

Training on indigo paste making

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Natural dyes used for textiles have been replaced by synthetic dyes in the majority of textile factories. Synthetic dyes allow industrial manufacturing in large quantities and therefore are sometimes cheaper than natural dyes which require several labour-intensive processes. However, in many cases the switch to synthetic dyes has not developed in line with establishing chemical treatment facilities. Whereas natural dyes are mostly harmless to the environment, hazardous chemicals that are reaching crucial water sources for communities are putting livelihoods in the proximity of dyeing factories at risk. South East Asian countries, where the global textile industry is mostly centred, are especially affected by this pollution, while the same pattern is slowly appearing in Central Asia. As part of the EU funded project RUTSIS a training has therefore been conducted on natural dyeing of textiles using indigo plants, strengthening the knowledge exchange between Thailand and Central Asia.

Prior to the training, indigo plants grown and harvested in Khorezm as part of a selection research project in Uzbekistan had to be transported to the dyeing workshop in Margilan within 12 hours after harvesting, as the plants tend to lose their qualities quickly. Within the training, different types of indigo plants were introduced and the requirements for gaining a dye paste out of it were illustrated. A step-by-step guide with a photo presentation and videos from Thailand then showcased the whole process of turning indigo into a natural dye by creating a blue-colored paste. This process was then reproduced by the training participants over the course of three days, accompanied by continuous testing of pH-levels, odour, colour, taste, etc. of the tincture to document the first indigo paste production trial from locally selected dryland indigo.

The Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle (BURG) took a lead in organizing the training including the engagement of the trainers and indigo expert duo Patricia and Lamorna Cheesman. Whereas the trainers gave instructions from their hometown Chiang Mai (Thailand), the live experiment was conducted in the Margilan Crafts Development Center in Uzbekistan. Due to the pandemic, only a few participants were allowed to take part in the experiment in the workshop location in Margilan, while others joined online. Video recordings of the training will be used to further disseminate the training content. As the lead organization in the project, adelphi supported the planning and implementation of the training and will facilitate its dissemination.