



# **International collaborations North and South: some experiences and cross-cultural challenges**

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# Preamble

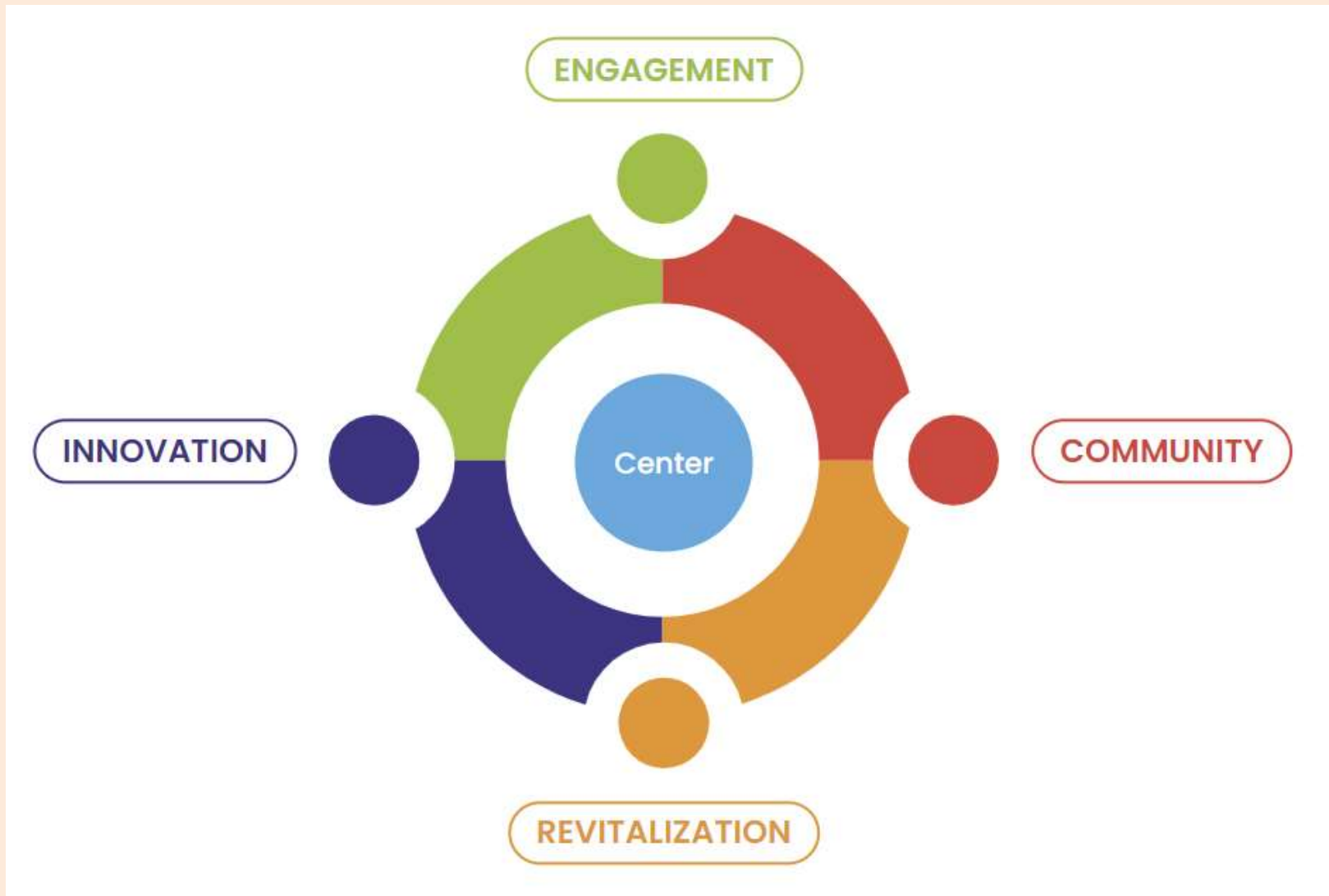
- commentary based on multiple international collaborations involving SOAS and partners in Europe and Asia
- all case studies were transdisciplinary, involving researchers from linguistics, language studies, history, archaeology, education, cultural studies, anthropology
- large component was early career researcher training
- collaborations revealed challenging differences in research cultures, especially within Europe (“East”– “West”) and Europe vs Asia (“North” – “South”), and sociocultural differences in notions of “education” and “social beings”
- the opinions expressed here are solely mine and not those of the University of Helsinki SAB or my former employer

# Case Study 1 Engaged Humanities (2016-2018)



- EU-funded Twinning Project EUR 1 million
- Workshops, conferences, field schools, summer schools, publications, exhibitions, performances, art competition
- Website: <https://engagedhumanities.al.uw.edu.pl/>

# Case Study 1 Engaged Humanities (2016-2018)



# Challenges

- transdisciplinary collaboration requires cross-cultural work to understand research goals, methods, terminology, ways of speaking, outcome expectations across disciplines
- EU “Twinning” West vs East Europe revealed some different conceptions, e.g. Uni Warsaw lack of ethics policy, weak conceptualisations of research methodologies and methods, replicability of research outcomes
- Involvement of Indigenous and minority scholars from Poland and Mexico – transition from “informants” to colleagues, e.g. presentations

# Case Study 2: Research models and methods in India (2014-2018)



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- Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), funded by Central Government
- Collaborators from across India and Sikkim
- 120 early career researchers (MA, PhD, post-doc, junior academics) each year
- 30% of attendees members of minority groups
- Workshops, summer schools, publications
- Website: <https://www.sppel.org/>

# Case Study 3: Research models and methods in Thailand (2015-present)





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**Aesthetics and Sociology of  
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**Ethnicity, Museum, and Social  
Innovation**



**Transnational Issues and (Multi)  
Cultural Dynamics: ASEAN, India  
and the Asia Pacific (TIMDA)**



**Digital Humanities, Language, and  
Society (D-HULS)**



**Chinese – Thai Studies (CTS)**



**Public Arts**

# Challenges (“North-South”)

- major cross-cultural effort to deconstruct and share research goals, methods, terminology, outcome expectations (especially Scopus publications)
- different cultural conceptions of research, e.g. ethics policy and practice, conceptualisations of research methodologies and methods, replicability of research outcomes
- different cultural expectations of education and relationships between teacher/supervisor (“god”) and early-career researcher (passive copier)

# More challenges

- different notions of critique and (positive) feedback
- lack of experience with teamwork, construction and management of group-based activities
- lack of access to resources (equipment, transport, finances to employ local assistants)
- hierarchical social and gender stratification within institutions and in the wider society (women, minorities and Indigenous people at bottom, if even considered as persons with independent agency)

# Summary and conclusions

- experiences with mid-level collaboration networks:
  - opportunities for transdisciplinary research and training with significant potential outcomes
  - central role for community engagement and attention to sustainable positive outcomes, especially for minority and Indigenous populations
  - substantial challenges, both “East-West” and “North-South” that are fundamentally cross-cultural
  - cultures of research, education, social interaction

Kiitos. Tack. Thank you.