

The Slawson Awards

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Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Roy Huijsmans

Education

- B-Ed, KPZ Zwolle, The Netherlands (1999)
- MA Development Studies, Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands (2004)
- PhD Geography, Durham University, United Kingdom (2006-present)

Current position

Roy recently submitted his PhD thesis and has just completed a three month posting in Hoi An, Vietnam, where he worked as a lecturer and seminar leader in a development studies programme for the Norwegian institute *Kulturstudier*.



Slawson Award

Roy received the Slawson Award in 2007 for conducting fieldwork in the Lao PDR for the project ***Migrating Children, Households, and the Post-Socialist State: An ethnographic study of migration and non-migration by children and youth in an ethnic Lao village***. The Lao PDR is a country in transition. After a decade of high communism, over the past two decades it has gradually moved towards a market economy and embarked on a process of regional integration. The phenomenon of children and young people involved in migration has been an important manifestation of this process of change. From the perspective of rural change these young migrants are the key agents of change. Nonetheless, the phenomenon is mainly addressed as one of human trafficking in which the young migrants are presented as the victims of processes of capitalist expansion.

Based on ethnographic research and discourse analysis this study has broken down the dichotomy of young migrants as agents of change versus victims of change. The study has appreciated children and young people as social actors and conceptualised migration as a social process. The study has thus uncovered the various relations constraining children and young people's agency in becoming but also in not becoming a young migrant, and the scope and limitations for children and young people to negotiate these various relations of power in the social process of migration.

The question of the involvement of young people below the age of 18 in migration has also shed light on constructs of childhood and youth and how these constructs are actively reworked in order to maintain a claim on the young population. The study has shown that the political premium that the Lao state places on keeping its young population within state spaces, particularly in times of transition, constitutes a significant obstacle for the formulation of policies which are more sensitive to addressing the actual sources of harm in young people's involvement in migration.

Since the Slawson Award

For his PhD research Roy stayed in the Lao PDR from June 2007 through to December 2009. The Slawson Award contributed in significant ways to making this prolonged stay in the Lao PDR possible which was essential for developing an ethnographic research orientation. This prolonged stay also enabled Roy to become involved in policy discussions concerning migration, amongst other things through a consultancy for the International Labour Organisation. In addition, it enabled Roy to develop an international network constituting of scholars working in the Southeast Asian region on issues concerning children and youth and migration. This cumulated into an international workshop funded by the European Alliance for Asian Studies in Bangkok in 2009 focusing on the sharing of research findings, methodological issues concerning researching children and youth in migration, and policy questions relating to young migrants.

Roy submitted his PhD thesis in May 2010 and is now preparing the thesis material for publication in scholarly journals. Roy is looking forward to furthering his research and teaching experience in the field of childhood, youth and development.