Fact Sheet 14 Proximity Matters in Vietnam – How to Access Information

by TATJANA BAUER

Researchers rely on different sources of information to upgrade their knowledge, exchange ideas and solve emerging research questions based on the acknowledged findings published by other researchers. The scientific output of research projects should be made publicly available to users in order to prevent redundant research and to drive innovation. Publications such as books or periodicals including scholarly journals, magazines and newsletters provide updated results on which future research proposals should ideally be based.

A survey[1] conducted during the field study shows that Vietnamese books are considered the most important source of information, followed by the internet and conversations with colleagues from the same organisation (see table).

Nationally published books offer a full range of information that is politically consistent and most likely available in libraries or bookshops (*conventional access* – see figure), while the internet is a very fast and convenient way to find necessary information (*IT-based access*). Conversations with colleagues from the same organisation are seen as important for the exchange of Vietnamese books, reports and journals, as it shows that affiliation to an organisation is essential for accessing information and knowledge and being updated (*relationship-based access*). The survey reveals that other sources of information, such as consulting other Vietnamese organisations or governmental agencies, are less relevant for the daily work routine of Vietnamese

scientific staff. As such, there is an obvious lack of cooperation.

Ranking of information sources that staff of knowledge-producing organizations frequently use for their work

No.	Sources of information	Mean value 1–very important 2-important 3-less important 4-not important
1	Vietnamese books	1.51
2	Internet	1.56
3	Talk to colleagues at home institute	1.70
4	International books	1.85
5	Talk to friends in Vietnam	1.90
6	International journals	1.91
7	Vietnamese journals	1.94
8	Consult other Vietnamese research institutes	2.08
9	Contact international friends/organizations	2.36
10	Mailing lists	2.39
11	Contact Vietnamese government agencies	2.50
12	Yellow pages	2.76

Source: Survey conducted by Tatjana Bauer (2008-2009)

Generally, the ways of accessing information are extremely complicated and demand creativity, patience and – at most – well-established relationships.

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[1] In total, 282 questionnaires were answered by Vietnamese staff members from seven different water-related universities, colleges, research institutes and local authorities in Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho City.

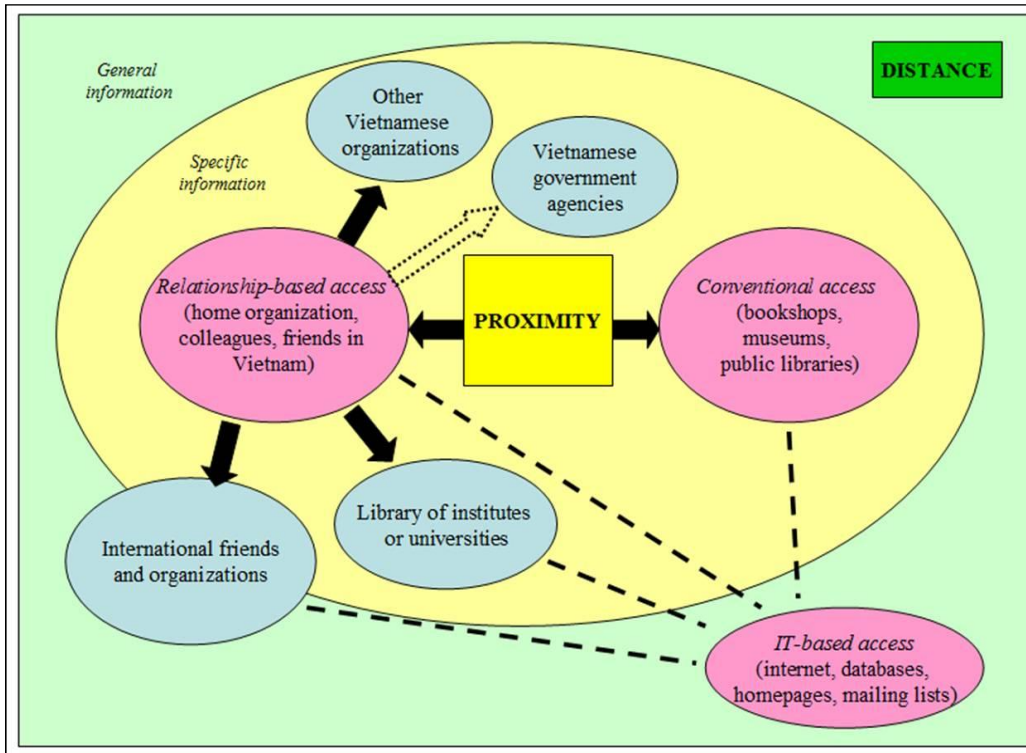**Opportunities to Access Information**

Chart: Tatjana Bauer (2009)

Vietnamese researchers lack information about other organisations' research activities operating in the same field of study, and relevant documents, books or articles are not shared with others.

There are two main explanations for the obvious scepticism towards knowledge sharing and the resulting restricted access to information and publications. Firstly, Vietnamese knowledge-producing organisations struggle for funding provided by the Vietnamese government or international donors. As a result, they have been forced to generate additional income sources in order to carry out research and development. Therefore, datasets, reports, documents and other apparently valuable information are held back for commercialisation or for using in order to get ahead of competitors. A second point is the serious violation of intellectual property rights, as there is still a huge gap between the law on paper and its enforcement in practice which results in the inability to protect intellectual property effectively. The Vietnamese science system is shaped by organisations that strictly keep secret their information and reports, which makes research staff dependent on personal networks and relationships. Hence, the geographical proximity of organisations and researchers is essential for supporting this informality, which is the most efficient way of accessing information and publications.

Further Reading

BAUER, T. (2011) The Challenge of Knowledge Sharing – Practices of the Vietnamese Science Community in Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. Hamburg, Muenster, London. LIT-Verlag. (forthcoming)

EVERS, H.-D. & T. BAUER (2011) Emerging Epistemic Landscapes: Knowledge Clusters in Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. In Menkhoff, T., Evers, H.-D., Yue Wah Chay & Eng Fong Pang (Eds.) Beyond the Knowledge Trap-Strategizing Knowledge as an Engine for Asia's Growth. World Scientific Publishing, New Jersey, pp. 239-276.

Tatjana Bauer studied Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Bonn, and obtained her PhD from the Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn. She has done extensive field research on knowledge governance in Vietnam.
Further information at: http://www.wisdom.caf.dlr.de/