

Executive summary - Pamirs at the Crossroads - Changing challenges and perspectives

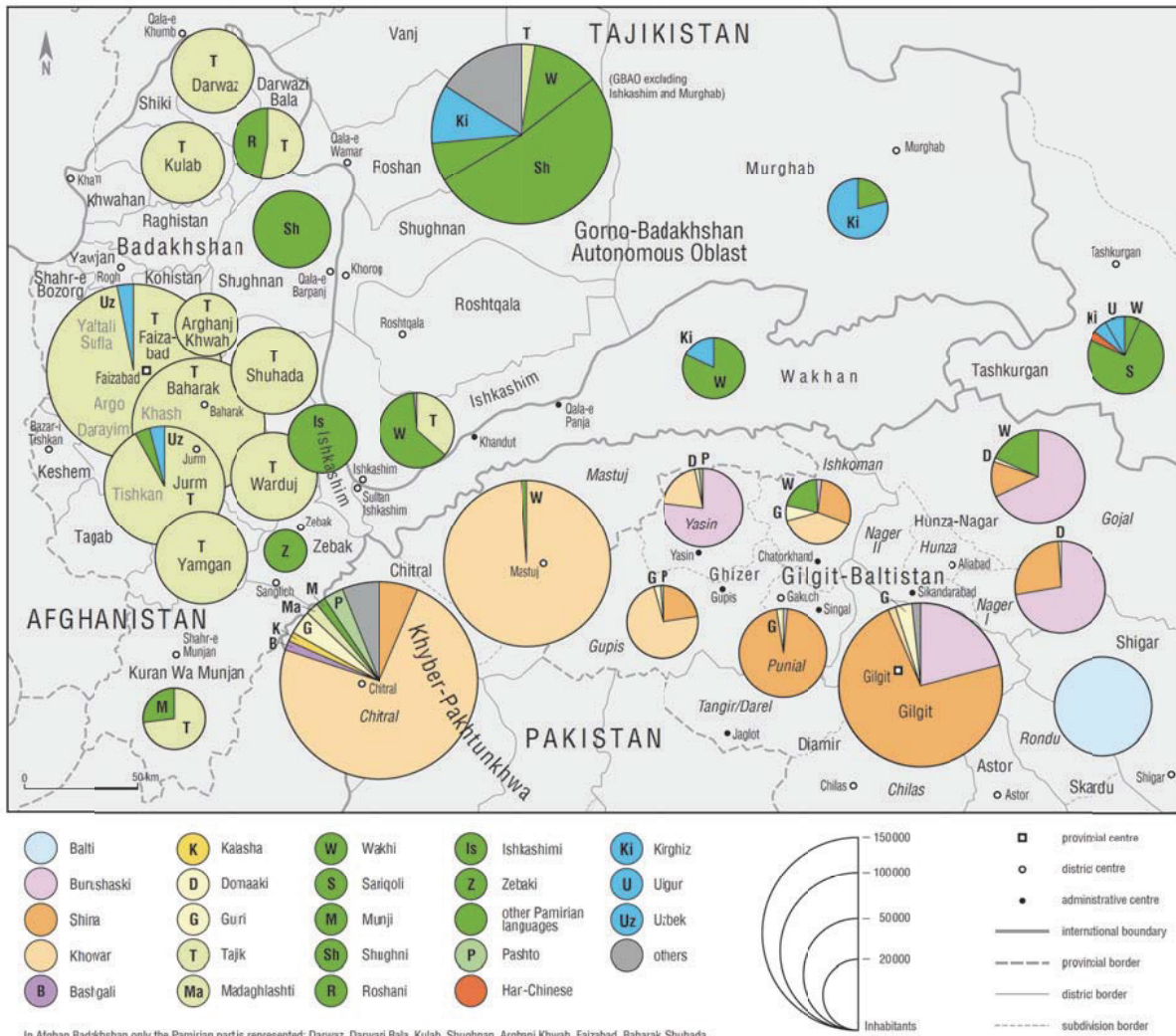
The meeting ‘Pamirs at the crossroads’ was convened in the framework of the Pamir research project sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation as a final conference that was looking back at what was achieved by previous academic and scientific activities in better understanding the historical heritage for path-dependent development. A further aspect of the ‘meeting of minds’ was to develop a vision for desiderata, short-comings and urgent needs directed towards Pamir-focused development and research efforts. All persons who could follow the invitation to convene in Berlin were experts in their respective fields thus representing a wide range of different personal experiences, professional backgrounds and upbringings. It was attempted to create a cross-border perspective that was focusing on a remote region in all countries that claim to have a share in the Pamirs. By looking from the periphery on local developments, regional connections, national dependencies and global networks the web of multi-fold interrelationships and contrasting perceptions emerged and illustrated the complex challenges to which this meeting of minds could contribute only some glimpses. The two-day deliberations were structured in five themes, two keynotes, and one summarising statement.

1 Setting the stage

With an impressive visual introduction the photographer Monika Bulaj from Trieste drew the attention to the challenges and plight citizens in Afghanistan in general and Pamirian people in particular have been confronted with through many decades. Her images left a continuing effect on all participants and have shown personal constraints, societal pressures and a resulting individual resilience that might and would allow adequate economic survival and self-determined everyday life under harsh and life-threatening environmental and socio-political conditions.

In a historic review attention was drawn to the first atlas map on the Pamirs in the second edition of the reputed and well-known Diercke Atlas, published in 1883. The same year when a European audience was fascinated by the Pamirian Knot as a geological meeting place of mighty mountain ranges it happened that a quarter of the residents of Wakhan followed their leader Ali Mardan Shah into exile into Yasin, Ishkoman and Gojal which lie in Gilgit-Baltistan, nowadays under Pakistan’s administration. His brother Sarbuland Shah led another group to Tiznaf and Tashkurgan in Sarikol, nowadays Tajik Autonomous County Tashkurgan, Xinjiang, in the People’s Republic of China. Subsequently the former mirdom of Wakhan was bisected into an Afghan and Russian-administered part which nowadays

belongs to Tajikistan as part of Rayon Ishkashim under the special denomination of Gorno-Badakhshanskaya Avtonomnyya Oblast’.



Source: Hermann Kreutzmann 2015: Pamirian Crossroads. Wiesbaden, p. 484

For the meeting of minds it was the desire of the organisers that participants from all four countries where Kirghiz and Wakhi migrated to in the 19th century could be welcomed in Berlin. The 20th century expanded the migratory web of Pamirian dwellers, thus from Erciş in Eastern Anatolia, Turkey Ekber Kutlu participated as a representative of the Kirghiz from the Afghan Pamirs in Turkish exile. In addition friends and supporters of the Pamirian crossroads who had succeeded in drawing more attention to a neglected mountain region of Central Asia, who had cooperated with local residents in educational projects and developmental packages augmented the group of experts in the meeting of minds. The select group was invited to continue an ongoing debate and to stimulate further activities in Pamirian studies.

2 Challenges for resource maintenance and utilisation

From the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, based in Kathmandu that follows an agenda in which trans-boundary landscape-based transects play a prominent role Yi Shaoliang and Muhammad Ismail represented the working group on the Hindu Kush-Karakoram-Pamir-Landscape Initiative (HKPL). In their presentation the challenge between nature protection and human utilisation of mountain resources was highlighted as it is perceived by the Kathmandu-based organisation which sees itself as a facilitator for the improvement of trans-boundary national parks to cooperate in fields of nature, culture and social welfare, and to provide data and knowledge for capacity building. Yi Shaoliang articulated that the biggest challenge will remain in balancing the region's potential between preservation and development. The conventional array of reasons for nature protection, the creation of national parks and biosphere reserves were reiterated and supported by arguments for maintaining ecosystems and unique areas of biodiversity. Its embeddedness in climate and global change was reiterated as well. The reconciliation between nature protection and human utilisation strategies is often one-sided in favour of the environment when outside players suggest the design and management of national parks. Certain areas appear on maps as marked spaces.

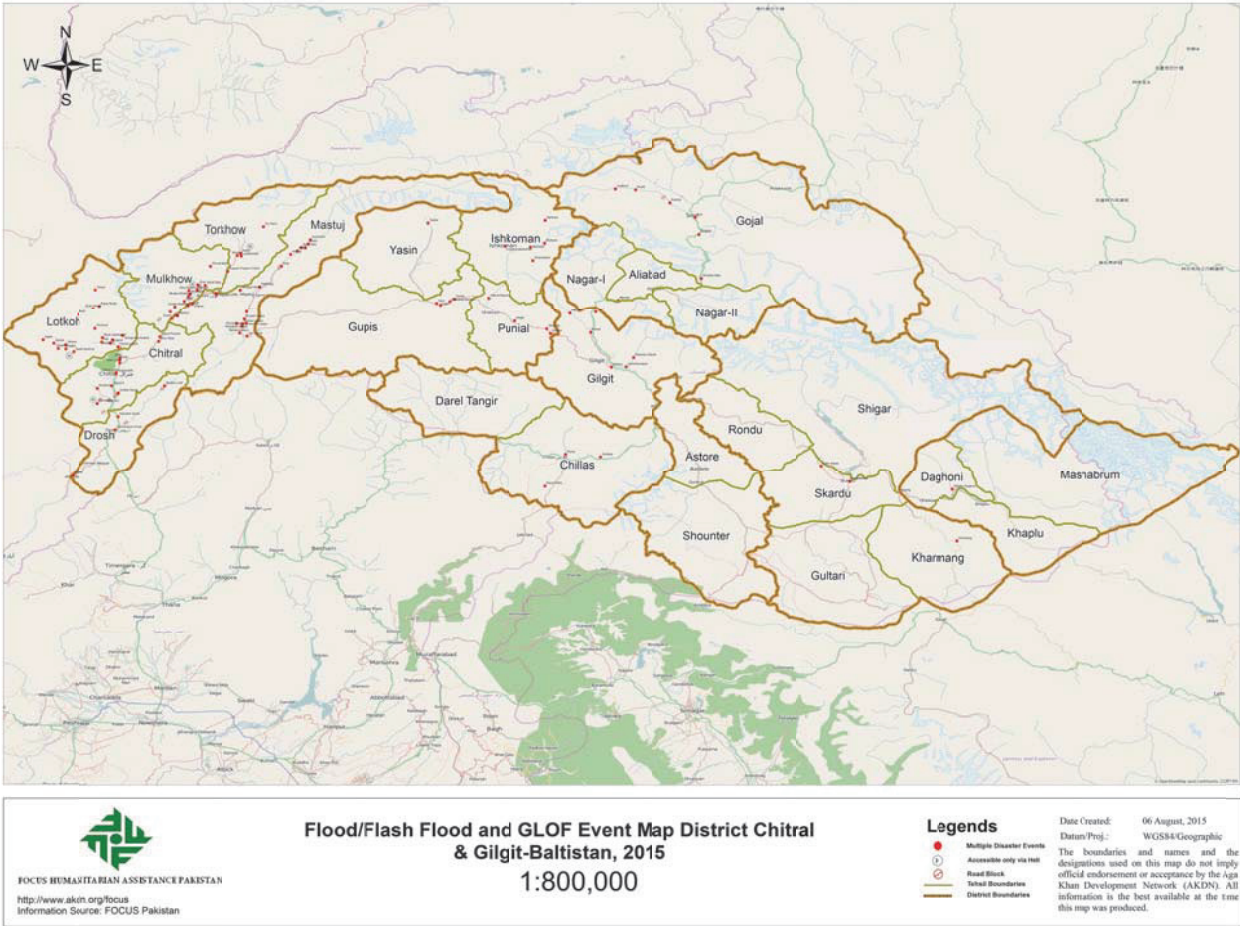
During our discussions it became obvious that some of these preserved areas only do exist on paper without having any impact on the welfare of human beings and nature. The Pamir National Park has operated in such a manner as several participants had observed over the years. Restrictions were reinforced in cases where management interventions were significant with strong impact on local residents. Muzaffar-Ud Din reminded the group of the adverse experiences in Shimshal that suddenly had become mainly lying in Khunjerab National Park that was designed by George Schaller and the Pakistan Government without consultation of local stakeholders. Khunjerab National Park borders on the Tashkurgan National Nature Reserve. The reservations of affected combined mountain farmers in Gojal in general and in Shimshal in particular had led to disapprove and refuse external management plans. In a reconciliation effort that took more than two decades the Khunjerab Villagers Organisation was established and has been acting as a stakeholder organisation for Gojal. The set-up of the Shimshal Nature Trust has been functioning as an overall welfare organisation that allocates income from mountaineering and trekking tourism and trophy-hunting fees to social projects in the village and the trust is managed by the local people themselves. The discussion highlighted the differing perspectives from outsiders, government officials, development actors and donors which often are in stark contrast to the viewpoints of local stakeholders who regard these areas as their heritage, traditional resources, and utilise these areas for a substantial share of the generation of their livelihoods.



*National parks and protected areas in the Pamirian Knot
Design Hermann Kreutzmann 2016; cartography Bernd Hilberer*

Local resources are not only endangered from human interventions, but are exposed to natural hazards in forms of earthquakes, heavy rainfalls causing avalanches, landslides, mudflows, rock-falls that result in loss of habitations, infrastructure and village lands. Nusrat Nasab, representing Focus Humanitarian Assistance from Islamabad, drew our attention to persisting challenges and forms of managing threats. Disaster-preparedness training and early warning systems have helped to mitigate crises and to reduce losses in human lives and valuable assets. Her organisation aims to enhance community-based disaster management by developing people's capacities of handling probable and recurring disasters before events take place, during the process and afterwards. Mitigation shall be achieved by rising

local awareness and through education and training. By incorporating indigenous knowledge into modern techniques of zoning and risk-mapping both bodies of experiences could be used for synergies as a key to risk reduction. In addition to the discussion on preparedness other aspects were addressed such as the challenges for relocation and resettlement from disaster-prone red-zone settlements to other habitations, the detrimental effects of out-migration due to changing lifestyles when the protection of local assets and resources is at stake, the loss of local knowledge due to not recording it. Linked to the question of allocation of required funds the pro and con arguments of early warning systems in terms of necessity, acceptance and practicability were discussed. In general it was broadly acknowledged that operations and trainings have significantly contributed to a higher awareness and preparedness in the field of interpreting available information and organising sound measures of handling these challenging situations.



Source: Focus Humanitarian 2015

3 Education and mobility

From three different perspectives experts who have been involved in education development drew our attention to salient features of the nexus of education and mobility. Robert Middleton took a historical approach to the anchoring of education and learning in the Pa-

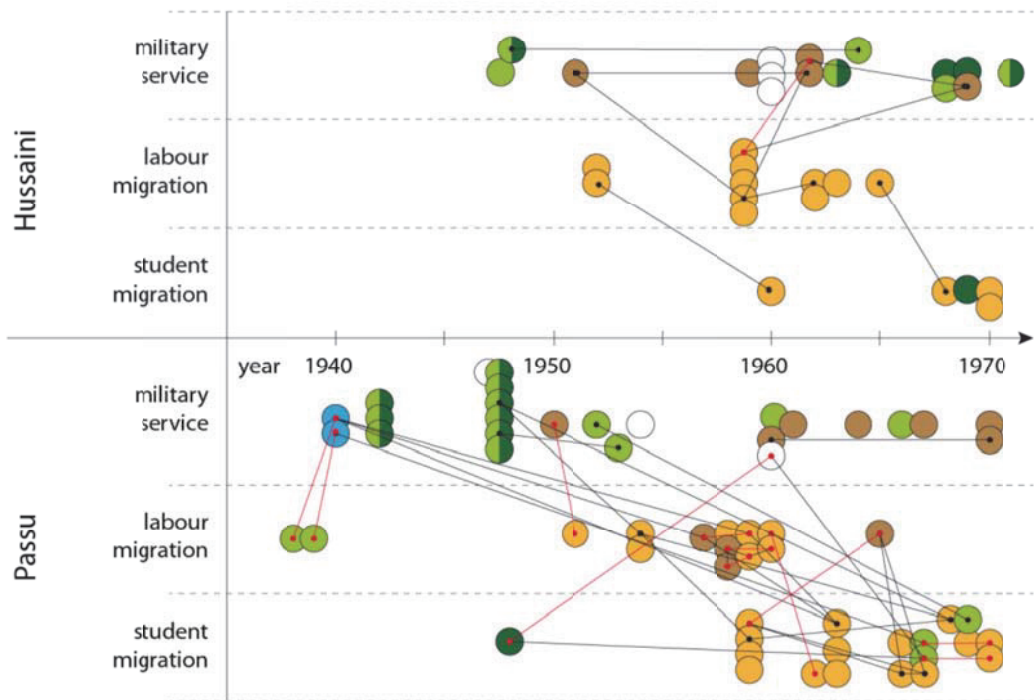
mirs and how it was connected to Ismaili scholarship and cultural expressions. A straightforward and systematic expansion of schooling for everybody took place in Gorno-Badakhshan during the Soviet period which significantly raised the standard of instruction and the quality of education since the 1930s. Many observers have articulated a standpoint that this high level has been maintained since. In his deliberations Robert Middleton emphasised that this is not the case anymore. After a quarter century of independence the quality of school infrastructure, staffing with qualified teachers and maintaining standards of pedagogy have deteriorated to an alarming state. The decline has been accelerated by the high rate of out-migration among the young generation including teachers and students for work in Kazakhstan and Russia. While educational quality has peaked in Tajikistan long ago the neighbouring regions of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan were late-comers in these educational efforts.

Majeed Khan drew our attention to the combined efforts of Pakistan's governmental and private institutions belonging mainly to the Aga Khan Development Network and the local communities in enhancing the standard of education. This full-flung process began in the 1970s and has not reached its peak yet in terms of quality while the qualitative aspects of school attendance and literacy rates are quite impressive for Gilgit-Baltistan, especially in comparison with other areas of Pakistan. The importance that is given in household decision-making to education is reflected in a growing number of Gojali households who have completely relocated to urban destinations where their children can enjoy adequate schooling and better facilities for studying.

The same effects of education could not be recorded for Afghan Badakhshan where the process of introducing female and male schooling has been very slow and bears huge potential. Surprisingly the Tajik minority (*minzu*) - the term Tajik functions as a synonym for all Ismaili people who speak a Pamirian language in China - in Tashkurgan County has always lagged behind other groups and areas in Xinjiang when it comes to formal education. Consequently, in the discussion the effect of boundaries was highlighted. The path-dependent developments were regenerated to different forms of colonial interventions by British, Chinese, Russian/Soviet powers which have had lasting effects until today in design and form of educational institutions.

The mobility aspect was discussed from the perspective of brain drain and out-migration. Although controversial opinions were articulated the overall consensus was that mobility has led to a higher inter-connectedness of Pamirian households with other arenas of economic activities from which local households and individuals benefit.

Early migration from Hussaini and Passu



Destination of migration

- Kashmir and British India
- Karachi
- other in Pakistan
- Gilgit
- GB
- unclear
- close kinship relation
- migration steps of the same person

Data: Based on 48 oral history interviews with former migrants and village elders of Gojal conducted in 2011 and 2012 by the author.

Source: Andreas Benz 2013: *How migrants made their way: The role of pioneering migrants and solidarity networks of the Wakhi of Gojal (Northern Pakistan) in shaping the dynamics of rural-urban migration*. In: *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series*, No. 11, p. 10

As long as there are no adequate professional positions, niche opportunities for income-generation and possibilities to raise a family based on certain perceptions and standards out-migration will remain a good opportunity for progress and prospects without giving claims and rights to local assets and resources.

From a third perspective Bohdan Krawchenko was painting a socio-economic picture of Tajikistan with not too bright colours. He emphasised on the challenges since independence and especially the additional constraints that are linked to the global economic crisis commencing in 2008. The impact on Tajikistan has been severe, and the role of the University of Central Asia is not limited to provide high quality education in a leading institution for higher learning, but the establishment of three campuses is seen as nuclear cells

for a 'new mountain economy' and for the creation of jobs and employment in the campus vicinities.

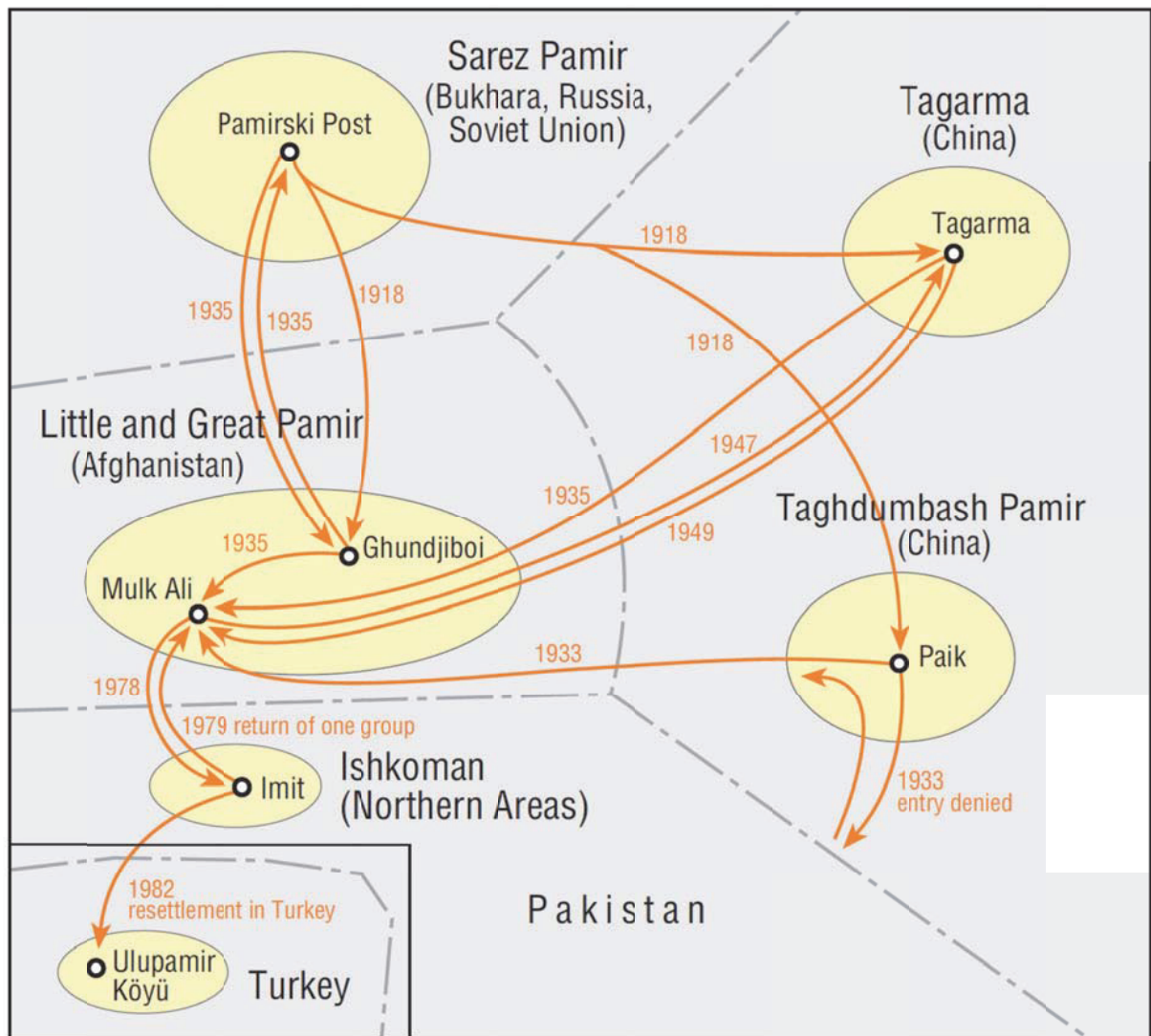


*Information board about the University of Central Asia during the Silk Road Festival in Khorogh
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 16 July 2010*

4 Keynotes

The final interventions of the first day were reserved for two special talks by contemporary witnesses that were devoted to the Kirghiz community which migrated from the Afghan Pamirs to Eastern Anatolia via Gilgit-Baltistan in the late 1970s and early 1980s. M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani drew the attention to the role of the charismatic leader Haji Rahman Qul and provided an eyewitness account of his encounters and friendship with the leader of the Kirghiz community. He asked the question how the 'last of traditional Turkic frontier khans in 20th century Central Asia' had become the unchallenged head of the community and how his leadership might have affected scholarly debates about authority in pastoralists' communities. As an admirer of this remarkable personality Nazif Shahrani highlighted the qualities of leadership that enabled him to become economically successful and very prosperous. The narrative was embedded in the socio-political Pamirian environment and time frame reaching from the October Revolution until the Saur Revolution. Both events had significant effect on the generation of livelihoods, external trade and communication relations. Haji Rahman Qul's role as the guardian of the Pamirian frontier which was vested upon him by the Afghan King Zahir Shah enabled him to find a special niche for his community and followership. The hiatus was the exodus in 1978 into exile across the passes of the

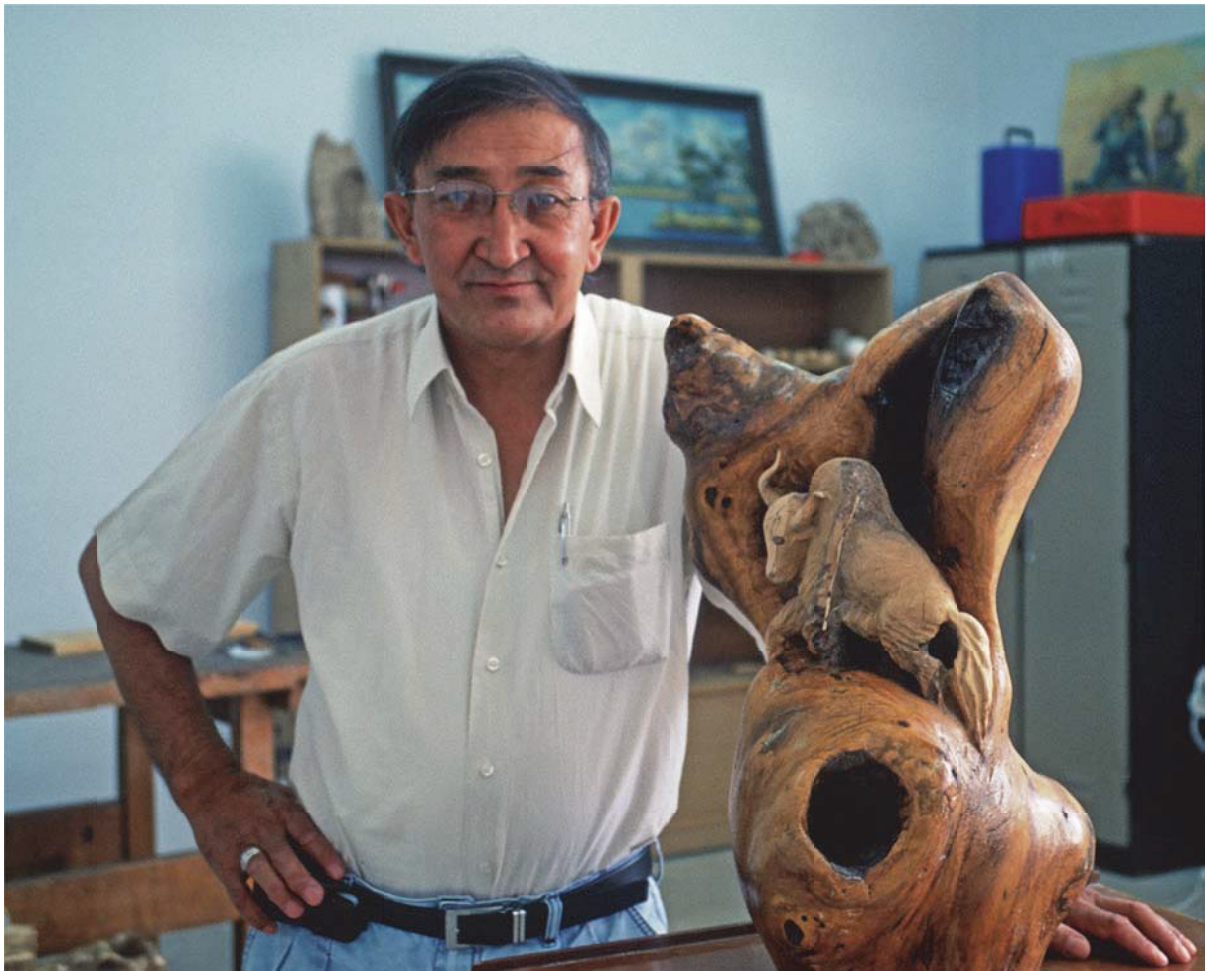
Hindukush into northern Pakistan. His anticipation of a changing socio-political landscape motivated this bold move which challenged the whole community to adapt to changed lifestyles and major losses of wealth. After four years in Pakistan the majority of the community moved to Eastern Anatolia where Haji Rahman Qul passed away in 1990. He had provided the required leadership in times of major challenges and constraints. Negotiations with various governments were not successful until the Turkish government provided a safe haven.



The movements of Haji Rahman Qul across borders during his lifetime
 Source: Hermann Kreutzmann 2015: Pamirian Crossroads. Wiesbaden, p. 335

Ekber Kutlu, son of Haji Rahman Qul, was the second eyewitness and as a family member provided an account how the 250 households fared after their arrival in Turkey. Especially impressive in his talks was the story how the first and second generations managed to adapt to Turkish lifestyles and how the connectedness with Turkish society has spread beyond the village of Ulupamir Köyü since they settled there. The young generations has tak-

an advantage of the opportunities offered by the educational system and by economic enterprises; they have been successful and impressive record was mentioned. Ekber Kutlu was full of praise for the good living conditions, the access to educational facilities, the comparatively supportive health, social welfare and security system. His assessment was that the overall situation now was better than in the Afghan Pamirs where a number of Kirghiz households have remained and are making all efforts for their survival there. Both lectures have brought back memories of the better times in the Afghan Pamirs which are always on the mind when it comes to fertile pastures, huge flocks of healthy livestock and independent lifestyles in a remote mountain location.



*Ekber Kutlu with a yak sculpture in his studio in Van
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 23 August 2005*

5 Experiences with regional development

Regional development has a number of actors and protagonists. Three viewpoints were presented. Bernard Repond contributed the perspective from the bridge-builder between donor and implementer by making a strong argument for the idea that it is only possible to convince individual and private donors in his home country to contribute to local development projects if he can assure them that his local partners are honest and trustworthy.

The success of initiatives such as ‘Pamirs Bridges’ which is literally building bridges might be questioned when indications about misled funds, corruption and even cultural differences in comprehending each others’ responsibilities lead to donor fatigue. Bernard Repond called for continued efforts in further cooperation and mutual learning and urged all participants not to forget the people who are continuing to live in Little and Great Pamir.



*Office of the Kizil Robot Jamuat administration in Murghab District, Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 15 July 2013*

From his perspective as an employee in the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme Amin Beg drew the attention towards the bottlenecks and hindrances under which regional development takes place in the Hindukush, Karakoram and Pamirs. The undecided constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan within Pakistan and under international law, security challenges due to recurrent detrimental violent activities and questions of border permeability are shaping the relationship of an area with governmental and non-governmental institutions when it comes to a fair share in resources and/or the allocation of development funds.

Gilgit-Baltistan has undergone significant changes since in the early 1970s hereditary rule was abolished and new institutions and cooperative efforts have filled the power vacuum. The opening of the Karakoram Highway as a trans-boundary artery for communication, exchange and trade as well as an internal link of the mountainous regions with down country Pakistan has stimulated an enhanced socio-economic transformation. The activities of the Aga Khan Development Network have begun at a crucial time for the region. One of the

biggest challenge for regional development are the donor-driven agendas which often require the application for funding certain packages that have been invented and perceived by outsiders and which not necessarily serve local needs or fit in an overall strategy for rural uplift. In this respect government development funds and packages serve a more holistic demand than external donors would provide who often depend on fancy developmental fashions and frequently change their agenda.



*Community organisation has managed to maintain the 4,600 metre high pastures in the Shimshal Pamiir by shepherdesses who spend five months away from the village
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 15 July 2013*

Muzaffar Ud Din illustrated the case of Shimshal in vivid terms and demonstrated how a community that has strong binding forces can achieve something that no outsider would have expected to be possible. The example of the Shimshal Road that was constructed as a unique community effort over a span of 15 years is outstanding in terms of determination and resilience. He underlined the local potentialities that have contributed to an impressive transformation within one generation. The speed of this significant change causes new challenges on the community, household and personal levels. The general discussion made clear that there are eminent examples of communal cooperation, but at the same time there are sufficient cases in which intra-villages adversaries and competition have hampered to work on common issues. In many cases the success of a development package depends on bringing the appropriate idea to the receptive personalities that have the authority to convince a community in such an endeavour.

6 Knowledge generation and heritage preservation

In Namadgut, Rajon Ishkashim Odinamamad Mirzoev has initiated a museum and learning centre for the preservation of Tajik Wakhan's cultural heritage. The location was well selected at a crossroads where from ancient times until today cultural artefacts have survived. The museum concept follows the idea to collect locally found items, the stories linked to them and to inform the interested public about the local usage of tools and utensils.



*Ruin of Zangibar Siaposh fortress near Yamchun, Rajon Ishkashim.
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 18 July 2010*

Following the recitation of his poem 'I was a shepherd, I am a shepherd' Nazir Ahmed Bulbul shared in his capacity as principal of Al-Amyn Model School in Gulmit with the participants the school's efforts not only to promote Wakhi as local vernacular, but to integrate Wakhi language classes into the regular curriculum. The experiences so far have shown that there is a great response to those classes that are embedded in a concept which draws on rejuvenating traditional dresses, games and cultural heritage as well as inventing new forms of bonding, cultural identity expressions and assigning students with local research that is rooting their interest in their place of residence. The activities initiated in the school blend well with measures implemented by the Ismaili local council that promotes community mobilisation in various fields such as social welfare, economic planning, cultural events and heritage preservation.



*Silk Road Festival in Khorogh City Park
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 16 July 2010*

The Pamir Archive Collection of Markus Hauser in Winterthur operates in different fields. The repository has merged a growing collection of historical and contemporary maps, books, postcards that were published mainly since the 19th century. The material has been processed and preserved for future usage. His mission is to make it accessible for academic research and public interest, thus providing a hub for Pamirian knowledge. Markus Hauser himself has prepared and published a number of Pamir-related high quality maps and has expanded his collection to historical texts from various languages and graphic designs which he would like to make accessible, readable and to be offered in translated versions to scholars, universities and the interested public.

7 Closing and remarks on future prospects

Yuri Badenkov took the task of summarising the main ideas and findings during two days of discussion and exchange. When looking at the Pamirian Crossroads he emphasised its role as part of the Great Asian Mountain Arch and as part of the global considerations on climate change and nature conservation in relation to sustainable mountain development. In this respect the connectivity to global programmes and agendas was highlighted for the Pamirian Knot. In comparison with existing bridges across physical obstacles and human-made boundaries the potential in terms of biosphere reserves was highlighted. For the Pamirian Crossroads in particular Yuri Badenkov made the link to the Silk Road Economic Belt

initiative which is named 'one belt, one road' in brief. Since 2013 the new Chinese development doctrine is drawing long corridors across Asia and perceives them as the future arenas for regional development and trans-boundary exchange. In this context mountain researchers are challenged to address major issues that are connected with such grand initiatives. What does that mean when these corridors of roads and communication lines cross national parks and bisect biosphere reserves? How does infrastructure development for the connection of dynamic growth poles in the lowlands and urbanised centres affect the mountain areas that are traversed? Do these mountain areas with low population density and limited economic potential as consumers and producers of tradable goods have a role and share in the new dynamism? More socio-cultural and economic-political questions could be raised that are addressing pressing and vital issues for the future of High Asian mountain regions beyond nature preservation and resource utilisation. Consequently, a new initiative was started by the Mountain Societies Research Institute in the University of Central Asia, the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Science, and the Centre of Development Studies of the Freie Universitaet Berlin titled "The Silk Roads crossing the Mountains of Central Asia. Ancient routes and new challenges in times of global change". The meeting is scheduled for September 2017 in Khorog.



The Pamirian Knot, a cross-border region between Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan
 Source: Hermann Kreutzmann 2016: Pamir or Pamirs - Perceptions and interpretations. In: Kreutzmann, H. and T. Watanabe (eds.): Mapping transition in the Pamirs. Cham, p. 17