

Reimagining “Development” Models in Asia-Pacific Making the Social and Human Sciences Count

22-23 June 2023, Novotel Sukhumvit 20, Bangkok, Thailand



1. Background

The Asia-Pacific region, and Southeast Asia in particular, have undergone a rapid and unprecedented transformation over the past few decades. This transformation is still unfolding in many aspects and fields. The successful integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) into the market-driven economy as a business-conducive environment has made it one of the world’s fastest-growing regions. This growth has led the World Economic Forum to declare ASEAN as becoming the fourth-largest economy by 2030.

But is this “development” model integral, sustainable, inclusive, and just? Despite the economic growth, social inequality, marginalisation, and exclusion have been on the rise over the decades – a situation that has only worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic and its induced disruptions. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation have led to environmental degradation with disproportionate adverse effects on marginalised groups. The “modernisation” process has raised many complex questions about cultural and ethnic identities, State centrality and the peripheries, social diversity vs national unity, and regional integration vs nationalism. Also, while Southeast Asia's digital boom comes with many benefits and great promises, it also raises several ethical concerns for the population in terms of equality of access, online scams, social surveillance, and gender bias raised by artificial intelligence.

Therefore, the essential questions for the social and human sciences are: *are the “development” models that have been used for the last few decades sustainable and conducive to inclusion, justice, and the protection of the common good in the near future? Have these models led to tangible improvement of the people’s quality of life?*

These questions are of particular importance since the world is set to reimagine the global Development Agenda Post-2023 in the coming years, with a pressing need to foster inter-generational dialogues and responsibilities in this re-imagination.

2. The Role of Social and Human Sciences (SHS)

UNESCO’s Social and Human Sciences Sector (SHS) aims at strengthening and deploying the social and human sciences to build more peaceful and inclusive societies by addressing social transformation and related ethical challenges in a comprehensive approach. To this end, UNESCO works with Governments, academia, and civil society actors at the national, regional, and global levels to address social transformations using the social and human sciences as a unique tool and approach. Such an approach should be integral considering the world is facing multiple complex crises that require new theories, models, and practices to be addressed. Despite the importance of social and human sciences however, the sector has been generally neglected in education policies globally in terms of teaching research, and research-policy linkages.

Drawing upon UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformation (MOST) Programme, the UNESCO Bangkok Office aims to rally and accompany a critical mass of knowledge and a community of practitioners committed to conceiving or re-imagining new models of “development” and practices for the region. These models would anticipate new trends and ensure development is more just, inclusive, sustainable, and respectful of people’s quality of life. To frame this approach, the SHS sector released a Position Paper in March 2023, which serves as a useful piece of reflection, consultation, and strategizing for UNESCO’s future work in the region.

In collaboration with the Jakarta, New Delhi, and Beijing Offices, the UNESCO Bangkok SHS Office is convening a two-day regional workshop that will engage with intellectuals, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners from the region. These key stakeholders will work to reposition the social and human sciences disciplines and approaches in understanding the challenges facing Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia by fostering collective and interdisciplinary attempts to address these challenges. Importantly, this workshop will help build new partnerships moving forward with the purpose of increasing the research-policy linkages.

This workshop is a first step towards building a network of social and human sciences thinkers and practitioners willing to join UNESCO’s reflection on how the sector can address the most pressing social transformation issues facing the region.

3. Main objectives of the workshop and expected outcomes

The workshop **objectives** are to:

1. Discuss the UNESCO Position Paper with social and human sciences intellectuals and practitioners, in order to sharpen UNESCO's interventions in the SHS fields in the region.
2. Envision meaningful UNESCO Flagship Initiatives and partnerships that could make a difference in responding to the social transformations that emerge in Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific.
3. Explore how UNESCO can improve and foster the research-policy nexus in support of Southeast Asian governments, academia and CSOs shaping policies that are more people-centred, inclusive, and sustainable.

The workshop expected **outcomes** include:

1. Finalisation of the Position Paper around common understanding of what is at stake.
2. Creation of a consultative process/network between UNESCO SHS and the lead figures of Social and Human Sciences experts in the region.
3. Agreement on a set of Flagship Initiatives in support of the research-policy nexus in reimagining new "development" models in the region, with expression of interest for joint ventures with partners from the region.

4. Programme

The workshop will be hosted by UNESCO and gather a core group of 20 intellectuals, scholars, and practitioners working across Southeast Asia and covering the full spectrum of Social and Human Science disciplines. The two-day in-person workshop at the UNESCO Bangkok Office will be facilitated by Phinith Chanthalangsy, regional advisor and head of the SHS at UNESCO Bangkok.

The workshop will be structured into three moments:

- The first session (Day 1) will be centred around discussing the UNESCO SHS sector's newly elaborated strategy and priorities in the region.
- The second session (Day 1) will focus on the possible UNESCO Flagship Interventions within the MOST Programme to address the key challenges identified.
- The third and last session (Day 2) will be a public conference open to the local university faculties concerned, the regional UN bodies, policymakers, and development partners. The Conference will explore innovative and solid ways to narrow the gap between research and policy, to reimagine the future, and to foster intergenerational responsibilities and dialogues, in the quest of new models to improve the people's quality of life.

5. Agenda

Day 1 – UNESCO Experts Consultation Meeting

| Time | Topics |
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| 8:30-9am | Registration and welcome coffee |
| 9-9:15am | Welcome Remarks, by Director of UNESCO Bangkok Office |
| 9:15-9:30am | Objectives and Programme of the Workshop, by UNESCO Social and Human Sciences Officer |
| 9:30-10am | Presentation SHS Position Paper – How can UNESCO engage? by Phinith Chanthalangsy, UNESCO Regional Advisor for the Social and Human Sciences |
| 10-10:30am | Discussions |
| 10:30-11am | <i>Coffee break</i> |
| 11-12 noon | Guests' presentations on their sectors' challenges regarding social transformation |
| 12-1pm | UNESCO Flagship Initiatives Presentation, by UNESCO Social and Human Sciences Officer |
| 1-2pm | <i>Lunch break</i> |
| 2-3pm | 4 Breakout Groups: Refining the Flagship Initiatives and Partnerships |
| 3-4:15pm | Restitution of breakout and plenary discussions |
| 4:15-4:30pm | Recap of day one by Phinith Chanthalangsy |
| 6-8pm | Official dinner |

Day 2 – Public Conference

| Time | Topic |
|--------------|---|
| 8:30-9am | Registration and welcome coffee |
| 9-9:45am | Keynote speech |
| 9:45-10:30am | Discussions |
| 10:30-11am | <i>Coffee break</i> |
| 11-12 noon | Research-policy nexus panel discussion |
| 12-12:30pm | Discussion |
| 12.30-1:30pm | <i>Lunch break</i> |

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| 1:30-2:30pm | Reimagining the Futures with Foresight panel discussion |
| 3:30-3pm | Discussion |
| 3-4pm | Transforming Learning with Philosophy with Children presentation |
| 4-4:30pm | Discussion |
| 4:30-4:45pm | Closing remarks |
| 5-6pm | Reception |