

Dr Monika Arnez

Assistant Professor, Hamburg University

Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures

Report

Power Imbalances and Resource Conflicts in Southeast Asia



Course Overview

This course for which I won a Teaching Innovation from the Faculty of Humanities, Hamburg University in May 2019, was about recognizing power imbalances and understanding how they are interrelated with resource conflicts in Southeast Asian countries. It invited Master and Bachelor students enrolled in the Master and Bachelor Programmes "Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia" to think critically about how modern problems of resource conflicts have developed in Southeast Asian countries, what their root causes are and how these problems can be addressed. Key issues addressed were land reclamation, cities, and hydropower dams. Three pillars inspired the design of this class: research carried out by researchers participating in the Horizon 2020 project "Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia" (CRISEA), an interview project, and exchange of knowledge with the public.

Objectives

The objectives of this seminar were three-fold. The first aim was to stimulate knowledge exchange between researchers participating in the Horizon 2020 project CRISEA and students. Secondly, the course aimed at offering students a research based learning experience and facilitate collaborative learning. Thirdly, this class aimed at stimulating discussions with the public beyond the classroom, thus facilitating knowledge exchange.

Implementation

Two researchers involved in the CRISEA project gave a lecture for this class: Assistant Professor Tomek Kaminski, Lodz University, and Assistant Professor Monika Arnez, Hamburg University.

In his contribution „International cooperation of Southeast Asian Cities“, a lecture delivered over Skype, Tomek Kaminski pointed out the important role of cities in International Relations, while particularly highlighting the relevance of cities as important factors in the success of global climate policy. In line with the theoretical framework of the theoretical framework of CRISEA's Work package 1 (Environment), he pointed to the ways in which knowledge is produced and circulated in city networks: [C40 Cities](#), where mega cities collaborate on climate change, [ICLEI](#) that joins forces between local and regional governments in sustainable development, and [CityNet](#), a network connecting municipalities, NGOs, and other urban players in sustainable development projects in the Asia Pacific. Pointing out that cities in Southeast Asia act rather as knowledge consumers than producers, he observed neo-colonial features in this process, where the "center" sets the standards of knowledge transfer to "peripheries". Moreover, he noticed that city networks play an important role for the city's capability of implementing climate policies while also noticing different patterns of Southeast Asian cities' participation in the respective networks. In the subsequent discussion with the students a particular focus was placed on the extent to which the participation of cities in city networks can become a powerful tool of influencing climate change policy.



I screened and discussed my documentary film “[Flow of Sand](#)” (2019), one of the deliverables of CRISEA's Work Package 1 (Environment) that ties in with my current research project about land reclamation in Malaysia. The documentary that has been screened in Kuala Lumpur, Chiang Mai, Singapore, and Hamburg in 2019 and 2020 shows how land reclamation in Malaysia creates tensions at multiple scales and how different imaginations of the future clash on the ground. Moreover, it reveals detrimental impacts of land reclamation on social communities and biodiversity and demonstrates how members of the Portuguese Creole (*kristang*) community deal with these problems. When discussing the film together with the students they showed keen interest in the conflicts between developers and members of the local community, and the destruction of the environment as a result of land reclamation as well as their prospects for the future.

A third topic discussed in this course was hydropolitics in the Mekong River, based on research carried out by Carl Middleton, who studies the ways in which water and society constantly coproduce themselves through a hydrosocial lens, examining the different meanings of water.

Broadening the geographical scope of this course and tapping in on recent debates about climate change, students were asked to respond to one chapter of Mark Beeson's book *Environmental Populism: The Politics of Survival in the Anthropocene* (2019), the key idea of which is that a more progressive form of populism (distinguished from ring-wing populism) is important for effective climate policies.

Inspired by these different research projects, students were asked to choose a suitable topic for an interview project. At the beginning of the seminar, a list of possible organisations that seemed suitable for the topic was made available. After the students had decided on their first interview partners, they were asked to formulate questions in teams, each with two sub-items on the topic, and I discussed with the teams how they could improve their questions. Topics students chose for their interview projects were "The Challenges of Recovered Paper Import in Indonesia", "The Palm Oil Controversy in Indonesia", "Productivity of Palm Oil or Alternative Resources", "Tin Mining in Bangka and Belitung", and "Deforestation in Vietnam."



The final event of the seminar took place on 17 February 2020, when students presented their work to the public; in addition to alumni, friends and students, one of the interview partners was also on site, who particularly emphasized the element of knowledge transfer back into society.

Last but not least: I would like to express my thanks to Esther Czaya, who supported the event as my student assistant, and of course, the students!

Monika Arnez