

Report, Field Trip 7:**Major Learning Outcomes/Linkages between Migration, Inequality and Environmental Change**

There are several conflicts between locals and the Chinese Investor as well as water and environmental issues: pesticides and the actors that use them (as an example: the usage of pesticides by locals is perceived as less harmful than the use of pesticides by the big banana plantation). However, local farmers except from Village Number 3, which got a funding from the king over 5 Million Baht and do organic farming, use pesticides to a great extent on their fields. This results in several discourses about the actors involved. In case of the ethnic minority of the Hmong one can say that they are strongly faced with racial stereotyping. Although Hmong people live in Thailand and just above the valley in the mountains, they are seen as foreigners and not as locals – we have to be careful by the terminology we are using and constantly reflect upon it.

Another outcome was the issue concerning organic farming, where products can be sold for higher prices. However, it also means more production work. The Thai King basically said that if you want to do organic farming, you have to work like a madman.

We soon realized that the whole region and its problems are connected, creating a bigger complexity. For example, one woman who works on the banana plantation told us that she spends quite much of her salary to pay Hmong people that also work in the plantation for spraying pesticides she was originally supposed to do. Another woman at the packing station told us that they have 2 breaks per day for 10 Minutes and work for 26 days a month.

One can say there is a huge demand for bananas on the Chinese market, thus a good infrastructure-system (roads, water access) is needed that can be found in Thailand. The main hub for bananas from Northern Thailand is Mohan, which functions as a distribution centre where sellers and buyers meet.

On the second banana plantation in Chiang Khong we saw that Chinese workers pack the bananas into boxes for shipping, while Thai work on the field and gather the bananas and carry them on their backs to the banana plantation.

Another issue was health and access to health treatment. There is universal health coverage for registered Thai people but not for others. This is very problematic for migrant workers because if they need treatment it is expensive, so they often just can't afford treatment. There is also not really a system of welfare if they get sick, they only get paid if they really work.

In the issue of the Hmong, we saw that there is an othering process going on and that the Hmong face much hatred from many sides: they have a small standing compared to "Thai" and are nearly all interview partners who talked about them framed it negatively.

We saw there are systems of sufficient economy like in village Number 3 that is only possible due to funding. It was interesting to see that although Thai and migrant workers are de-facto colleagues in the plantation, they are treated differently with different tasks and there is a big language barrier which probably prevents the formation of some kind of labour union. Although they theoretically have the same interests.

Ing river is central to our research, it is not only the water source for the big banana plantation but also for many surrounding farmers and more downstream its water is used for the second banana plantation.



Figure 1: Packing station of big banana plantation

Insights concerning Transdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity research

We did not do TDR. Although it probably is safe to say that we had the idea and approaches of TDR in the back of our heads, which could mean that we approached everything more comprehensive. For future TDR in this area we can provide a good overview of the region to understand the actors involved and their problems. Possible interests or research would be:

How to expand the organic farm model sustainably?

Bring natural scientists to examine water, ground and bananas.

Look at conflicts between groups in the area

How is sufficient sustainable agriculture possible without big funding?

How can workers organize themselves to overcome inequalities in workforce, how can unity can be created among workers?

Relevance for your own work

The experience of field work and its challenges were very useful for future research projects, as well as for understanding other cultures and improve our intercultural competence.



Figure 2: Second Banana plantation

Open Questions and Challenges

How to get welfare and health insurance?

Is there large-scale organic plantation? How can that work?

Challenges:

Language barrier

Appointment: interview partner brings friends, quickly decide who goes where.

Spreading of groups and forming of groups to different locations sometimes chaotic.

Group interviews 1 guy with 10 people was problematic.

Limited time, exhausting for our bodies.

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Depending on pi-jieb and relying to contacts, some conflicts of research interest, became better.

Too less time for enhanced observation.

How to approach different stakeholders (Chinese investor not accessible, same for hmong people).

Organization of FT and find things that are related to research interest and adapting to new situations.

Interview-guidance has to be improved.

More reflections in between and more time to discuss in between would have been nice.

Before FT not enough time for discussing of methods and approach in detail.

Plan one day for TF and not the rest so you can react to things that happen on the first day: FT leader had to provide a detailed planning in before that made everything stricter and less flexible.