

Summer School Report, Day 5:

Major learning outcome:

On day 5 of KNOTS Summer School and Field Trip, we learned about the transdisciplinary teaching manual and research methods which prepared us for our Field Trips. One of the major learning outcomes is, on the one hand, that methods have to be adapted, and on the other hand should be systematically open and transferable; in other words, they are contextual.

The first method we discussed was observation, a qualitative research method that is used for describing and understanding the situation (e.g. what is here?). It is about description rather than explanation, and therefore often used as a first step before applying any other methods, such as interviews. It is therefore crucial to differentiate observation from interpretation.

Furthermore, we talked about the participatory approach which is about the direct interaction with the people. In this sense, we do not come with our own assumptions and wishes, but instead we may ask about what the people know. In this context, we learned about the tool box method: cognitive mapping, diagram and time line, which can be applied to include people's points of view instead of bringing our own assumptions to the field.

The last method was the transect (walk) which we also practiced in smaller groups. Ours was guided through the campus by a local student from Chiang Mai University. By doing so, we selected 10 different places according to importance and relevance. Trying out the method, we had to keep in mind the following questions: what are the social interactions like at this place? How could they be improved? Without trying out this method we would have never been able to see some of these places.

Insight concerning transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research:

In order to apply the transdisciplinary approach, it is crucial to keep an open mind and critical thinking in terms of adapting new points of view. For example, many methods can be used for the observatory method: choosing the best method for each case requires the logic of the researchers. In case of the transect walk, researchers need to free their thoughts before participation, in order to decrease the researcher's objective.

Relevance for our own work

The transdisciplinary approach is a vital method for our group because it entails working with and for the people. In our Field Trip, we have to work with people and we need to learn from them. Moreover, transdisciplinary is not just working in two groups, but instead aims to bring people from different backgrounds and disciplines together. In this sense, people in our research group may have different lenses to see the situation. Everyone sees and perceives differently. Hence, it is useful to see more than one side of the information and knowledge.

Furthermore, especially the transect (walk) seems to be useful: our field site is located in Ban Huay Hin Lad Nai, Chiang Rai Province. As "outsiders", applying this method would mean that we could learn from the villagers and exchange knowledge with them. Hence, we have two groups of people: researchers and local people. With the transect walk, we as researchers can follow the local people around in order to see and/or learn anything they want us to show and know. For example, local people may bring us to the rice fields and tell us about the traditional shifting cultivation. This way, researchers are able to get to know many different details from the locals.

However, while applying this method, we should always keep in mind to select local people for interviews and different approaches who know the village very well. Nevertheless, as people have different lenses and therefore different ideas of reality, selecting experienced locals does not mean that they will tell you about the reality.

Open Questions and Challenges

Due to time limit, the different methods of the transdisciplinary approach could not have been presented in detail, but we can conclude that TDR is a new ideal type of research that is needed to build up and verify over time. Applying the methods mentioned above, we should keep in mind that local people might not like to participate in our research. This could be due to time reasons or even lack of trust. Practicing the method of observation, we should also think about ethical questions, e.g.: is it ethically correct to observe the villagers' daily life and maybe even set foot in their houses? Another general open question would be: how does the TDR methodology differ from other methodologies?