

#Concepts

Building resilience through translocality

Climate change, migration and social resilience
of rural communities in Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Climate change and migration are drawing increasing interest from researchers and policy makers, as well as from the general public. Much attention has been given to climate change as a push factor contributing to migration, and to the potential conflicts and humanitarian crises that may result. The TransRe Project offers a fresh perspective on the climate change-migration nexus. It starts from the assumption that, regardless of the accuracy of the projections of future environmental changes, migration is already occurring and will continue to be a major dynamic of global change. Migration is connecting people, transforming places, and facilitating flows of knowledge and resources, and thus creating networked and interconnected translocal spaces. Through this intensifying translocal connectedness, the ability of households and communities to respond to climatic risks and sustain their livelihoods and well-being – that is, their social resilience – has the potential to be strengthened. The project focuses on resource-dependent households and rural communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate-related risks. It seeks to decipher the relations between migration, translocality and social resilience to climate change. It follows a place-based and multi-sited fieldwork approach and seeks to generate empirical evidence based on case studies carried out in Thailand and in the places of destination of migrants.

KEYWORDS: Translocality; Climate Change; Migration; Resilience; Livelihoods; Thailand

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1. Researching translocal social resilience – the starting point

There is growing concern about the impact of global climate change on patterns of human mobility and the challenges that may result, such as conflicts and humanitarian crises (Affifi & Jäger 2011; Brown 2011; Piguet et al. 2011). The UNFCCC¹ has recognized these issues as constituting a field requiring urgent action, and have called for researchers and policy-makers to engage in advancing understanding of the relations involved and in the elaboration of necessary policies. At the same time, international organizations (e.g. IOM, UNHCR), national governments (e.g. UK) and a growing research community (e.g. Foresight 2011; Each-For Project 2009) have intensified their engagement in the issue. There is a growing consensus that the relationship between climate change and migration is more complex and multifaceted than that suggested by simple cause-effect models and rather alarmist projections (Black et al. 2011; Hugo 2011; Warner 2011). Yet, most attention has been placed on the question of how climate change acts as a driver of out-migration. Policy recommendations tend to focus on adaptation measures that prevent or reduce migration, since migration is usually considered as a problem or a threat (WBGU 2007; Hartmann 2010). However, the evidence provided by migration research suggests that preventive policy measures fail to respond to the complexity of causes and effects of migration and its potential for building social resilience in the face of climate change impacts (Deshingkar 2012; Scheffran et al. 2012; Barnett & Webber 2009; Tacoli 2009; Adger et al. 2002).

The project Building resilience through translocality. Climate change, migration and social resilience of rural communities in Thailand (TransRe) seeks to provide a fresh perspective on the climate change-migration nexus. It starts from the assumption that migration, regardless of the projected environmental changes, is already occurring and will continue to be a major dynamic of global change (UNDP 2009). Migration is connecting people and transforming places, facilitating flows of knowledge and resources and thus creating networked and interconnected translocal spaces (Brickell & Datta 2011). The central hypothesis of the TransRe Project is that migration should be seen not only as a way of adapting to climatic risks (McLeman & Smit 2006), but also as a mechanism that potentially strengthens the social resilience of the exposed groups and communities – that is, their ability to respond to climatic and other environmental stresses while sustaining their livelihoods and well-being (Adger et al. 2002). Yet, this interaction is still under-researched, and empirical evidence is sparse and anecdotal.

1 UNFCCC, Work undertaken by the Conference of the Parties at its fifteenth session on the basis of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention, FCCC/CP/2010/2, 11 February 2010, para. 4(f)

The project seeks to generate empirical evidence based on case studies carried out in Thailand. Thailand is particularly vulnerable to droughts and floods and has experienced several extreme climatic events in the recent past (CHRR 2005). In 2010, 54 provinces in Thailand were declared disaster areas by the Interior Ministry due to water shortages brought on by a severe drought (UPI 2010). A year later, Thailand was underwater: more than one million people were affected by severe flooding for several weeks as a result of persistent rainfall (World Bank 2011b). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified several changes in climatic patterns for the region (Parry et al. 2007):

- a) increasing average temperature, especially during the winter months;
- b) increasing frequency of heavy rainfall events;
- c) decreasing number of rainy days and decreasing precipitation;
- d) increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climate events.

There is still a high level of uncertainty regarding future projections of climate change for Thailand (Lebel 2009). Within Thailand the structure of risk exposure varies between regions (Chitradon et al. 2009; Prapertchob et al. 2007; Monkolsawat et al. 2001): sea-level rise and cyclonic storms are likely in the coastal zones of the Southern region; there are regular floods in the central plains of the Chao Praya Basin; high rainfall variability and droughts are characteristic of the North-Eastern region; upland areas of the Northern region are affected by flash flood and landslides after heavy rain events.

Despite rapid economic growth and structural transformation of the economy, 42% of the Thai population still depends on agriculture as a source of livelihoods (World Bank 2011a). This large group is particularly susceptible to climate-related events and trends (Chinvanno et al. 2008). Agricultural production in Thailand is dominated by small-scale family farms that are engaged in cash crop production (Husa & Wohlschlägl 1999; Rigg 1997). These farms' economies have experienced a continuous decline over the past few decades due to a decline in access to natural resources (UNDP 2010; Grandstaff et al. 2008). Climate change is expected to put additional pressure on this population. Within this context, off-farm income sources play an important role in rural livelihoods (Rigg 2006). Migration – internal as well as international – has been a common strategy used by the rural population to cope with and adapt to the seasonality of agricultural production, climate variability, land pressure and economic crises (Sakdapolrak 2005; Chalamwong 1998). The pattern of migration in Thailand is very diverse and has intensified in the course of the past 50 years (Huguet & Chamrathirong 2011; Kelly 2011; Husa & Wohlschlägl 2000). Migration flows include trans-continental permanent emigration (e.g. to Europe, Australia), regional temporal flows within South-East Asia and East Asia (mainly to Singapore and Taiwan), and intra-national rural-rural and rural-urban migration, with Bangkok as a major hub. At the same time, Thailand is a major receiving country for migrants from neighboring countries. This unique interplay

of climatic, environmental and socio-cultural factors, where migration is already a major constituent factor of many rural communities, makes rural Thailand an ideal testing ground for conducting an in-depth empirical analysis of the linkages between migration, climate risk and social resilience.

2. Vulnerability, resilience, migration and translocality – the state of the art

The TransRe Project draws on research into vulnerability and resilience as well as on studies on translocality and the feedback of migration.

2.1 Social vulnerability and social resilience

The concepts of *social vulnerability* and *social resilience* – both of central importance in the debate surrounding global environmental change (IPCC 2012; IPCC 2001) – are powerful analytical tools for understanding vulnerable social groups exposed to adverse conditions, and their ability to respond in times of crisis (Adger 2006; Folke 2006).

Social vulnerability is a negative state suffered by individuals and groups as a result of risk exposure and the lack of capacities to cope and adapt (Adger & Kelly 2001; Chambers 1989). When applied in the analysis of social groups under pressure, social vulnerability has emphasized the agency of vulnerable actors (Bohle 2009) and has been operationalized through the livelihoods approach (Krüger 2003; DFID 1998; Chambers & Conway 1992). The ability or inability of vulnerable groups to sustain their livelihoods under conditions of stress depends largely on their asset bases, including financial, physical, natural, human and social capital (van Dijk 2011; Bebbington 1999; Moser 1998). Vulnerable actors are embedded in power-laden social and ecological arenas, in which livelihood security is struggled over, negotiated, won and lost (Sakdapolrak 2010; Bohle 2007; de Haan & Zoomers 2005). The concept of social vulnerability has been applied to the study of environmental change and migration (Tacoli 2011; McLeman & Smit 2006). It offers a way of contextualizing the climate change-migration nexus, and enables a nuanced understanding of the associated interactions (De Haan & Zoomers 2003; Turner et al. 2003): while households are exposed to multiple social and ecological drivers – including climate-related stresses – migration as a multi-local livelihood strategy is one of various ways in which households cope and adapt to them (Black et al. 2011). Migration in this context could be a sign of failure of the local adaptive capacity, a mean of adaptation, or an enhancement strategy that reduces vulnerability and strengthens resilience (Scheffran et al. 2012; Tacoli 2011).

Resilience in its original definition refers to the ability of systems to resist and absorb disturbance and to bounce back after experiencing a shock (Holling 1973). The concept is often used with a positive connotation. Departing from a resilience discourse rooted

in and dominated by ecological systems thinking (Berkes et al. 2003), scholars studying social resilience have adopted an actor- and agency-oriented perspective, focusing on the capacities of social actors endowed with capital to not only absorb, cope with and adjust to adverse conditions, but also to actively search for and create options (Keck & Sakdapolrak forthcoming; Wilson 2012; Obrist et al. 2010; Bohle et al. 2009). The conceptual progress of social resilience shows several commonalities with the analysis of social vulnerability, and yet social resilience analyses can also contribute new perspectives to the understanding of vulnerable groups under stress. Firstly, it recognizes uncertainty, change and surprise as constitutive of normality. The analysis of social resilience is therefore geared to understanding the mechanisms underlying the capacity to adapt to the unexpected, and investigating ways in which this transformative capacity may be enhanced (Folke et al. 2003; Folke et al. 2002). Secondly, the study of social resilience emphasizes the embeddedness of social groups in a coupled socio-ecological system. It seeks to explore how the vulnerability and resilience of social groups influence, and are influenced by, coupled socio-ecological processes. Thirdly, resilience thinking emphasizes temporal dynamics and cross-scale interaction influencing and influenced by social actors embedded in dynamic socio-ecological systems (Pelling & Manuel-Navarrete 2011). Finally, social learning processes and social memory facilitated through networks and institutions are recognized as central aspects of adaptation, reorganization, renewal and transformation (Wilson 2012; Pelling & High 2005). A social resilience perspective on the climate change-migration nexus focuses on social-ecological transformation induced by migration and translocality, and explores the ways in which these processes influence social learning and the capacity to adapt to future uncertainties.

2.2 Migration and translocality and their impact on the place of origin

The potential positive feedback effects of migration in the context of climate change adaptation and social resilience have come to be recognized by a growing number of scholars (e.g. Deshingkar 2012; Scheffran et al. 2012; Tacoli 2009; Adger et al. 2002). These studies draw on research into the effects of migration dynamics on development pathways and environmental change in the place of origin of migrants – a subject which has been a central concern in migration studies for a long time (Adamo & Izazola 2010; de Haas 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that the relationship is complex, multi-faceted and context-specific, and influenced by multiple factors on different scales (Massey et al. 1999). Research in this area has highlighted the selectivity of migration; causes and motivations; temporal and spatial patterns of migration; the flow of social and financial remittances, and return-migration as important processes through which the feedback loops of out-migration are mediated (Locke et al. 2000; Papademetriou & Martin 1991). In this complex interaction, simple causal relationships cannot be identified. Assessments of evidence for the effects of out-migration on socio-economic development, for example, can be placed on a continuum ranging from

pessimistic to optimistic (for an overview, see Mendola 2012; De Haan 1999; Massey et al. 1999). On the one hand, more pessimistic interpretations conclude that out-migration and remittance flows lead to the development of dependencies, hinder local economic progress, increase social inequality, and facilitate excessive consumption that cannot be maintained by local livelihoods; on the other hand, more optimistic outlooks emphasize the beneficial development potential of such impulses for establishing local enterprises, loosening the risk and liquidity constraints of households to productively invest, and, via multiplier effects, for generating benefits for those who cannot participate in migration processes. The evidence for the effects of migration on agricultural change and natural resource management shows a similarly diverse picture (Davis & Lopez-Carr 2010; Taylor et al. 2006; Jokisch 2002; Tiffen et al. 1994). Despite varying assessments of the outcomes of feedback processes, the studies show that the interconnectedness established by out-migration is a profound transformative force and consequently alters – positively or negatively – social resilience to climatic risks.

More recent research has emphasized the continuing and enduring links between migrants and their areas of origin (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). In the course of widespread migration and multiplying forms of mobility (UNDP 2009; Sheller & Urry 2006), the connectedness of people and places to others in different and often distant localities intensifies (Zoomers & Westen 2011). Migration is not the only means through which these networks and connectivities are established, but it is an important one, which facilitates the flow of resources, information, ideas, and identities (Levitt 2001; Pries 1999; Portes 1996). The concept of translocality systematically seeks to capture these processes and dynamics (Hedberg & Miguel Do Carmo 2012; Brickell & Datta 2011; Zoomers & Westen 2011; Greiner 2010; Steinbrink 2009; Oakes & Schein 2006). It builds on research into migration networks and remittances, and uses insights from transnationalism studies, but seeks to integrate these into a more holistic, actor-oriented and multi-dimensional understanding of grounded socio-spatial interdependencies (Brickell & Datta 2011). Translocality emphasizes the importance of a simultaneous analytical focus on motilities and localities, which entails focusing on multiple forms of mobility and connectedness without neglecting the importance of the places where people live (Oakes & Schein 2006). Zoomers & van Westen (2011; Zoomers et al. 2011) elaborate on the notion of “translocal development”, which takes this connectedness and embeddedness into account. The authors highlight the emergence of development corridors as intensified and institutionalized forms of spatial connectedness which can shape opportunities, but can also constrain local development. An example is the engagement of diaspora communities in community development at the place of origin (Page & Mercer 2012). The role of networks and social capital is also increasingly discussed in the context of social-ecological resilience (Rodima-Taylor, Olwig, & Chhetri, 2012; Bodin, Crona, & Ernstson, 2006; Newman & Dale, 2005; Pelling & High, 2005; Tompkins & Adger, 2004). While a translocal approach emphasizes local-local interactions (be they rural-rural,

rural-urban or transnational), these interactions are embedded in a multiplicity of structures beyond the immediate trans-local scale, such as national policies, global economies, or patterns of climate change. When attention is directed to understanding translocal dynamics, manifold questions relating to the migration-social resilience nexus emerge: how do the ideas, knowledge and ideologies that migrants acquire flow back into their sending areas? What kind of social learning processes do they initiate, and with what effects on social resilience? What are the material, political and discursive effects of these informational flows in terms of agricultural practices and sustainable resource use and social resilience-building? In what ways does the utilization of translocal networks broaden, hinder or nurture access to resources? How do such changes affect stratification and power relations, and what effect do these changes have on the social resilience of the community?

3. Goals and research questions

The overall objective of TransRe is to understand the transformation induced by feedback processes of migration and translocality, and its effects – be they positive or negative – on social resilience to climate risks in the place of origin of migrants. The project combines the vulnerability and resilience approaches with insights from studies on migration and translocalism. It seeks to develop a concept of “translocal social resilience”.

On a theoretical level, Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (Bourdieu 1998) has informed recent research on migration (Thieme 2008) and translocality (Brickell & Datta 2011), as well as on vulnerability (Sakdapolrak 2010; 2007, 2014) and resilience (Wilson 2012; Obrist et al. 2010). Building on these common theoretical developments, the project interprets “translocal social resilience” in terms of social practice. Conceptualizing translocal social resilience in this way emphasizes the everyday practices of social actors who are embedded in social fields, which are structured by the endowment of social actors

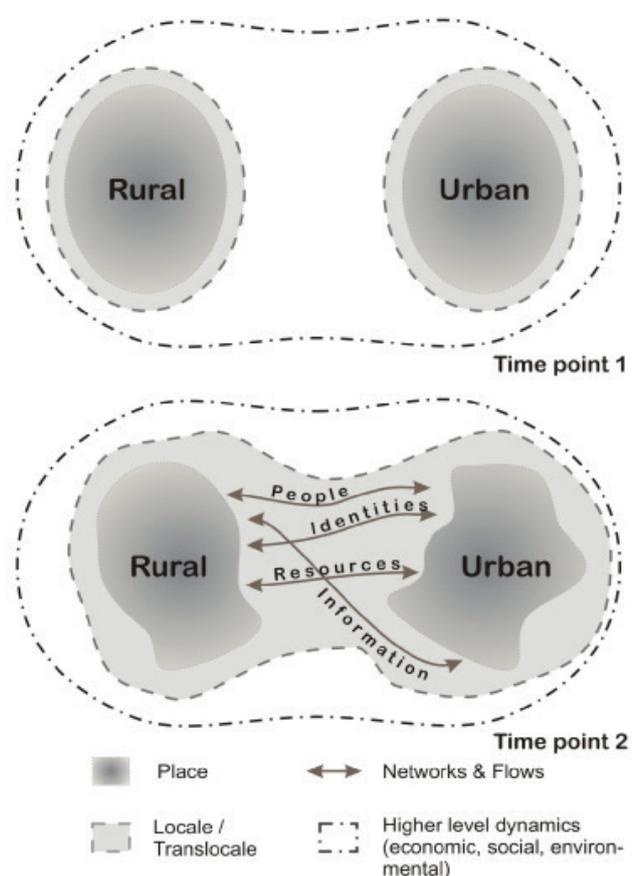


Fig. 1: A sketch of translocal dynamics. Time point 1 shows unconnected places and locales, and time point 2 shows them merged by migration-induced dynamics (Source: Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2012: 16)

with different forms of unequally distributed capital. Translocal social resilience puts specific emphasis on place, networks and locales (see Fig. 1; Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013): a dynamic and multi-dimensional notion of place is strongly emphasized. Place is considered as a node where “local-to-local negotiations” of social resilience are grounded, where particular global flows converge and influence the social resilience of local embedded actors (Brickell and Datta 2011: 10). Migrant networks are considered to be an outcome of, as well as a precondition for, translocal social practices, and crucial for exchange and communication. Both migrants and non-migrants are embedded in these networks (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), which allow the circulation of resources, information and commodities, as well as the social remittance of ideas, practices and identities, which transform social resilience at the place of origin of migrants (Levitt 2001). Migration stretches the locales, the settings for social interaction, beyond places. These extended locales eventually become translocales through the establishment of routine activities. These translocales provide the context and setting for action that is extended and increasingly influenced by remote interaction. Translocal social resilience is understood as the interplay between the structural properties of households and communities embedded in translocal networks, and human agency – the latter referring to the choices, freedoms and capabilities of social actors to establish and maintain translocal connectedness and to cope with and adapt to climate change. These social practices occur in interaction with other actors and are structurally embedded in power-laden physical and social environments.

The central hypothesis that will be tested in the research process is that migration and translocality have a significant ability to strengthen the social resilience of groups and communities to climate change impacts and other environmental stresses. The research questions addressed within the conceptual framework focus on issues of vulnerability and resilience to climatic risks; migration as a livelihoods strategy; migration networks and translocality; and social-ecological transformation:

- *Question 1:* To what climate-related risks are smallholders exposed? What is the importance of these risks compared to other risks, such as crop price fluctuations? How do they perceive these risks?
- *Question 2:* What groups are particularly vulnerable to climatic risks? Which groups are more resilient, and why? What kinds of coping and adaptation strategies do they apply? What resources do they draw on? What resources are important for successful adaptation, and why?
- *Question 3:* What role does migration play in the livelihoods system of smallholders? For what purposes do different groups migrate? What different spatial and temporal patterns of migration can be identified?

- *Question 4:* What patterns and pathways of migration-induced translocality can be identified? What structure do these network relations have? How are they established? How are they maintained? What resources, ideas, information and identities are exchanged through translocal networks?
- *Question 5:* How does migration-induced translocality initiate social and ecological transformation in the places of origin? What are the factors that determine processes of change and different pathways of change? Which transformative processes have a positive effect on social resilience to climate change, and why? Which are negative?
- *Question 6:* How do different existing policies on the international and national levels influence translocal social resilience? How can a refined understanding of migration and translocality in the context of social resilience to climate change be mainstreamed into policy on climate change adaptation?

The project also explicitly addresses a research gap in the climate change-migration nexus with the aim of providing relevant empirical evidence in order to guide policy-makers and shape practical solutions for building social resilience in the context of climate change. The questions that will be specifically addressed to this end are:

- *Question 7:* How can the social resilience to climatic risks of rural communities be strengthened through translocality? How can translocal resources be activated in the search for innovative and sustainable solutions to deal with future uncertainties? How can migrants scattered in distant localities be involved in resilience-building in a participatory manner?
- *Question 8:* What is needed to enable policy-makers and practitioners to systematically integrate migration and translocality into climate change adaptation plans and strategies?

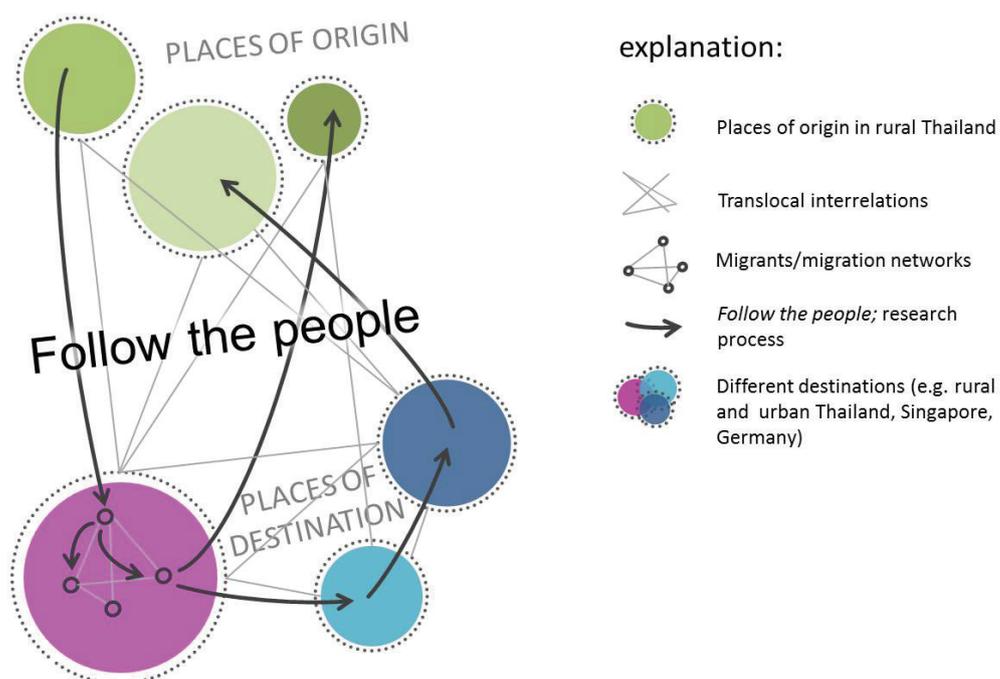


Fig. 2: Multi-sited Ethnography (Draft: S. A. Peth and P. Sakdapolrak)

4. Implementation plan

The main activity of the project will be intensive empirical fieldwork in Thailand. The research activities will start in villages and sub-districts in rural areas in Thailand. The site selection for fieldwork will be guided by the hypothesis that differences in livelihood systems (rain-fed agriculture, irrigated agriculture, etc.), risk exposure (flood, drought, etc.), and embeddedness in migration networks (national, international) will influence translocal social resilience. The project will apply a multi-sited approach and follow the migrants from the selected study areas to their places of destination both within Thailand and in other countries (Singapore and Germany). The selection process will seek to establish contrastive types of locations through which a broad range of interactions and pathways can be identified. In general, the site selection approach will be guided by the aim of facilitating up-scaling and enabling data to be applied at a higher level of abstraction.

The research program will employ various approaches from the fields of Development Geography, Geographic Migration Studies, Political Geography and Anthropology. It includes four core scientific sub-projects:

1) *Vulnerability and resilience to climatic risks*: One researcher will carry out detailed vulnerability and resilience analyses in selected villages within the sub-districts. Participatory rural appraisals (Kumar 2002) in combination with small-scale standardized quantitative in-depth surveys and qualitative social science research methods will be applied (Rademacher-Schulz et al. 2012). The aim of this subproject is to gain a detailed understanding of factors influencing vulnerability and resilience on both the household and community level. The subproject will also facilitate an understanding of the role of migration within the livelihood system.

2) *Migration networks and social resilience*: One researcher will study household migration networks. Based on theoretical insights from studies on social networks (Portes 1998; Granovetter 1985, 1973), a combined qualitative and quantitative social network analysis will be carried out (Scheibelhofer 2011; Hollstein & Straus 2006). A particular focus will be placed on properties of the networks on the one hand, and on the nature of flows through the networks on the other. The aim is to understand the influence of network properties and flows on the ability of households to respond to climatic risks and to innovate and search for new livelihood pathways.

3) *Social practices of translocality*: This sub-project focuses on the everyday dynamics of translocality and the translocal social practices of migrants who are rooted in multiple localities. This subproject will carry out a multi-sited ethnography (Coleman & Von Hellermann 2011; Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995) (see Fig. 2). Two researchers will “follow the people” (Marcus 1995) from the selected research sites to their place of destination, with

the aim of understanding translocal practices and their effects on the places of origin. Each researcher will investigate internal migration and international migration flows (Singapore and Germany) respectively.

4) *Governing translocal social resilience*: One researcher will focus on the governance of climate-change adaptation and migration. The researcher will carry out a detailed multi-level policy and stakeholder analysis (Eckerberg & Joas 2004). This sub-project will not only create an understanding of the policy environment and its impact on social resilience, but will also help to guide policy dialogue and suggest how migration and translocality can be mainstreamed into climate-change adaptation policies. The subproject will significantly contribute to the development of the translocal resilience toolkit for practitioners.

Through the fieldwork activities, nuanced context-specific empirical evidence will be gathered, which will enhance our understanding of the relationship between migration, translocality, and social resilience to climatic risks in resource-dependent rural households and communities in Thailand. These insights will be synthesized in a conceptual framework relating to translocal social resilience in order to systematically describe the factors and interactions involved in the process.

In addition and in close cooperation with project partners from NGOs, TransRe will carry out two “from knowledge to action” sub-projects:

5) *Supporting community resilience through translocality*: Informed by findings from other subprojects, this subproject will engage in participatory action research with the aim of identifying and initiating pathways of translocal resilience-building on the community level. In close collaboration with local partners and affected communities, the subproject will design and guide the implementation of pilot projects. This pilot projects, which are informed by an integrative understanding of translocal social resilience gained in the scientific projects, will be implemented within a comparatively tight structural and institutional framework, the project also seeks to create free space for innovative ideas from below. This translocal resilience “from below” will be fostered through a Translocal Grassroots Innovation Initiative. The aim is to enable local ideas to be implemented effectively. In collaboration with local grassroots NGOs in Thailand, an innovation contest will be held. The members of the winning initiative will have the opportunity to implement their ideas – a process which will be facilitated by the TransRe research team.

6) *Translocal resilience toolkit for adaptation policy-makers and practitioners*: Based on the research evidence generated throughout the project, and practical experience gathered from pilot projects on translocal community resilience-building, this subproject will develop a toolkit for supporting translocal social resilience-building for the local governments and NGOs working on community-based adaptation. The toolkit will be developed in close

collaboration with the IOM, partner NGOs and local governments in Thailand, in order to guide government officials, decision-makers and practitioners in devising actions to support social resilience-building in the context of migration and climate change. The toolkit will consist of policy guidelines and practical support measures for effectively integrating migration-based social resilience support with community development and climate-change adaptation plans and policies. The toolkit will be developed with a practitioner audience in mind, and use best practice examples and case studies derived from the field research as illustrations.

5. Anticipated results and practical relevance

The anticipated results and practical relevance of the project will be related to four areas:

Engaging in academic debate: the overall objective of the project is to enhance our understanding of the relationship between migration, translocality and social resilience to climatic risks. An anticipated scientific result of the project is the establishment of a comprehensive framework for describing the interaction of relevant factors. Using detailed empirical evidence from Thailand, the project will contribute to the climate change-migration debate and highlight the potential of translocal connectedness as a force of social resilience-building. In so doing, the project will boost the visibility of alternative ways to frame the relationship, and so counterbalance a discussion which has hitherto focused predominantly on push factors contributing to migration and the resulting potential conflicts and humanitarian crises.

Informing climate adaptation policy: the results of the project will inform both international and national climate adaptation policies. Policy-makers on different levels are currently seeking guidance about how to address the climate change-migration nexus. The UNFCCC, as mentioned in section 1, has recognized the importance of the issue. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have recognized the potential of migration for development and have launched related projects (BMZ 2011), but so far these have not been linked to climate change adaptation. In Thailand, migration has been featured negatively in the National Social and Economic Development Plans (Rigg 2011) and has not been recognized as a potential source of social resilience-building. A synthesized policy- and practice-relevant conceptual framework will help to enhance our understanding of the mechanisms that determine how and under what circumstances migration may enhance social resilience and guide future policy-making in the field. Through the network of UNU-EHS, local NGOs, and contact with high-level administrative officers in Thailand, the project can reach out to relevant policy-makers. While the project cannot secure practice and policy changes, it aims to increase the prominence of the resilience-building potential of migration and translocality on national and international policy agendas.

Influencing public discourse: Public discourse on the climate change-migration nexus is dominated by negative scenarios. The project will reach out to the media and the general public in order to create awareness of possible alternative ways to frame the relationship between climate change and migration.

Supporting social resilience: through the pilot project on translocal community resilience (subproject 5), the development of a toolkit (subproject 6) and summer schools at the partner universities in Thailand, the project will concretely support work in the field of social resilience-building on the community level, among practitioners and policy makers, and in the academic sphere.

6. Conclusion

The project Building resilience through translocality. Climate change, migration, and social resilience in rural Thailand offers a fresh perspective to the understanding of the migration-environment nexus. It seeks to move beyond simplistic and geo-deterministic understanding of the relations that is still prevalent particularly in the public arena. It provides an alternative narrative that focuses on the agency of migrants and their potentiality for social resilience building. Through intensive empirical research in Thailand and a translocal approach the TransRe Project seeks to decipher the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the relationship between environment and migration by adopting multiple perspectives on the issue, including livelihoods vulnerability, social networks, translocal practices and governance. With its research the TransRe Project does not aim at the enhancement of scientific knowledge alone, but seeks to close the gap between science and practice which will be ensured by the close collaboration with partner from the practice field.

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#Concepts

Building resilience through translocality

Climate change, migration and social resilience of rural communities in Thailand

by Dr. Patrick Sakdapolrak



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About the TransReProject

Our research group “Environment. Migration. Resilience” offers a fresh perspective on the environment-migration nexus. It starts from the assumption that, regardless of the accuracy of the projections of future environmental changes, migration is already occurring and will continue to be a major dynamic of global change. We seek to interrogate how migration-induced translocal relations alter the environment and the capacity to deal with environmental changes in the places of origin of migrants. Please find more information on:

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