

Preface

The training of students in the Department of Geography at the Centre for Development Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin includes the scientific preoccupation with theories of development, with social inequalities at multiple scales reaching from global to local arenas, and with questions of international development policies and practices aimed to ensure basic needs and sustainable development. Such theoretical and conceptual training goes along with the facilitation of methodical skills in empirical investigations. This shall help students to gather own experiences in empirical fieldwork and establish the link between development theories and practice. For this reason, we regularly conduct student projects in different countries of Central and South Asia. These projects also form part of the curriculum of the Master's program in Geographical Development Studies. The experience of everyday life in urban and rural contexts, the perception of regional and global disparities, and the testing of own designed research tools to answer specific research questions provides the students with a high degree of exposure to various professional aspects of possible future employment as development practitioners as well as valuable personal experience. The student project in 2016 was dedicated to the potentials and challenges for rural, urban and regional development in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan with specific consideration of the existing connections and exchange relations between rural and urban areas in Naryn Oblast', the biggest and least populated of Kyrgyzstan's seven provinces (NSC KR 2016).

After gaining independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan experienced fundamental transformations of the political system, the economy and the sociocultural sphere. These transformations had various immediate impacts on the people's daily life in terms of income generation, the provision with food and consumer goods, the management and use of locally available natural resources, as well as the availability of reliable social services, including health and education. Questions related to national belonging and religious identity represent another fundamental challenge of the post-Soviet era, requiring the search for new answers. Against this background, the student project focused on three thematic clusters including ten subprojects: I) 'Economy: markets, trade, and agriculture'; II) 'Connections and relations: rural-urban nexuses'; and III) 'Culture and society: religion and identity'. The studies were conducted in close cooperation with the Naryn State University named after S. Naamatov located in Naryn Town, the administrative centre of Naryn Oblast'. Ten groups of up to three Kyrgyz and German students addressed specific issues through case study approaches applied in selected rural and urban settings of the province. The scope of the individual subprojects encompassed issues like the car trade and public transport system in Naryn Town, the bazaar economy of the city, trade and value chains of milk and other animal products, the management and utilisation of pastures and irrigation water, challenges related to drinking water supply, small-scale gold mining, endogenous development potentials, and the representation of national identity in the study region. This report includes a selection of the manifold results gained by the Kyrgyz-German student group, and presents six case studies addressing diverse topics (Fig. 1).

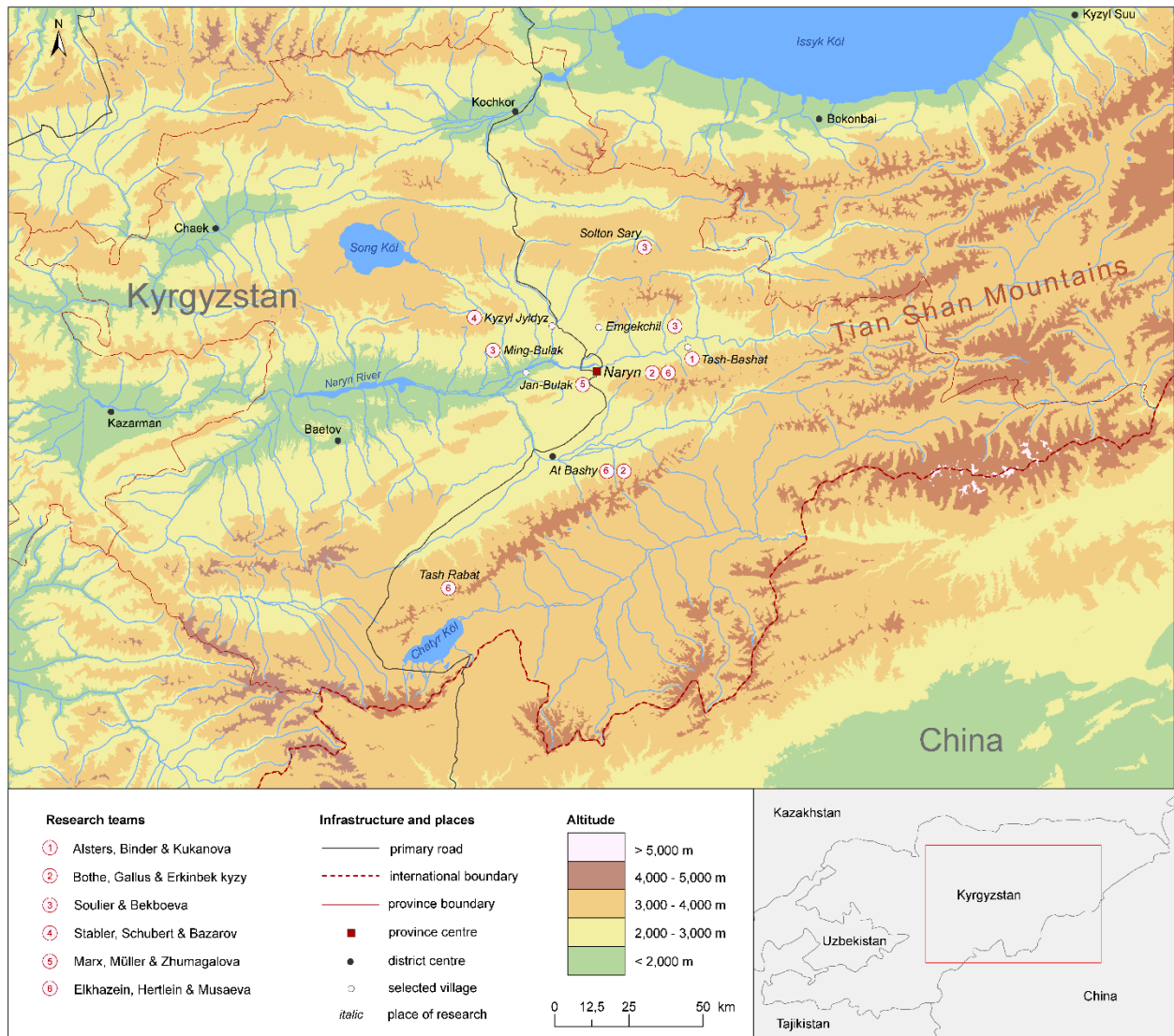


Fig. 1: Naryn Oblast', distribution, and location of the presented case studies
Source: Dörre, 2017 (draft)

David Alsters, Lisa Binder and Cholponai Kukanova (Team ①) examined, through the analytical lens of the 'endogenous development' approach (Bohle 1988), factors, actors, and potentials for the development of the rural settlement of Tash-Bashat.

Julia Bothe, Katie Gallus, and Zhanara Erkinbek (Team ②) adapted the 'global commodity chain' approach (Gereffi et al. 1994) to examine the commodity and value chains of milk and milk products processed by the dairy factories of Naryn Town and At Bashy to get a better understanding of the regional milk processing industry.

Marlene Soulier, and Nadira Bekboeva (Team ③) looked at the small-scale and artisanal gold mining practiced by the inhabitants of the two villages of Emgekchil and Ming Bulak, and interpreted the observed practices as locally specific livelihood strategies (Chambers & Conway 1992). They also applied the 'global commodity chain' approach (Gereffi et al. 1994) for their analyses, and 'followed the gold' from the excavation of the raw material to the diverse processing steps conducted in the two villages.

Martin Stabler, Franz Schubert, and Aman Bazarov (Team ④) asserted that the problem of inadequate drinking water supply is an urgent problem in Kyrgyzstan, and especially in rural areas. They stated that this challenge, in combination with poor sanitation, represents a serious impediment for rural development by causing high morbidity rates and social costs. The authors present the anecdotal case of Kyzyl-Jyldyz Village, which shows that the externally initiated decentralisation of the drinking water supply in Kyrgyzstan unintentionally contributed to the perpetuation or even deterioration of already difficult living conditions of some marginalized, and economically weak communities.

Alexander Marx, Carolin Müller, and Nurgul Zhumagulova observed the local water management and irrigation practices in the village of Jan-Bulak, which, during Soviet times, represented the centre of a collective farm. Against the background of the scarcity and uneven spatial distribution of irrigation water, as well as the absence of a superior body managing the local water use and distribution in post-socialist times, the authors applied Elinor Ostrom's Social Ecological Systems Framework (2009) to analyze the local management approach and irrigation patterns of Jan-Bulak. The objective of the study is to evaluate the self-organized practices of the local community in terms of sustainability of the outcomes, and efficiency of the taken measures.

Sakina Elkhazain, Lars Hertlein, and Kaliman Musaeva have dealt with questions pursuing the problem of Kyrgyz national identity and its representation in the study region. Inspired by Anderson (1996) and Hall (1994) the authors conceptualize nation and national identity as imagined communities and social constructs, respectively, and applied a mix of different methods to uncover and reconstruct the constructionist character of manifold material and figurative representations of 'Kyrgyznes' of, and within the study region.

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