

Closing statement and remarks on future perspectives

The conference devoted to the Pamirs is reaching final moments. It was organised in the most perfect manner by the Centre for Development Studies, Freie Universitaet Berlin. Special thanks go to Prof. Hermann Kreutzmann and his excellent team. The conference was preceded by the publication by Prof. Kreutzmann's "Pamirian Crossroads. Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia", the volume presenting the outcomes of a unique research carried out in the best traditions of the German geography school. This classical German *grossbuech* includes a detailed review of the environment, history, culture, and traditions of the Pamirs, starting from the period of the Great Game until recent times. In this connection, it would be proper to mention the phenomenon well known in geography: German scientists demonstrate unfading interest in the Asian Region and in Central Asia, in particular.

I would also like to recollect several important dates that have been both directly and indirectly relevant for the theme of the Conference:

- In 2018, we shall mark 90 years since the famous Soviet-German expedition to the Alai and Pamirs carried out by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR with participation of German geographers and mountain climbers;
- In 2017, we shall mark 25 years after UN Earth Summit on Environment and Development (Rio 1992), which adopted the Global Agenda-21 having for the first time included the issues of mountain development in the list of global priorities;
- In 2016, we shall mark 16 years from publication by Chinese scientists Lu Tsan-Fu and Gu Tsa-yui of their article 'Reflections on Transnational Development of the Eastern Central Asian Economic Zone and Construction of the Eurasian [Transportation] Continental Bridge Across Mountainous Altai' (Lu Tsan-Fu & Gu Tsa-yui 2000). This article was the first Chinese 'touchstone' preceding the ongoing Chinese initiative 'Economic Belt of the Silk Road. One Belt. One Road' that has commenced in 2013.
- In 2016, the first campus of the University of Central Asia will open its doors in the city of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. This University was built under the initiative of the Aga Khan (1996) and its focus is directed on the exploration of mountains of Central Asia, as well as on training of the leaders in sustainable development of mountain territories. In 2017, the UCA is expecting to open its second campus in the city of Khorog, Pamirs, Tajikistan. In 2019, construction of the third campus of UCA is to be finalised in the city of Tekeli, Kazakhstan.

I believe that the dates mentioned above are the important keystones in the most recent history of exploration of the mountain areas of Central Asia, of their transformation and development trends. All of them are directly or indirectly interrelated and are of acute interest for the researchers and the practitioners.



New Silk Road economic belt initiative

Source: Trade and container shipping homepage; http://www.joc.com/international-trade-news/so-what-china%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98one-belt-one-road%E2%80%99-things-anyway_20150407.html; accessed 2 June 2016

What issues were raised by the participants of the conference in their presentations?

The issues may be grouped in accordance with the thematic sessions proposed by the conference organisers and following the chronology of the meeting.

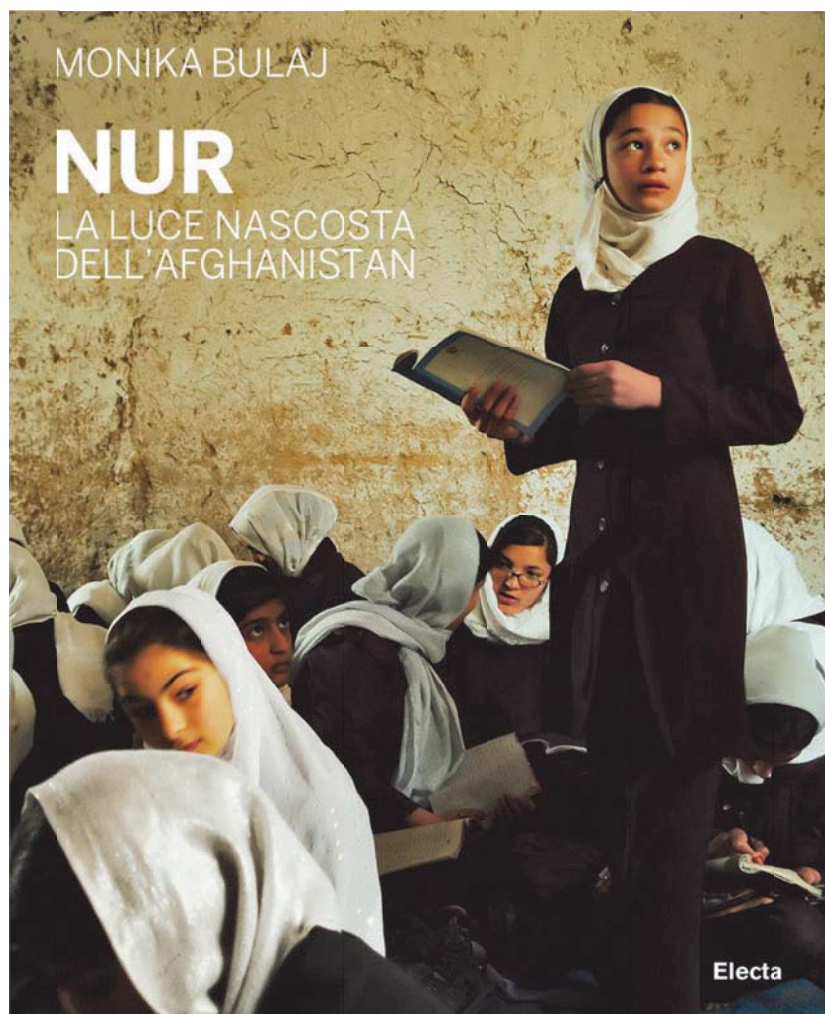
1 Setting the stage

Professor Kreuzmann opened the Conference by saying the following: This conference is planned to be a meeting of minds under the title ‘Pamirs at the crossroads’. Borderland studies have taken a new direction and have occupied an important place in social and political sciences. The studies have gone beyond looking at border-lines; nowadays emphasis is laid on the permeability of boundaries and selectiveness trespassers, traders, migrants and refugees in border regimes. The region concerned has been one of the central objectives in our joint research programme ‘Crossroads Asia’¹. From a second perspective these border regions have become of global interest nature protection and biodiversity

¹ See the webpage of Crossroads Asia: <http://crossroads-asia.de/en/home.html>. All working papers and other publications can be downloaded from this site.

preservation are at stake. The conference is shifting the perspective from the places of political decision-making in the lowland capitals of the respective countries into the centres of attention which we have located in the mountainous interface named as the Pamirs, but which reaches far beyond. Remoteness and marginalisation should be reversed for the purpose of highlighting vital issues that are concerned with the peripheral mountain areas of the Pamirs.

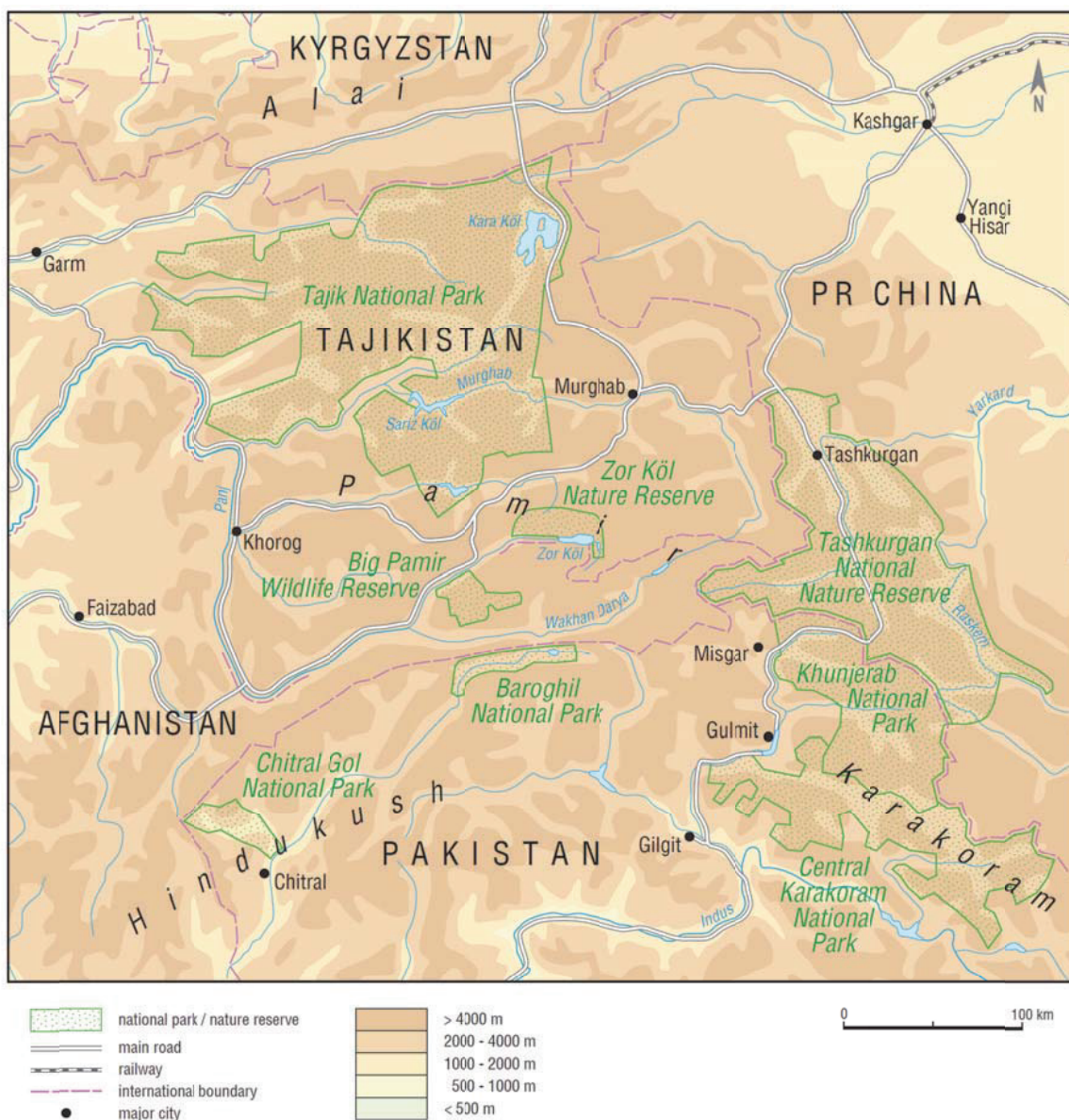
The brilliant photo presentation by Monika Bulaj: 'Nur. La luce nascosta dell'Afghanistan' was based on photographs taken by her between 2009 and 2012. It has brought us in the midst of actual life of Badakhshani, Kirghiz and Wakhi, and made the participants feel the atmosphere of the Afghan Pamirs. Monika Bulaj issued a strong statement to look at the challenges Afghanistan has been facing and how Afghan faces have been imprinted by the effects of war, confrontation and flight. She succeeded in creating an atmosphere that geographers have defined as the sense of place. And from the very beginning this gave the conference a special tonality - openness and desire of each participant to share the knowledge and views on the issues and the development potential of the Pamirs.



Source: Monika Bulaj 2013

2 Challenges for resource maintenance and utilisation

Yi Shaoliang stated that due to effects of globalisation and climate change the Pamir-Hindu Kush-Himalayan region has undergone great changes in the past decades. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) sees the biggest challenge in balancing the region's potentials between preservation and development. In its role as a facilitator ICIMOD aims to improve the management of trans-boundary national parks as 'natural, social and cultural resources'. During the discussion in the plenum the function of national parks in their present set-up and the role of ICIMOD were questioned in a way that demanded an intensified stakeholders' integration, both on national - i.e. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - as well as on a regional level.



National parks south of Kashgar crossed by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Source: Hermann Kreutzmann 2016: Pamir or Pamirs - Perceptions and interpretations. In: Kreutzmann, H. and T. Watanabe (eds.): Mapping transition in the Pamirs. Cham, p. 4

The cases of Tajik National Park as a non-functioning park and Khunjerab National Park as a repressive outsider's scheme without reasonable local participation and adequate compensation measures for the loss of pasture were taken as examples of misdirected funds with shallow effects. The integration of the local populations and their extensive knowledge seems still to be an exception even after decades of addressing these vital issues. The spatiality of cutting out certain areas as nature preserves and protected territories seems not always to be in tune with watersheds, glaciated areas and their extent in order to have a positive effect. Another unsolved and increasingly important issue will be the commercial idea proposed by neighbouring governments for introducing a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it cuts through several national parks and nature reserves. On its way from Kashgar to Islamabad heavy truck traffic will cross the Kizil Su Pamir Plateau Wetland Nature Reserve, the Tashkurgan National Nature Reserve, the Khunjerab National Park and the Central Karakoram National Park. Its long-term effects on nature and society cannot be estimated yet.



*Zor Köl Nature Reserve is located in the Great Pamir at the Afghan-Tajik border where Kirghiz pastoralists use the pastures on a seasonal basis
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 14 July 2013*

Nusrat Nasab explained how Focus Humanitarian Assistance has aimed to enhance community-based disaster management by developing the people's capacity of handling possible disasters before, while and after their happening. Mitigation shall be achieved by awareness-raising, education and training for which indigenous knowledge is seen as the key to risk reduction.

The debate in the plenum focused on the challenges of relocation and resettlement as a preventive measure. Experiences so far have shown convincing results that are due to early warning and sharing of weather forecasts from various meteorological services with village communities. Another aspect was who is bearing the high investment costs for improving the infrastructural resilience measures. In this context the issue of out-migration was raised as a form of brain-drain of local institutional wisdom as migrants take their knowledge with them and will not be at the place when it might be required. In addition the multi-local lifestyles of many households have a detrimental effect on being prepared for a wide range of crises that occur in the mountain villages. Here issues related to migration and knowledge preservation came into the picture for the first time.

3 Education and mobility

Three viewpoints were offered about the nexus of education and mobility. Robert Middleton emphasised upon the early effects of Ismaili religious scholarship and training which was much later augmented by a sophisticated Soviet school system. The latter approach serviced all communities irrespective of their physical remoteness and had established a comprehensive schooling and training system that has changed the income opportunities of people from Gorno-Badakhshan. The last quarter century though was characterised by a deterioration of education in the mountain villages due to dwindling funds, civil war and economic crises in Tajikistan. Thus, we find a quite different development of the educational sector here that in neighbouring Afghanistan or Pakistan. Majeed Khan shared his experiences as director of education in Gilgit-Baltistan and highlighted the efforts that have been implemented during the last two generations by governmental institutions in northern Pakistan. Here quite significant achievements could be recorded. Finally Bohdan Krawchenko presented his perception of the frame conditions under which the socio-economic development in Tajikistan takes place and in which the activities of the University of Central Asia are embedded. Certain challenges for training and job creation are connected with the upcoming new institutions of higher learning. The following plenary discussion expanded the perspectives on Afghanistan and China where we have two other extremes of educational attainment. In general the question was raised what is the contribution of basic education and higher learning and how is it connected to out-migration. In conclusion it was acknowledged that though a growing number of educated people from the mountains is not finding adequate jobs the investments in education since the second half of the twentieth century have had a salient effect on providing income from multi-local sources that is contributing to the well-being of the relatives who reside in the mountain villages and maintain the inherited resources.



*Meeting of international delegates of the Global Mountain Forum with principal, teachers and staff of Al-Amyn Model School Gulmit
Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 31 August 2015*

4 Experiences with regional development

Bernard Repond who founded the non-governmental organisation ‘Pamir’s Bridges’ made a strong point about accountability and reliability. This gives an NGO certain tasks in two directions. To motivate and stimulate individual private donor’s interest in continuing support - in his case in Switzerland - it is inevitable to guarantee and safe-guard the credibility of a project. This can only be achieved by ‘giving local people a sense of responsibility’ and by cooperating with trustworthy partners that cannot be found everywhere. He concluded his deliberations with a personal wish that we should forget the people in the Afghan Pamirs whom he called ‘the poor and forgotten people there’.



*Board on display at the newly opened tunnels along the Karakoram Highway in Gojal
Source: Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 28 August 2015*

Ghulam Amin Beg highlighted the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme's (AKRSP) role in northern Pakistan and emphasised detrimental frame conditions such as the semi-autonomous constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan within Pakistan, security questions and border issues. Economic dependencies on Pakistan play important roles in regional development. Since 1972-74, when small feudal states were dissolved many changes have occurred. The Karakoram Highway played an important role. Development efforts by AKRSP started then. The integration of Pakistan's mountainous areas with the lowlands was accelerated due to the infrastructural assets and political reforms. The government institutions have played a central role for the sustainability of projects as they have remained the biggest donors. Donor-driven development means that the agenda of measures and packages comes from outside which is not necessarily in tune with the demand of local communities. Consequently, he highlighted the importance of integrated rather than piece-meal approaches to development.

Muzaffar-Ud Din took his home village Shimshal as a case in point to show how important the fabric of a local community might be for achieving their own goals. Shimshal was formerly very isolated, no support was extended by government, but people themselves were very active: During 15 years of self-organised communal work and with material support by AKRSP the village community constructed a link road over a distance of more than 60 km from the Karakoram Highway to the village. Shimshal used to be a poor village, but now it is one of the most prosperous villages in the area. The villagers managed to achieve this by themselves. Shimshal is only an example, there are many other villages where people did extraordinary things by themselves.

In the discussion the question was raised what are the factors and parameters that allow certain mountain communities to prosper and others to fail? What have been the reasons for these extraordinary achievements in Shimshal? One answer that was offered mentioned the abstract concept of resilience. In this difficult environment, working together is central for survival. Ismaili factor might play an additional role, but there are other communities e.g. in Baltistan that follow different denominations. Another reason might be the aspect of ownership; people tend to work hard for the maintenance of their own resources. An important point is not to romanticise such examples as Shimshal, because there are many villages where such community action does not work. From the outsider's perspective it was mentioned that the leadership component is also essential; one has to find the 'diamond' in the village, meaning that certain communities benefit of their own visionaries and social activists. Communities are heterogeneous, there are always people who are more active than others and have the ability to convince them. Projects must fo-

cus on common objectives; when the majority of the community benefits, the project is more likely to succeed.

5 Knowledge generation and heritage preservation

Odinamamad Mirzoev presented the example of cultural heritage preservation in the Museum Namadgut, in the Western Pamirs of Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan. As a former headmaster and present-day museum curator in Namadgut he shared his experiences about the difficulties to raise awareness about one's own cultural heritage. He provided an overview of his on-going work dedicated to the preservation of Pamirs' cultural heritage in Tajik Wakhan. Situated at the ancient Silk route, Namadgut in Ishkashim District was a frequented transit station for traders as well as Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Muslim pilgrims. This is one reason why the road is sometimes named a Buddhist road. Over the last centuries the region has been an important crossroads within the Pamirs which is documented and evidenced by numerous artefacts that have been collected over time or which are visible witnesses along the road in form of ruins of previous castles and fortifications, shrines and other sacred places. Today many cultural sites as well as the historical rock paintings in Langar with more than 5000 petroglyphs remind us of those times. The challenge has been and will remain one for the future to collect and preserve artefacts. Giving those artefacts a shelter and to preserve and display them in an adequate manner needs further expertise and support.

Nazir Ahmed Bulbul from Gulmit has been involved in culture-related projects through a variety of functions. As a poet and painter, writer and dramatist, but as well as principal of a private school and as Local Council president he has identified a variety of everyday projects that can help in his agenda of strengthening Wakhi communities by education and preservation of the local culture. He identified himself as a 'shepherd' within the flock of 'knowledge generation. His work is dedicated to the protection, maintenance - and shepherding of local thoughts and ideas. His conclusion to the challenges of heritage preservation within the knowledge generation is to strengthen the civil society by education and local culture, so that the Wakhi can trust their own potentials.

From an external perspective Markus Hauser explained the activities and usefulness of the Pamir Archive for present and future generations of scholars, travellers and the interested public. As a Swiss cartographer Markus Hauser has persistently built up the Pamir Archive with the objective to collect, process and thus preserve information about the region. By now, the archive contains books, historical and topographical maps, geo-data, postcards, paintings and photographs; all made available both in digital and print format. The digitised material is made available in high resolution and contains additional and new (geo-

)information. Textual materials are edited by intelligent text recognition, so their accessibility and legibility will be enhanced. All digitised material is accessible for the general public and can be found online (<http://www.pamir-adventure.com/pamirmountains/>).

In the discussion the question was raised on the mere process of transferring Wakhi, as an oral language, into a scripture. As regional languages (language groups) do not correspond with national borders, the importance of trans-boundary cooperation was highlighted. The importance of enabling and motivating people of the Pamirs to write down their own histories and to participate in the cultural preservation process was highlighted as being essential. Then the plenum turned towards the question whether development and cultural preservation are by nature contradictive processes or whether both endeavours can be combined in a beneficial way. It was argued that tourism - seen as one of the main economic present and future forces in the field of cultural preservation and maintaining hereditary practices - highly depends on the historical and natural wealth of the region. Moreover these sites are resources for study and research and as such must be financially supported and maintained by science.

A much-discussed aspect was that the aspect of 'culture' has not entered into the objectives of 'development' yet. Thus, the current mantra of economic development in the Pamirs would impede cultural, historical and social heritage preservation. The point was made, that culture is not valued in financial terms - 'Most donors will not give you a grant for culture'. Others were of the opinion that a combination of culture and development is feasible and that some donors honour such endeavours; e.g. UNESCO, Swiss embassy. Cultural centres are needed to raise awareness for the necessity of preservation. Techniques like those introduced by Markus Hauser were seen as useful methods that fulfil the main objective to provide access to those materials for everybody. Therefore, the necessity to turn the University of Central Asia not only into an educational centre of higher learning but also into a cultural and research centre for the Pamirs was highlighted and the idea endorsed by all participants.

6 The way forward

According to Yuri Badenkov the discussion of new global challenges and future research areas and development trends of the Pamir mountain communities, and of other High Asian regions, should bear in mind the historical experiences accumulated through centuries of cultural and economic development of the mountain countries placed within the Great mountain arch of Asia: from Himalaya-Karakoram- Hindukush, Pamirs, Alai and Tien Shan to the northern mountain massifs of Altai, Sayans, and Transbaikal areas, and further along the Amur River to the Sea of Ohotsk and Sakhalin Island.

The above areas possess remarkable environmental and ethno-cultural diversity; therefore, two key aspects will be relevant for their exploration and development:

- Proper accommodation of the local and regional context in the development studies of specific mountain massifs, and broad involvement of various stakeholders representing interests of diverse social groups and institutions (based on participatory and partnership principles)
- Concerted studies in key mountain regions of Central Asia experiencing new global challenges. Such studies should be based on common principles and approaches and be implemented as a series of joint mountain projects designed under a common umbrella. An important element of such studies should be a comparative analysis of the outcomes, and their implementation in management and development practices. Participation of all potential stakeholders in such studies and exchange of knowledge and information shall be the factors for promoting the success of studies and proper strategies and plans ensuring adaptation of social, environmental, and economic systems to change.



The vision of a Silk Road economic belt that traverses the Pamirian crossroads with Central Asia as a commercial hub
 Source: China Daily 15 April 2015

These, roughly, are the approaches needed for an implementation of the joint project 'The Silk Roads crossing the mountains of Central Asia. Ancient routes and new challenges in times of global change' (2017-2019) pursued by three institutions: Mountain Societies Research Institute, University of Central Asia; Mountain Group MAB-6, Institute of Geography/Russian Academy of Sciences; and Centre for Development Studies, Freie Universitaet Berlin. It is expected that the project shall be carried out under the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) Programme, and shall cover three major mountain regions of Central Asia:

Pamirs, Tien Shan, and Altai. The project should be completed by an integrating workshop presenting the research outcomes. In this perspective, the current conference may be viewed as a starting event for this future project.

The format of the conference that was proposed by the organisers has perfectly corresponded to the themes and objectives of the conference. It ensured discussion of the diverse aspects of life and development in the Pamirs, a remote mountain region subject to global change impacts, and also falling into the sphere of interests of China and its new large scale initiative 'Economic Belt of the Silk Road'. The conference was attended by representatives of a broad range of professions and stakeholders from many countries and regions: scientists, experts, practitioners, journalists, writers, etc. Many of them originate and live in the Pamirs or in the vicinities, carried out studies and continue to explore these areas, and possess profound knowledge of the region, its environments, cultural and humanitarian values and traditions of the Pamirian peoples inhabiting today the territories of four countries Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and China. This trans-disciplinary format of the conference ensured valuable discussions and debates of diverse aspects of life and development in the Pamirs and its interrelated changes of various expressions and on different scales. We have heard various views from each other, and got a better understanding of the challenges involved. I also hope that we were successful in identifying the key opportunities of research and development for the future. This is, in fact, the major outcome of our work during the conference. There is no doubt that outcomes of the conference shall provide new impetus for studies of the Pamirs, and for exploring the potential for development in the Pamirian crossroads.

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