004)

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Justification of the selected areas

Mukdahan-Savannakhet / Chong Mek

- Mukdahan-Savannakhet:
 - Part of the EWEC
 - Cultural and historical links
 - 2nd Mekong International Bridge

- Chong Mek:
 - New Development Corridor
 - No-physical border
 - Interactions between Ubon and Pakse

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Conclusion: selected areas' diversity according to...

- Corridor integration
- Natural vs. non-natural border; conflict vs. non-conflict border
- Bordertowns' position related to the border/ to each other
- Level of development and economic disparities, cultural and historical links, demographical features
- Level of cooperation and interactions (formal and informal) between the two cities

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Research questions

1. What are Thai regionalist and national strategies and how do they reflect on border areas?

- Regional scale: transport and investment hub; financial and technical assistance towards the neighboring countries.
- National scale: develop land-locked provinces; create opportunities for target-areas (interchanges, gateways, border nodes); «economic bridges» theory.
- Local scale: create SBEZ to attract FDI and industrial development; enhance cross-border cooperation; «sponsored» vs. unsponsored towns

□ *Articulation between these strategies?*

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2. To what extent are the GMS and national policies impacting twin cities across the border?

- 1st level of consideration: between the 2 cities
 - Infrastructures built
 - Interactions, cross-border flows of people and goods, and cooperation programs. What tendency?
 - Redefinition of the urban structure at the provincial level

□ *Creation of a new urban form? («transfrontier metropolitan region», Herzog)*

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□ 2nd level of consideration: city scale

- Functional transformations (e.g. SBEZ)
- Morphological transformations: urban growth and densification
- Elements of internalization and new infrastructures
- Stakeholders involved: state actors and private actors

□ Creation or move of urban centers within the city?

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Mukdahan's example: new infrastructures



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Mukdahan's example: functional transformations



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Mukdahan's example: border crossing



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Mukdahan's example: morphological transformations



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Mukdahan's example: schema



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Schedule

- July-August 2008: first fieldtrip
 - Visits to the selected areas
 - Contacts making
 - Secondary data collection

- February-August 2009:
 - Primary data collection through surveys (interviews with the main stakeholders) and observation

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Identified sources of information

- ADB
- State actors:
 - National: NESDB, DOH, DTP
 - Provincial, municipal: TAT, Immigration Offices, customs, Chambers of Commerce, Municipality offices
- Non-state actors:
 - Industries and investors
 - NGOs and associations
 - Residents

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ATTENTION*