KONFERENZEN

Civil Society in Southeast Asia – Scope and Concepts, International Conference

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, June 7-8 2004

From June 7th to 8th an International Conference on 'Civil Society in Southeast Asia' took place at the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The conference was planned and organized by the Munich Institute for Social Science (MISS) in cooperation with the Buddhist Institute and the Heinrich-Boell-Foundation and supported by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), InWent, the Asia Development Bank and others. More than a hundred-fifty interested people from the region and beyond visited and participated in five discussion panels and three focus group discussions throughout the two days. The participants' background varied widely – academics, political decision-makers, activists from diverse organizations, community council members from Cambodian provinces, and expatriates from the field of international development cooperation – which reflects the variety of the conference's topic very well.

Why have we chosen 'civil society' as the focus of our discussions on Southeast Asia? The political scientists among us certainly point out civil society's central role in democratization processes. While the sociologists mainly see the integrating function of civil society. Yet, both fields of academia share the American/European perspective of the discourse on civil society. The 'Asian' perspective had so far, not been integrated in the discourse – a fact that this conference changed.

The conference was officially opened by His Excellency Chea Savoeun, Minister of Religious Affairs and Cult after several brief and remarkable introductory speeches by the First Counsellor of the European Commission to Thailand Andreas List, MISS Director Gerd Mutz, Luc de Meester, Team Leader of the GTZ, and Vice Director of the Royal University of Phnom Penh Neth Barom.

Gerd Mutz and Hema Gonatilake introduced the first panel, Panel A on *The Local Civil Society – Influences, Concepts and Initiatives,* which was completed by Thida Khus, Ok Sereisopheak, Nick Tan, Lang Sengdala, Pora Vanna, and Somkid Mahissaya.

The discussion in Panel B *The Cultural and Religious Dimensions – Civil Society in Southeast Asia under Pressure of Modernization* was chaired by Heng Monychenda and brought forward by Walter Aschmoneit, Arnaldo Pellini, Peter Gyallay-Pap, Sri Yunanto, Shaarad Kuttan, and David Mueller. In Panel C Michael Nelson, Nor Azizan Idris, Nguyen Minh Tam, and Vineeta Shanker discussed the topic *Economic Institutions and Civil Society.* In Panel D the *General Setting for Civil Society and Political Practice* was discussed by Roger Henke, Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Heike Löschmann, Michael Nelson, and Kim Sedara.

In order to focus on some selected issues addressed especially to the local conference participants, the conference offered three Focus Group Discussions on *Coping with Health Problems in Different Cultures – Civil Society, Participation and Empowerment* chaired by Manfred Zaumseil, *Management of Local Civil Society Groups* by Thida Khus, and *Gender and Civil Society* by Susanne Mueller. Additionally to the discussion program the conference enhanced ones knowledge by means of three keynote speeches held by Manfred Cramer on *Transnational Expert Culture and Local Civil Society,* by Shamsul Amrid Baharuddin on

Modernization and Civil Society in Southeast Asia, and by Grant Curtis on *ADB-Government-NGO Cooperation*. A *Résumé* and *Round Table Discussion* closed the successful conference.

The central aspect from where each Panel started its evaluation and discussion was *What is civil society, and How can we best describe and evaluate civil society in Southeast Asia?* To structure the subsequent debate, Gerd Mutz compared two approaches to discuss civil society: the topographic approach and the action-oriented approach.

There are two Approaches on Civil Society

Basically, there are two conceptions of civil society: First, civil society is defined as a specific social realm apart from the market and the state. This definition clearly separates the three spheres of society: market, state and civil society. It is a widely used concept, and we call it the *topographical approach*. The problem is, that while the spheres of market and state are relatively easy to describe and analytically distinct, much greater difficulties incur to the attempt of assigning certain fields of societal action to this third sphere and, subsequently, to demarcating it against the other two. While the market sphere incorporates companies and business organizations with profit orientation, the state sphere incorporates government, bureaucratic organizations related to the state, and political parties, the civil society sphere has not such clear distinction. This is why the concept of civil society in the topographic tradition often serves as a *residual category* only – civil society is what is left over from society after subtracting the spheres of the market and the state.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this concept of civil society is US- and Eurocentric as it derives from a typical western pluralistic system. Moreover, within the topographic approach it is common practice to solely obtain an organizational perspective, thus restraining the concept of civil society to the existence of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).

As discussed in Panel A, these are generally presumed to represent the institutional core of civil society – but it remains a typically western point of view. Consequentially, other forms of involvement and ways of conduct are lost out of sight. A narrow view, focused on NGOs only, is not sensitive enough to include cultural aspects and national characteristics. Hence civic potentials from non-recognized actors would remain hidden from the observer of the *topographical approach*.

The second approach conceives civil society by the notion of civic structures and civic action – even by a civic habit or attitude. In other words, this approach changes the perspective on civil society from simply viewing the civil society sphere to viewing civic action, in which civil society actors are involved. We call this approach the *action orientated approach* towards civil society. From this point of view civic structures and civic action may well be enclosed in all areas, spheres and subfields of society.

For instance, there are companies adhering to the non-profit principle as well as to social aims – this would represent an example of civic involvement in the realm of the market sphere. Especially the civil society-oriented structures of economic associations, as co-operatives or co-op networks, are of similar relevance as party political structures for a civic state. The role of economic institutions in civil society was discussed by Panel C.

Concepts of Civil Society have to be Culturally Sensitive

Having diminished the 'western' organizational perspective, different cultural aspects – such as traditional practices – will become visible, when we look at civil society as a structured way of acting. These traditional forms are unique in local societies in Southeast Asia and often completely inconsistent with modern conceptions of civil societies. This inconsistency

can be harmful to development aid by western organizations, aimed at building civil society that does not consider the unique traditional features of civic life. Acknowledging that, some actors have created ways to bridge traditional and modern ways of acting; one can even observe that modern organizations reanimate old traditional practices. In order to cultivate a maximum potential in the development of civil societies, creative mechanisms of linking old and new forms of civic involvement have to be found.

One example can be given. One can find traditional practices in all societal fields, however predominantly in religious institutions, for example Buddhist communities. These communities are a well-integrated, organic part in some Southeast Asian societies such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. These religious institutions carry a variety of potentials for civic engagement, culturally, economically and politically. Of course, one must not deny that the importance of religious institutions is sometimes over-interpreted and idealized, and the danger of being misused or instrumentalized is always inherent. This discussion was central to Panel B.

Only an *action-orientated approach* allows us to analyze and compare civil societies in a culturally sensitive way. Especially for an intercultural comparison – e.g. the development of civil society in different countries of Southeast Asia –, it is of utmost importance to bear in mind the varying culture-specific meanings of civic actions and structures in a given societal context.

Minimum Standards of Civic Structures and Practices shall be Discussed

We have concluded that civil society in Southeast Asia is characterized by different cultural aspects that create various forms of civic actions by a variety of civil society actors in different societal environments. After recognizing the significance of cultural sensitiveness of civil society discourses, we need to qualify its meaning to the fact that certain values and norms must be developed in order to consider civic structures and practices as such. Cultural sensitiveness must not excuse the absences of common values and norms which for example is often the case in the Human Rights debate. Therefore we need a value- and norm-discussion to find consent on minimum standards for structures and practices of civil society. We suggest following indicators to define civic practices:

- civic activities shall be voluntary,
- they should be not for individual profit,
- they should contribute to the benefit of society, and
- they must be transparent and accessible for the public.

These four criteria are necessary yet not sufficient and demand further differentiation.

This realization – the need for the fulfilment of minimum standards for civil society activities – implies that civic structures and practices cannot just be put in the place (like an institution or organization) but they have to be learned, exercised and shaped, which depends on the right legal, political, and social framework. Hence there must be specific political structures and opportunities that allow people to engage in civic processes. These were discussed in Panel D.

Up to now, no alternative concept of civil society has gained as much influence as the one discussed so far. Rather than separating civil society from market and state, the action-oriented concept thrives to understand civil society as a structured way of acting, generating effects, and being effective in every societal field. This implicates above all to widen the horizon of the notion. The horizon has indeed been widened for most participants at the conference, for the variety of the participants' background, professional and national, was mir-

rored in the diversity of the discussions during the two conference days. Yet, this should only be the beginning for a series of discussions to furthermore deepen the understanding for the subject at hand. MISS and its partners already specifically plan further projects on this subject in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma, and Vietnam. This will continue the debate and provide a certain degree of sustainability to the discourse in the respective countries.

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9. Japanisch-Deutsche Geographenkonferenz "Shaping the Future of Metropolitan Regions in Japan and Germany: Governance, Institutions and Place in New Context"

Bochum, 30.8.-1.9.2004, und Berlin, 2.9.-6.9.2004

Der regelmäßige wissenschaftliche Dialog zwischen japanischen und deutschen Geographen im Rahmen der Japanisch-Deutschen Geographenkonferenzen *(Nichi-Doku Chiri Gakkai)* ist längst eine Institution geworden. Im Internationalen Begegnungszentrum der Ruhr-Universität Bochum fand vom 30.8. bis 1.9.2004 die 9. Japanisch-Deutsche Geographenkonferenz statt. Nach 35 Jahren kehrte sie damit zum zweiten Mal an den Ort zurück, an dem 1969 auf Initiative von Peter Schöller und Taiji Yazawa die erste dieser Konferenzen veranstaltet worden war. Organisatoren der diesjährigen Tagung waren Prof. Dr. Uta Hohn (Ruhr-Universitiät Bochum) und Prof. Dr. Winfried Flüchter (Universität Duisburg-Essen). Die rund 40 Teilnehmer aus Deutschland und Japan versammelten sich an drei Veranstaltungstagen zu einem umfassenden Vortrags- und Diskussionsprogramm, das dank einer großzügigen Sachbeihilfe der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) in dem anvisierten Umfang verwirklicht werden konnte. Die Tagung in Bochum gliederte sich, eingerahmt von den Vorträgen der *Keynote Speaker* und einer halbtägigen Exkursion, in acht Themensitzungen mit insgesamt 17 Präsentationen. An die Konferenz schloss sich vom 2. bis 6.9. eine Exkursion in die Metropolregion Berlin an.

Unter dem Leitthema *Shaping the Future of Metropolitan Regions in Japan and Germany: Governance, Institutions and Place in New Context* wurden aktuelle Kernthemen der international vergleichenden Metropolenforschung aufgegriffen, die auf unterschiedlichen Maßstabsebenen behandelt wurden. Die Bezeichnung *New Context* steht dabei für ein Bündel neuer Faktoren und Rahmenbedingungen, die auf die Strategien und das Handeln der Akteure, den Wandel von Institutionen und Machtverhältnissen und letztlich das "Raummachen" in den Metropolregionen Einfluss nehmen. Schlagwortartig seien genannt: Globalisierung und Verschärfung des Wettbewerbs der Metropolregionen, Zunahme der sozialräumlichen Polarisierungen in den Städten, ökonomische Restrukturierungen (De- und Neo-Industrialisierung), Tertiärisierung, Clusterbildungen, technologische Innovationen (I&K, Verkehr, Umwelttechnik usw.). Zugleich entwickeln sich die Reaktionen und Antworten der Akteure auf die neuen Herausforderungen aus einem je spezifischen gesellschaftlichen Kontext heraus, was gerade einen Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Japan wissenschaftlich reizvoll macht. Bei der Auseinandersetzung mit der Gestaltung von Zukünften in den Metropolregionen Japans und Deutschlands wurden von den Referenten Akteure und Akteursnetzwerke, ihre institutionelle Einbettung, ihre Ziele, Strategien und Projekte, ihre politischen, ökonomischen, sozialen und wissensbasierten Kapazitäten sowie ihre konkreten Raumwirksamkeiten in den Blick genommen. Raumnutzungskonflikte wurden thematisiert und unterschiedliche Varianten von *Governance* beleuchtet.