

Title: Between Perils and Promises of Mobility: Aspiration, Possibility, and the “Good Life” in Southeast Asia.

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Brief description of the panel: This panel focuses on the complex ways in which aspiration, opportunity, and the notion of ‘the good life’ shape particular forms and experiences of (im)mobility in Southeast Asia. Scholars have increasingly emphasized the need for a better understanding of people’s conceptions of wellbeing and their visions of a good life, neither of the two ought to be confined to just material wealth or social security, as nonmaterial values are equally relevant (Appadurai 2013; Fischer 2014, Hart 2012, Robbins 2012). Fischer’s theorisation of the ‘good life’ emphasizes the importance of aspirations in understanding people’s actions and choices. Nevertheless, aspiration is framed and bounded by ‘the realm of what is seen as possible’. Aspiration, possibility, and imagination of the good life are often located and vary at different scales. These concepts can sometimes be at odds with each other across these scales. The state’s imagination of the good life can shape people’s aspiration and possibility and vice versa. At the same time, individual aspiration and imagination of the good life can clash with those of the state. Through a multi-disciplinary and multi-scalar investigation of (im)mobility from and within Southeast Asia, this panel analyses the way in which aspiration, possibility, and imagination of the good life by different actors, including people, the state, the local government, and transnational actors, inform practices of mobility throughout people’s life course, across cultural and societal boundaries.

Single session–Presenters:

1. Dr. Roy Huijsman, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
2. Prof. Lynne Milgram, OCAD University, Canada
3. Dr. Seb Rumsby, University of Warwick, United Kingdom
4. Ms. Jessica Steinman, Universität Leipzig, Germany.

Discussant: Prof. Minh Nguyen, Universität Bielefeld.