

Crossways of Knowledge

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The theme of ICAS 13 was “Crossways of Knowledge,” an epistemological phrase inspired by Surabaya’s pluralities and the transdisciplinary nature of contemporary Asian Studies. The concept of “crossways” not only encapsulates the broad scope of ICAS 13 but also reflects my personal feelings about it.

My roles at ICAS 13 were primarily technical and administrative. In this capacity, I worked closely with the ICAS team from IIAS. This transnational collaboration, often conducted through virtual means, revealed certain communication challenges. The 5- to 6-hour time difference between the Leiden and Surabaya teams resulted in varying energy levels during our meetings. One team’s dawn was another team’s dusk. It was challenging to synchronize our energy, but we strived to meet with the same level of vigor. In the many meetings we held every Thursday,

we prepared for every minute technical detail necessary to bring ICAS 13 concepts to life and pondered any bureaucratic challenges facing us.

Surely, we also exchanged personal stories and jokes – though these often ended with awkward grimaces, perhaps due to cultural differences or simply because they weren’t funny (I’ll never know...). These cultural differences grew larger as we and all ICAS 13 participants came to Surabaya. ICAS 13 became a site where many cultural antitheses and coalescences – however small they were – took place. Poetically, this pluralism was set against the backdrop of one of the most multicultural cities in Indonesia.

The multitude of tasks in our hands mirrored Surabaya’s bustling atmosphere, giving a prolepsis that we were already experiencing the city before we all even gathered there. Despite acknowledging its imperfections, it was nothing short of a miracle that ICAS 13 came to life in true ConFest style, spread across multiple sites in Surabaya and involving multiple societal and governmental layers. ICAS unearthed many hidden potentials in Surabaya, creating new paths – and crossways – for future activities, future histories, and emotional connections to emerge. It’s an exciting future for Surabaya, and hopefully for the collegiality of the ICAS team beyond the context of this event.



Fig. 4 (above): Roundtable participants at ICAS 13, 2024.

Building a Conference-Festival (ConFest) Model

Wai Cheung

Spring 2023 marked the start of ICAS 13 for me, when we found our solid partner, Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC), to jump into this ICAS adventure with us. The shaping of ICAS 13 happened in the months that followed, in which we together decided to host a full in-person, locally-relevant conference that would not be bound by disciplines and regions. For the first time, ICAS proposals were not categorized by academic discipline but rather into broad overarching themes that were designed to create opportunities for transdisciplinary conversations. Alongside the more academic part, we envisioned a festival to complement the conference at which knowledge could be shared outside the conventional academic setting. With these ideas in mind, we continued to prepare for a Conference-Festival (ConFest) that would grow beyond academic

boundaries by reaching out to other communities in society and celebrating the diverse types of knowledge creation.

After a lot of planning and discussion about how the festival part of the ConFest should take shape, we decided to expand our proposal format types, adding the proposal formats ‘Activity/Workshop’ and ‘Exhibition’ to be an essential part of the festival. For these new aspects, I was more involved in preparing for the activities and workshops. Though I did not have the chance to visit any of the workshops, unfortunately, the positive feedback I got from both contributors and participants was such an encouragement. Learning how scholars, artists, and practitioners from abroad collaborated with a local counterpart to share and create knowledge together was the best result I could wish for.

On a personal level, I was glad that we could meet our participants in person again. I almost forgot how extremely rewarding it is to see the wonderful smiling faces of our participants enjoying the content that we worked hard to put together for them. Finally, I am incredibly grateful for all the amazing teams I have worked with that made ICAS 13 possible. It is not every day that I meet colleagues, both at AIIOC and IIAS, so committed and hardworking. From working jointly on screen for months to preparing the last details together at each other’s side, we shared many joyful and funny moments. This is an ICAS that I will remember for the partnerships and friendships that have flourished from it.



Fig. 5 (above): Setting up signposts at ICAS 13, 2024.



Fig. 6 (left): Visitors at the IIAS booth at ICAS 13, 2024.