Global Problems Do Not Have Global Solutions: Climate Change in Vietnam

Is climate change the same in one country as it is in another? In *Flexible Science*, a new PhD thesis from the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University, Eren Zink shows that climate change is a social and a natural phenomenon that is different from one place to another. Climate change is not only made of greenhouse gas molecules in the atmosphere. It is also made of social, political and economic relationships. *Flexible Science* shows that global problems do not have global solutions, and global solutions generally have unexpected consequences.

Climate change is often described as a global problem. Meanwhile, solutions are planned that specifically target developing countries. Carbon trading is one such solution that links wealthy and poor countries in the fight against climate change. Many industrialized countries plan for major reductions in their ‘carbon footprint’, but much of these reductions are achieved by transferring money to poor countries so that they can reduce their own production of greenhouse gases. In their everyday lives inhabitants of industrialized countries experience these links when they use electricity, buy airline tickets, or eat hamburgers that are ‘carbon neutral’ or ‘climate friendly’. However, they would not be mistaken to ask if the climate change that concerns them, is the same one that global solutions and international money addresses when they arrive in developing countries?

Eren Zink explores the links between European intentions to address climate change, and what is done in the name of climate change in a developing country, in this case Vietnam. Here, donor agencies have a strong interest to move the taxpayers’ money before the end of the year, and to support businesses from home to secure lucrative contracts. Some Vietnamese bureaucrats and government officials see opportunities to reap large personal rewards by skimming money off infrastructure projects. Other Vietnamese and foreign development workers see opportunities to address more pressing domestic environmental and health issues such as dirty air and polluted water. For some Vietnamese actors, climate change is about challenging the authority of international organizations and the one-party state to chart a course for the future of the country. Thus, while development agencies, government officials, and scientists from both Vietnam and other countries agree that climate change is an important threat, the outcomes of climate change projects can be very different. Misunderstandings amongst partners, sometimes intentional and sometimes by chance, make cooperation possible.

Eren Zink finds that understanding these coexisting aspects of climate change is as important for attempts to find solutions, as are scientific models of changes in the atmosphere.

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