

*The Sociality of Infrastructure-Mediated Development:  
Dynamics of In/Exclusion in Southeast Asia*

**conveners**

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**Abstract**

This panel aims to develop a comparative perspective on dynamics of inclusion and marginalisation associated with infrastructure-mediated development in Southeast Asia. Historically, a diverse range of development models have been in operation across the region, and the legacy of these models continues to be felt in complex ways in the present. More recently, both the regional body, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and member states have committed themselves to common global development goals, including the adoption of sustainable and inclusive development strategies. However, according to a 2018 UNESCAP report, progress towards meeting these development challenges has been profoundly uneven. Despite having made significant progress in “industry, innovation and infrastructure” development, the report noted that Southeast Asia is the only subregion within Asia Pacific with widening inequalities, and, alarmingly, shows less progress in the development of “peace, justice, and strong institutions”.

Our panel take this divergence from commonly-held policy objectives as our point of departure. Our individual papers detail research focused on the sociality of infrastructure-mediated development, which foregrounds the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion in each case. Our case studies engage diverse national and regional policy visions for inclusive development: urban planning in Thailand, ethnic language accessibility in Vietnam, global market integration and financialisation in Lao PDR, and Korean ODA’s projects on rural development in Myanmar.

Our research engages with diverse infrastructures conceptualised as material forms through which objects, ideas, finance and people circulate. Infrastructures are bound up with discourses of development and rhetorics of progress and are shaped by and in turn influence networks of power at local, national and global scales. Our research examines the infrastructures of smart urbanisation (Thailand), communication (Vietnam), agriculture and finance (Lao PDR) and development aid (Myanmar). Across our case studies we aim to illustrate how the contingent processes of infrastructural development projects, and the differentially distributed opportunities for participation they imply create opportunities for social actors to challenge and subvert dominant development discourses. Finally, we propose how these social assemblages of smart urbanisation (Thailand), digitised ethnic scripts (Vietnam), boom crop plantation and digital payment (Lao PDR) and ethically oriented development projects (Myanmar) offer an empirically grounded reconsideration of the discrepancy between state aspirations for national

and global integration, and collective imagination of socio-economic equality and inclusive society.