

KNOTS-Kick-off Workshop in Vienna – a short report

Participants:

Chiang Mai University (Thailand): Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen; ***Charles University (Czech Republic)***: Tomas Petru, Barbora Jirková; ***University of Bonn (Germany)***: Christoph Antweiler, Frank Seemann; ***Chulalongkorn University (Thailand)***: Naruemon Thabchumpon, Carl Nigel Middleton; ***Vietnam Academy of Social Science (Vietnam)***: Dang Nguyen Anh, Vu Manh Loi; ***Southern Institute of Social Science (Vietnam)***: Le Thanh Sang, Pham Thi Dung, Nguyen Thi Minh Chau; ***Ho Chi Minh City Open University (Vietnam)***: Ha Minh Tri, Nguyen Bao Thanh Nghi; ***University of Vienna (Austria)***: Wolfram Schaffar, Petra Dannecker, Judith Ehlert, Rainer Einzenberger, Christiane Voßemer, Nora Faltmann, Richard Bärthaler, Michaela Hochmuth, Alexandra Heis

From the 6th to the 10th March 2017, the KNOTS Kick-off Workshop took place in Vienna; it represented the official starting shot of our three-years project and the first get-together of all partners. After the participants had arrived in (rainy) Vienna, the workshop was inaugurated by an official opening ceremony at the 'Old Chapel' located at the University of Vienna's campus. Yuki Seidler moderated the ceremony and representatives from all participating universities as well as University of Vienna's vice-rector Heinz Fassmann and Martina Friedrich from OeAD (Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research) gave short presentations about their institutions.

After the opening ceremony, the participants changed their location to the Department of Development Studies (University of Vienna), which served as the 'headquarter' and physical room for discussions for the remaining week. To ensure an equal starting point of information amongst all participants, the moderator Yuki Seidler re-visited the project objectives, expected results, and target groups all of which were initially formulated in the project proposal. In doing so, the aim was to derive from a problem statement - "Lack of transdisciplinary platforms to address issues of migration, inequality, and environment related to Southeast Asia (SEA)" - to a so-called solution tree. The latter stated, "Transdisciplinary platforms to address issues of migration, inequality, and environment related to Southeast Asia (SEA) are established" and emphasised its three primary goals: 1) transdisciplinary teaching methodologies and learning materials are developed and used; 2) innovative cooperation networks between and amongst academic and non-academic actors are established; 3) institutional and human resource potentials of the participating HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) are fully developed. Finally, these goals were linked to particular work packages.

Tuesday the 7th started with inputs on and discussions about transdisciplinarity. Petra Dannecker and Wolfram Schaffar (both University of Vienna) gave a short presentation on the theoretical considerations and practical consequences of transdisciplinarity. Afterwards, Christoph Görg (IFF) continued with a presentation about interdisciplinarity in social ecology, and finally, Patrick Sakdapolrak (University of Vienna) rounded off the topic by focusing on the potentials of transdisciplinary research in practices that have already been carried out by the participants. Each presentation was followed by a Q&A session. In the afternoon, Yuki Seidler moderated a world café discussion asking the partakers to get to know each other by focusing on everyone's disciplinary backgrounds, methodologies used, and epistemological assumptions held. The participants have been invited to outline their discussions on flip charts and finally to present them in the context of the world café. Subsequently, a stakeholder analysis depicted the last official activity at the Department of Development Studies on this day. Through the analysis, participants were enabled to know and analyse different actor's expectations to avoid misunderstanding, assess and analyse the project environment better, recognise conflict of interests between stakeholders at an early stage, and identify appropriate types of participation by different stakeholders.



In the evening, the participants joined a panel discussion on the topic "Transdisciplinary Global Issues: Approaches and Perspectives", which took place at the 'Old Chapel'. The panel was made up of Jörg Flecker (Department of Sociology, University of Vienna), Christina Plank (Catholic Social Academy of Austria – KSOe & University of Vienna), and Alessandra Bravi (International Centre for Migration Policy Development – ICMPD); Wolfram Schaffar (University of Vienna) chaired the panel. It discussed recent developments and dynamics of inequality, migration as well as the exploitation of resources and focused particularly on disciplinary as well as transdisciplinary approaches and perspectives, which were deemed useful in understanding the complexity and dynamics of global issues.

Wednesday morning began with an SCOT-Analysis (Strength, Challenge, Opportunity, and Threat) of each participating institution. The outcomes were discussed to identify common threats and opportunities as well as to pinpoint challenges and to argue how these potential challenges could be compensated by the institutions' strengths. The remaining day was used to continue the work on the solution tree, especially discussing responsibilities for the respective work packages and negotiating a detailed time schedule for the upcoming activities.

On Thursday, inputs as well as following discussions on topics concerning Project and Financial Management were provided and moderated by Michaela Hochmuth (University of Vienna) and Richard Bärnthaler (University of Vienna). The debates around these issues constituted the basis for the subsequent negotiation of the Partnership Agreement between the University of Vienna and all project partners.

The last day was used to plan, schedule, and discuss the upcoming stakeholder conference, the roundtrip, and the first summer school in Vietnam. Additionally, a meeting concerning the development of teaching manuals took place, in which everybody gave a short overview of previously held courses and curricula.