

Building bridges between Germany and Southeast Asia



DAAD/Wolfgang Hübner-
Stauf

Happy guests: intense though it was, there was also time for lighter moments during the study tour organised by the DAAD and SEAMEO RIHED

What approaches exist for collaboration between higher education institutions and research institutes in Germany and Southeast Asia? This and other questions were the focus of the first study tour organised by the DAAD in cooperation with its Southeast Asian partner SEAMEO RIHED. The jointly developed format, which was funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), brought decision-makers from a number of Southeast Asian institutions to selected locations in Germany, enabling them to gain significant insights into the German higher education and research system.

The delegation consisted of 16 high-ranking participants from eight ASEAN states: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Alongside offering insights into the German higher education and research landscape, the visit was designed to provide the guests with opportunities to establish new contacts and initiate cooperation projects. A further major aim was to enhance skills that would enable the attendees to act as multipliers, promoting research and innovation in their home countries and networks and thereby effectively contributing to achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) of the United Nations](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs) [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs]. Key topics of the visit were demographic change, agricultural engineering, and how to combine academic teaching with experience from industry. In addition to the DAAD in Bonn, the delegation visited higher education institutions in Heidelberg, Hohenheim, Munich and Frankfurt/Main.



“It was important to us to provide an overview”: Chantavit Sujatanond, director of SEAMEO RIHED

It was the first visit the DAAD had organised together with its partner [SEAMEO RIHED \(Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development\)](http://rihed.seameo.org/) [http://rihed.seameo.org/]. Both institutions already have a strong track record of collaborating closely on projects such as [SHARE \(European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region\)](http://share-asean.eu/) [http://share-asean.eu/] and the quality assurance initiative [ASEAN QA](http://www.asean-qa.de/) [http://www.asean-qa.de/].

“Facilitator of networking”

“Such visits often generate ideas that lead to successful projects in the long term”, emphasises Michael Hörig, head of the DAAD section Development Cooperation: Partnership Programmes and Higher Education Management. Anette Pieper, director of the Projects department at the DAAD, also underlines the significance of such delegation visits: “We want to act as a facilitator of networking and exchange, and thereby stimulate the creative process. No e-mail and no telephone conversation can replace personal encounters.”



Delegation members: making use of the opportunity for personal exchange

The aim of SEAMEO RIHED is to advance the Southeast Asian higher education sector. “With this visit to Germany we want to support those who previously did not have the means to establish bilateral agreements with German higher

education institutions”, says Dr Chantavit Sujatanond, director of SEAMEO RIHED. In so doing, she adds, the aim was to explore as many offerings from funding organisations as possible, discuss potential cooperation projects and find out what could be learnt from one another.

“It was important to us to not just hop from one institution to another, but to also give the participants an overview of the German higher education and research system so they could better understand circumstances and connections and make even more effective use of the visit”, explains Sujatanond. To this end, the group also attended a seminar at the DAAD at which representatives of the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK), the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the International Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research gave talks on topics such as the excellence initiative and various internationalisation strategies.

Establishing bilateral research groups

“At this seminar I discovered for the first time how many opportunities Germany actually offers of which we were previously unaware”, reports Professor David Asirvatham, head of the School of Computing and IT at Taylor’s University in Malaysia. Attracting German students to doctoral programmes and professors as guest lecturers were among his goals, as was establishing bilateral research groups.

“In order to successfully attract German students and apply for funding to cooperate with German partners we have to understand how the system here works. The seminar was very helpful to us in this respect”, says Professor Montira Nopharatana, vice president for industry and partnerships at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) in Bangkok, Thailand. Professor Charoenchai Khompatraporn, chairman of the Institute for Production Engineering at KMUTT, was especially interested in his German colleagues’ work on the Sustainable Development Goals and in approaches to making research findings utilisable to German society.

Cooperation between higher education institutions and industry was of particular interest to Dr Bounheuang Ninchaleune, vice president of Savannakhet University in Laos. “In Germany, higher education institutions have so much expertise, while for us it is still difficult to acquire third-party funding from industry and initiate cooperation projects”. He believes exchange is the answer – a view that is also based on personal experience: during his Master’s programme he spent time at TU Dresden as a DAAD scholarship holder.

Maria Horschig (18 December 2017)

ADDITIONAL LINK

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