



International cooperation in transportation research among East Asian countries: Experience of the Eastern Asia society for transportation studies (EASTS)



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ABSTRACT

Many transportation issues not limited by country, region, or city, instead being shared globally. However, as policies, plans, and regulations related to transportation drastically differ between countries, due in part to their vastly different histories of development, the specific solutions to these problems also differ between cities. Despite these differences, people in every country share the common hope that their transportation problems can be solved, and governments, agencies, and organizations are each undertaking efforts to improve the mobility of their citizens. International cooperation allows much to be learned from both differences and commonalities, and is therefore an important factor in solving transportation problems. This paper address the contribution of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS) to international cooperative research, with a focus on the International Research Group (IRG) and International Cooperation Research Activity (ICRA), which are core programs for connecting researchers in East Asia. With ten years of achievements in the two programs, the EASTS can provide an opportunity for Asian experts and researchers to exchange experiences, views, and ideas on the critical issues related to transportation problems in the region. In many cases of successful international cooperation, there are numerous efforts within secretariats over a lengthy implementation period: program developments, efforts to have face-to-face communication, establishment of online journals, and seeking sustainable funding sources.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Wave of globalization

The recent wave of globalization continues to propagate throughout the transportation research community. Ideally, research should be borderless, researchers should be able to conduct their research anywhere, and, as soon as they are deemed suitable for publication, results should be available online to anyone. Such a process would foster keener competition among transportation researchers in academia.

Although the most recent type of globalization is economic globalization (Rossi, 2007), what are the current issues in transportation? Have those issues indeed become a global problem? Some issues are shared globally, regardless of country, region, or city. For example, traffic congestion and accidents are a familiar headache associated with urban living in many cities. The specific solutions, however, are different among cities because policies, plans, and regulations related to transportation drastically differ between countries, due in part to their vastly different histories of development. It is important to remember that other differences occur owing the specific local circumstances, such as the geography, transportation systems including the road network, and the available modes of transportation.

Despite these differences, people in every country share the common hope that their transportation problems can be solved, and governments, agencies, and organizations are all undertaking efforts to improve the mobility of their citizens.

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International cooperation allows much to be learned from both differences and commonalities, and is therefore an important factor in solving transportation problems.

1.1.2. Needs regarding international cooperation in research

Why is international cooperation in research academia important? Firstly, individual countries develop their own plans to solve existing transportation problems. However, many countries share common transportation problems, and sharing international knowledge and experience regarding such problems could therefore be the most effective strategy for finding effective solutions.

A second aspect of international cooperative research is to help devise solutions in developing East Asian countries, such as through international technology or policy transfer (Mladenovic et al., 2016). Consider the following scenario: One country is helped by another country to solve a transportation problem, and the first country learns about related technology and policies during the international cooperative process. Given this type of situation, international cooperation could enable developing East Asian countries to solve their transportation problems independently in the future.

1.1.3. Outline of the Eastern Asia society for transportation studies (EASTS)

The Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS) (EASTS, 2016) was founded in November 1994 following a meeting in Kawana, Japan, attended by transportation experts from 13 East Asian countries/regions. As of September 2015, EASTS comprises 1617 members in 19 domestic societies from Australia, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The primary objectives of EASTS, which is composed of transportation science societies (referred to as “member domestic societies”) in East Asia as well as individuals from other countries, are to foster and support excellence in transportation research and practice and to stimulate professional exchanges in all aspects and modes of transportation.

One of the primary activities of EASTS is organizing biennial international conferences. The first conference took place in 1995 in Manila, the Philippines. Since then, 11 additional conferences have been held, providing great opportunities for participants to enrich their professional knowledge. The 12th conference will be held in September 2017 in Binh Duong, Vietnam. EASTS conferences are managed by an international scientific committee and a conference committee.

EASTS publishes the following three academic journals in parallel: *Asian Transport Studies* (ATS); *Journal of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies*; and *Proceedings of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies*. Of the three, ATS is the most prominent, containing many highly qualified papers that are strictly peer-reviewed. The first two volumes of ATS had acceptance rates of about five percent. All three journals, along with information regarding other EASTS activities, are available online at www.easts.info.

EASTS is governed by board members from each domestic society. Three to five directors-at-large and officers are elected to the board of directors periodically. Annual board meetings are organized and operated by secretariats made up of university professors and researchers, who also handle EASTS-related paperwork and communications, such as e-mail correspondence and updating the society website, mostly on a voluntary basis.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the contribution of EASTS to international cooperative research, with a focus on the International Research Group (IRG) and International Cooperation Research Activity (ICRA), which are core programs for connecting researchers in East Asia.

We analyze how the society makes an effort to create opportunities for research cooperation and collaboration. We also address how the society reaches strategic decisions on cooperation and what its essential criteria it uses in weighing potential candidates and cooperative projects. Lastly, we show the lessons learned, barriers encountered, and mitigation strategies utilized.

Although extensive studies have discussed globalization and research & development from the perspective of various fields of research, no previous study has discussed the role of academic societies for international cooperation in transportation research.

2. Planning international cooperative research

International cooperative research is conducted at EASTS using the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. In this chapter, we provide a detailed description of how the Planning phase is conducted in IRG and ICRA, the two core EASTS programs.

2.1. Building IRGs

The IRG program started in 2005 to create research groups composed of researchers from various member societies. The IRG program has the following declared purposes: (1) to promote international research activities; (2) to conduct symposia, seminars, and workshops; and (3) to foster young EASTS researchers. IRG research activities are expected to contribute to the progress of transportation research in East Asia and the promotion of EASTS.

The IRG program is held to possess the following advantages: (1) it can utilize the EASTS website and mailing list to announce its activities to EASTS members; (2) it can utilize EASTS sponsorship; (3) it can arrange special technical sessions at EASTS biennial international conferences; and (4) it is eligible for ICRA research grants.

To realize these advantages, IRGs must satisfy the following requirements: (1) IRG representatives must be regular EASTS members selected by their respective domestic society; (2) at least three IRG members must be regular EASTS members belonging to different domestic societies; (3) an IRG must achieve its research plans within five years; (4) an IRG must submit annual activity reports to the EASTS board; and (5) an IRG must submit summary reports to the EASTS board in conjunction with the end of the respective research period.

The IRG application process begins three months before the EASTS annual board meeting each year. The secretariats send a call for applications to regular EASTS members, all of whom are eligible to apply. Applications can be submitted up to one month before the board meeting. During the board meeting, all applications are reviewed and discussed among the board members, who ultimately make the final decision regarding approval. Some applications are approved with recommendations. Further details about the selection criteria are provided in the next section.

The IRG can be seen as a Community of Practice (CoP), which are defined as “group(s) of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002). This concept of knowledge management outlines the best practices for IRG. The leader of an IRG is expected to gather other professionals concerned with a specific

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