

The Heart of Borneo: a challenge for social scientists

Nature conservation projects must contend with (illegal) logging, poaching, encroaching farmers, the trans-border trade of wildlife and timber and local communities that question the protected status of areas. Anthropologists' professional code of ethics states that the studied group must never suffer from the research when there are conflicts of interest – the people must come first. Does this imply that anthropologists cannot contribute to nature conservation because their science serves a social purpose?

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From the conservation point of view the protection of a large area has advantages. Such areas harbour a multitude of ecosystems containing a high degree of biodiversity. This variety makes it possible to acquire a high political profile, offering an attractive option for potential donors including those from the private sector. The recently launched WWF campaign for the Heart of Borneo is one of the major conservation initiatives to protect large areas with high biodiversity. The proposed area covers about 220,000 square kilometres in Indonesia, the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, and a small part of Brunei. Other large-scale examples are the Guyana Shield in the northern part of South America, the massive rainforest area in the Congo Basin in Central Africa and the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion between Indonesia, the Philippines and Sabah. All of them occupy large transnational areas and try to connect a number of smaller protected areas.

The success of such conservation areas depends largely on the heads of states of the involved countries to engage in such large multinational protected areas, but

equally important is the willingness of lower level governments to live up to the aspirations. Former encounters of local communities with external organisations aiming to conserve biodiversity are also relevant. These encounters often lead to frustrations about unfulfilled promises, inadequate compensation for income losses and diminishing interest of conservation organizations after a limited number of years.

Social scientists studying nature conservation emphasize the human element. Anthropologists focus on the social and cultural complexity of an area. They describe, from a political ecological point of view, stakeholders' interests in a particular natural resource or a particular part of a forest or sea, and shed light on the tensions (ethnic, social, political, economic) that arise from the power play over control of natural resources. In most cases, the anthropologist's main informants are local people. It is their land that conservationists are in business to protect. Granting that there are challenges to the rhetoric of the indigenous peoples' movement (see Kuper 2003), the conclusions of many social science studies on conservation practices are clear: conservation organizations have been

'increasingly excluding, from full involvement in their programmes, the indigenous and traditional peoples living in the territories the conservationists were trying to protect' (Chapin 2004:17). Organizations such as World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International (CI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), build their projects on the basis of cooperation with local communities. However, in the last decade or so it became clear, that the so-called 'ecological noble savage' does not exist. These local communities often turn out not to be sustainable users of the environment, sometimes due to circumstances beyond their control.

According to the anthropologists' professional ethical code, the group under research is not to suffer by the research, especially not through information passed on to third parties, and when there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Because of this, anthropologists encountering local practices that are harmful to the environment can find themselves in a dilemma when the local community is told by outsiders (government representatives, conservationists) to change its ways. However, this does not imply that it is impossible for anthropologists to play a

role in research supporting nature conservation projects, as became clear during the Heart of Borneo conference last April. Many anthropologists and other social scientists have been involved in research among people living in the Heart of Borneo. The high turnout of social scientists and the dedication shown in their work gives hope for the future. Contributions could be made by bridging the gap between the local population (their way of life, their perceptions towards nature, their projected futures) and the world of conservationists (their aims, their perceptions and their time perspectives). And, as one presenter put it, environmental conservation should not just be about the environment. It should be about what alternative sources of income, law enforcement, compensation payments, and campaigns will bring to these communities, not just at the height of the campaign, but over a more extended

period of time. For this, the knowledge and experience of the social sciences is indispensable. <

References

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The Heart of Borneo Conference

At the end of 2004 WWF launched its campaign for the Heart of Borneo to protect one of the largest intact rainforest areas in the world with extremely rich biodiversity. Two conferences were held in early 2005, the first in Brunei, which had largely political and diplomatic goals, and the second in Leiden and The Hague with more scientific aims. The latter was organized by WWF, the Institute of Environmental Sciences (CML, Leiden University), and IIAS. A selection of conference papers will be published by Tropenbos International.

Book announcement

Towards social stability and democratic governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security

In the current world system Central Eurasia may seem peripheral with its poor socio-economic indicators, particularistic tendencies in politics and intensified ethnic conflicts. However, its geo-strategic location and natural resources – among them the large hydrocarbon reserves of the Caspian Sea – may return its historical centrality to the region. This new 'centrality' of Central Eurasia brings new threats. Repressive political regimes and marginalisation of whole groups of population inflame conflicts that spill across national borders. Migration to Europe, both legal and illegal, is the direct outcome of social-economic destabilization in the region.

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The end of the Cold War and current globalization have opened the doors to the region for various international actors: the USA, international monetary organizations, strategic alliances, TNCs, NGOs, regional blocks, as well as criminal groups and ethno-religious movements. The illicit production and trade of drugs add to the complexity of security problems in the region. As a direct neighbour to the turbulent Middle East, it is a potential playground for extremist movements - marginalized sections of the population serve for recruitment by radical Islamic groups and terrorist organizations.

To resist the rapid penetration of these groups and to prevent the newly established states from falling apart along ethnic lines, the current governments have launched nation-building policies. Nation-building in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus has a complex and controversial history that goes back to the late period of the Russian Empire

and the Soviet creation of nations. Together with the historical legacy, old ethnic conflicts resurfaced and have shaped concepts of the nation-centric state. The nationalistic nature of these concepts creates a serious obstacle to regional integration processes and security. Border conflicts and competition for water and other resources along ethnic lines have become an unfortunate reality. Territorial disputes, especially in the Southern Caucasus, leave much doubt that the wealth accumulated by the realization of the international oil contracts will be used for peaceful solutions to these conflicts.

The book, consisting of a number of reviewed and edited papers resulting from the workshop, provides an analysis of existing knowledge and discussions in the field of security studies on Central Eurasia for professional scholars, students and all intellectuals outside academia, who are interested in the rapidly changing geopolitical arrangements, economic and socio-political realities in Central Eurasia.

It consists of four parts respectively, covering general discussions on the historical development of Central Eurasia in the *longue durée* perspective and its socio-cultural legacies; Soviet and contemporary state and communal structures, administration, nation-building processes and unofficial clan politics in Central Asia; the current economic conditions as a precursor to social stability and development; and the correlation between economics and domestic and international politics in the region and prospects for future regional development, including democratization. The book features historical political-administrative maps of Central Asia and the Caucasus and a bibliography on the topics discussed.

Social stability as an integral component of human security is *a priori* viewed by the contributors of *Towards social stability and democratic governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security* as an indisputable value, while discussions on democracy and democratic governance do not produce any commonly accepted conclusion. The views and approaches of the authors can

be diametrically opposed. The Kyrgyz so-called 'tulip revolution' in March 2005 and the unrests in Uzbekistan (Andijan) two months later proved to be some kind of 'checking point' for the views and prospects set up by the authors. <

- Morozova, I., ed. 2005. *Towards Social Stability and Democratic Governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security*. NATO Science Series, IOS Press, Amsterdam.

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The announced publication is the result of the NATO Advanced Research Workshop (ARW) *Towards social stability and democratic governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security* which took place in Leiden, 8-11 September 2004.

Scholars of many backgrounds from different theoretical and interdisciplinary perspectives addressed the historical and social legacy of Central Eurasian societies and current risks such as socio-economic collapse, under- and unemployment and marginalisation, and the ability of regional governments and elites to deal with these threats.

The workshop was organized by co-directors Wim Stokhof and Irina Morozova (IIAS) and funded by the NATO Science Programme, NWO, Leiden University, CNWS, KNAW and IIAS. For further info www.iias.nl/iias/show/id=40997