

Environmental Change, Uncertainty and the Adaptation of Local Knowledge Systems

Panel proposal for sixth EUROSEAS Conference, School of Global Studies, Goteborgs Universitet, Gothenburg University, Sweden, August 26th -28th, 2010

Convenors:

Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge (Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, Germany), Mail: Hornidge@uni-bonn.de

Prof. Dr. Christoph Antweiler (Department of Oriental and Asian Studies, Division for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Bonn, Germany), Mail: christoph.antweiler@uni-bonn.de

Environmental change as consequence of eco-system and natural resource exploitation as well as changes in the global climate increasingly threaten people's livelihoods across Southeast Asia. This leads to a constant increase in uncertainties, insecurities and lacks of safety in the understanding of Beck, Giddens and Lash (1996) to which rural and urban poor are especially exposed to. Environmentally based uncertainties, negatively affect everyday livelihoods, cash and food crop agriculture, social and political security. They are especially pressing, since environmental change fosters a high level of knowledge uncertainty, the not knowing of how different localities are affected, to what degree, how to cope with it as well as adapt to the changed conditions. The not knowing poses an immediate and constantly growing threat for agricultural production throughout Southeast Asia and therewith especially affects vulnerable communities with a low degree of resilience, meaning urban and rural poor.

While this has been noticed by many national decision-making bodies, international organisations and development practitioners, the uncertain prognosis on which environmental changes will affect different localities and how, poses an immense challenge to the formulation of responsive strategies. The realisation of the effects of environmental changes due to climate change as well as eco-system exploitation and respective degradation therefore structures thinking and guides action in Weber's understanding. Yet, the uncertainty surrounding the precise effects of climate change on different localities and communities challenges systematic responses further and locally embedded adaptations to the ongoing changes become even more pertinent than before. The abilities of local communities to innovate, to modify their existing stocks of knowledge and develop locally embedded coping as well as adaptation strategies that enable local communities to stay rather than migrate are challenged.

In the here proposed panel, we would like to discuss issues of environmental change, increased feelings of uncertainties posing threats to everyday livelihood provision in especially (but not exclusively) rural areas of Southeast Asia and local responses to this. In our reading of the issue at hand, we are mainly looking at environmental change that fosters knowledge uncertainties. This regards questions such as how do local communities in Southeast Asia perceive environmental changes affecting their eco-system? How do they deal, cope with and adapt to them? What are the responses of the local knowledge and innovation systems in place to the challenges ahead?

We would like to encourage the submission of papers related to the suggested topic from any disciplinary perspective as well as of empirical and/or theoretical nature.