

Report, Field Trip 1:

Fieldtrip Number One was at the Mae Kha Canal in Chiang Mai City. Mae Kha Canal suffers from pollution for many years now and people living alongside the canal are the most affected ones. A lot of actors are working on finding a solution but till now, it could not be solved completely.



We spent the days of our field trip by going to the canal to experience the living there and to meet different people affected by or working on the Mae Kha.



This case is not new and the problems there are consisting for a long time now. We asked all our stakeholders to make a list of the main problems, causes and their idea of solutions to the Mae Kha Canal, to bring all the perspectives together and try to see the problematic clearer. From our listing results we gained an overview of the different point of views regarding these three categories. We could find out that over 50 years people only focused on the pollution of the canal and did not include other topics or issues which are directly interconnected. More than 20 years academics are now working on this case to understand the issue and to find solutions, but every discipline on its own and a great focus on engineering. There are many actors involved in the Mae Kha Canal case which are working to improve the situation, but everyone has his or her own focus and interests. They work on short-term solutions to improve the momentous

situation but there is no wholistic and long-term solution till now. From our interviews and observations, we found out that the main issue could be the lack of coordination and collaboration between the different stakeholders. Nearly everyone we met named this as a main cause of the problem. Other than that, the rapid urbanization and lack of canal management were also highlighted. Only NGO und CSO working on this case mentioned the lack of budget whilst only two stakeholders talked about the miss-use of the budget and corruption. There is a clear blaming process towards the businesses alongside the canal but also towards the villagers and migrants living there. Any other factors are mostly ignored. People living there are not only affected by the pollution but also by the floods, poor landscapes, infrastructure, inequality of access to resources and encroachment. The issue of land right and ownership was mentioned only by the affected communities. Migrants were mostly living in the area where the land belongs to the Department of Fine Arts because it is along the old Chiang Mai City wall and therefore did not own land or even were resettled to far-away places where they lost the access to work and to the city in general.

One of our main findings is that there is a need of an intersectional approach to see the overlapping of inequalities. Furthermore, we found out that there are actors which were mostly invisible regarding the pollution of the Mae Kha, such as the Chiang Mai University or tourism. A lot of actors mentioned that making out of the Mae Kha a touristic area could be a solution to improve the situation. But the villagers living there were never asked or consulted about this idea, which will affect their lives drastically. The area will be more expensive for living, which will lead a lot of families to leave the area and most probably the people will be resettled or relocated from their homes in order to make a touristic area because they do not own the land. It is also not mentioned that this could also lead to more pollution.



Directly related to the issue of ownership, according to the collected data, was the citizen engagement and cultural aspects. People claimed that there is no sense of belonging and sense of community anymore because they do not own their land and mostly did migrate from other areas so there are no cultural and social roots anymore.

Actors often focus on the Mae Kha cleaning and cutting the pipes which go to the canal, but there are no solutions like drainage pipes for the whole neighborhood. Some of our interviewees addressed this issue and asked for a long-term and complete housing and neighborhood plan. Whilst only the governmental official mentioned more budget to be the solution, all the other stakeholders said there is a need of redistribution of the budget, not more of it.

We asked all our stakeholders to rate the level of solutions and actions which took place till now to improve the situation. It was interesting to see that people put a lot of hope in the government and in their actions for improving the canal. They rated them pretty high because they are doing an effort but nearly all of them were not sure if these actions will continue and if there will be a long-term solution or only a short-term cleaning activity.

In the context of our fieldtrip we had tried to use suitable participatory methods for our case such as observation, open interviews, transect walk, listing, collecting and testing the water along the canal.



One main difficulty we found out after these five days is that TDR has a so called “western” glasses to look at problems but we should keep in mind that in other contexts such as SEA, researchers need different glasses in order to understand the different meaning of problems such as migration or boarder. The history is different and therefore it should always be seen out of a postcolonial point of view.

At the end of our fieldtrip, our main insight to TDR was that it needs a lot of time to collaborate with other actors which do not share the same knowledge as one own. There is a need to elaborate a common knowledge base for all and to define the problem together, which is very time intensive and also requires willingness from all the parts.

As one of our main finding was that the Mae Kha Canal problematic was not solved till now because there was no collaboration between all the actors involved, TDR could provide an adequate space in the future for coordinating and collaborating. It could be difficult because the involved stakeholders all follow own interests. The first step would be to bring all together and conduct the first phase of framing of the stakeholders and the problem itself. Again we like to mention that it should be a process of working with and for the people, this is why the definition of the problem has to be done in collaboration with all involved actors and after long discussions.



Our group discussed a lot how to apply TDR on our own research after the fieldtrips and back in our home universities. Some of us want to compare the case of the Mae Kha Canal to similar cases in their home countries by inviting other relevant stakeholders to define the problem there and see if there were similar or completely different factors. Others do not do their research on environmental issues but still we elaborated how TDR could be applied to our research. We learned that the collaborated defining of the problem is one main step which is essential to further TDR to find solutions for a real-world problem. We were stuck with the question of how to choose the relevant stakeholders and in which order.

During our fieldtrip we faced some challenges from which we could learn a lot. We tried to do reflection sessions to address these challenges and decide how to handle with them. Our first challenge was the time factor. We had too little time to handle such a big topic in which so many actors are involved. That is the main point why our research during the fieldtrip cannot be considered as a TDR. We had the chance to meet a lot of people and to try several methods, but we could have included other forms of data gathering such as mobility mappings or participant observation. Due to the lack of time in general but also the availability of each stakeholder we often focused too much on the obvious problem, the environmental issue, and could not go into depth regarding other topics as migration or social inequality. For further research we should try to integrate all topics and not focus on the obvious ones.

Regarding the stakeholders we faced the difficulty that they were chosen beforehand. The pre-fixed list of stakeholders we had, gave us the opportunity to talk to as many people as possible in a short time to understand the field and try to find out what the main problems are. We are aware that our work was only the first basic step to enter the field before starting with the first step of TDR, framing the problem and the stakeholders. We found out that important actors as the businesses and tourists were missing completely although they are blamed by many for the pollution of the Mae Kha Canal. We also discussed the order of the chosen stakeholders regarding power structures. While our reflection we tried to categorize the stakeholders concerning their social, cultural, economic and geographical engagement to the topic and their power to legitimize and the right to change. We tried to visualize this topic in a graph (See figure 1), which is only a guide for our group to locate the different stakeholders to see which power relations exist and which field remains open. For example, we met a governmental official who talked about the Mae Kha case, but it seemed to us, that his engagement to the field was too little to know all the issues, that's why he focused more on short-time solutions rather

than long-term actions. Would it have been better if we met a governmental official who works in the field?

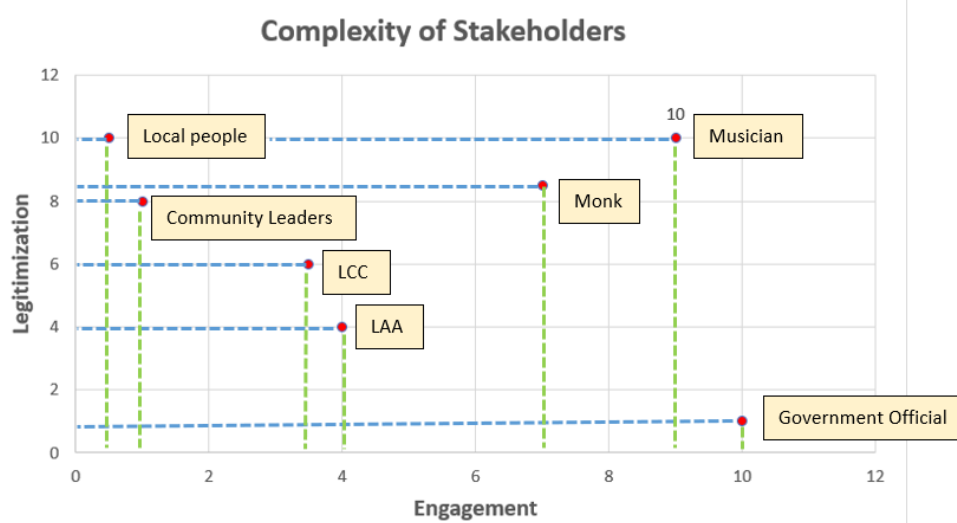


Figure 1 Complexity of Stakeholders

Another challenge we faced in our team was that all of us came from different disciplines, countries, universities and spoke different languages. This was on the one hand the most effective part because we could interact and combine different perspectives, which is one of the most essential points of TDR and TDS but on the other hand it was the mayor difficulty. Our discussions helped us a lot to understand more about TDR and our research field because we could include various perspectives to enrich our knowledge and to try to raise questions for further research on this topic.

Finally, one important last point which should be reflected during the whole research process is the positionality and the role of the researchers in the field. For us it was sometimes hard to define who we are in this specific research and how we are perceived from different people we meet. Some of them were suspicious that we could be from any authority and some wanted us to find out solutions for their problems. For further research this issue should be made clear from the beginning. It was also hard to engage with the stakeholders in order to work together on a topic because of our lack of language knowledge. We were dependent on our Thai-translator, which often produced too big groups to talk to only one person. This resulted in an unequal situation which surely influences the interaction. This is way we would like to end with our fieldtrip motto: “reflect about your positionality”.

