

**Dr. Viet Dung Trinh
Ina Litterst**

Let's Found a Branch Campus in Asia!

**Navigating Speed, Strategy, Culture,
Processes, and Structure**



**KÜHNE
LOGISTICS
UNIVERSITY**

**Leading with an
Operations Mindset**



**UNIVERSITY:FUTURE
FESTIVAL**



Niche topical focus: Logistics, Supply Chain Management, Operations

International at core: Full EN program portfolio (BSc, MSc, PhD), 50%+ international students

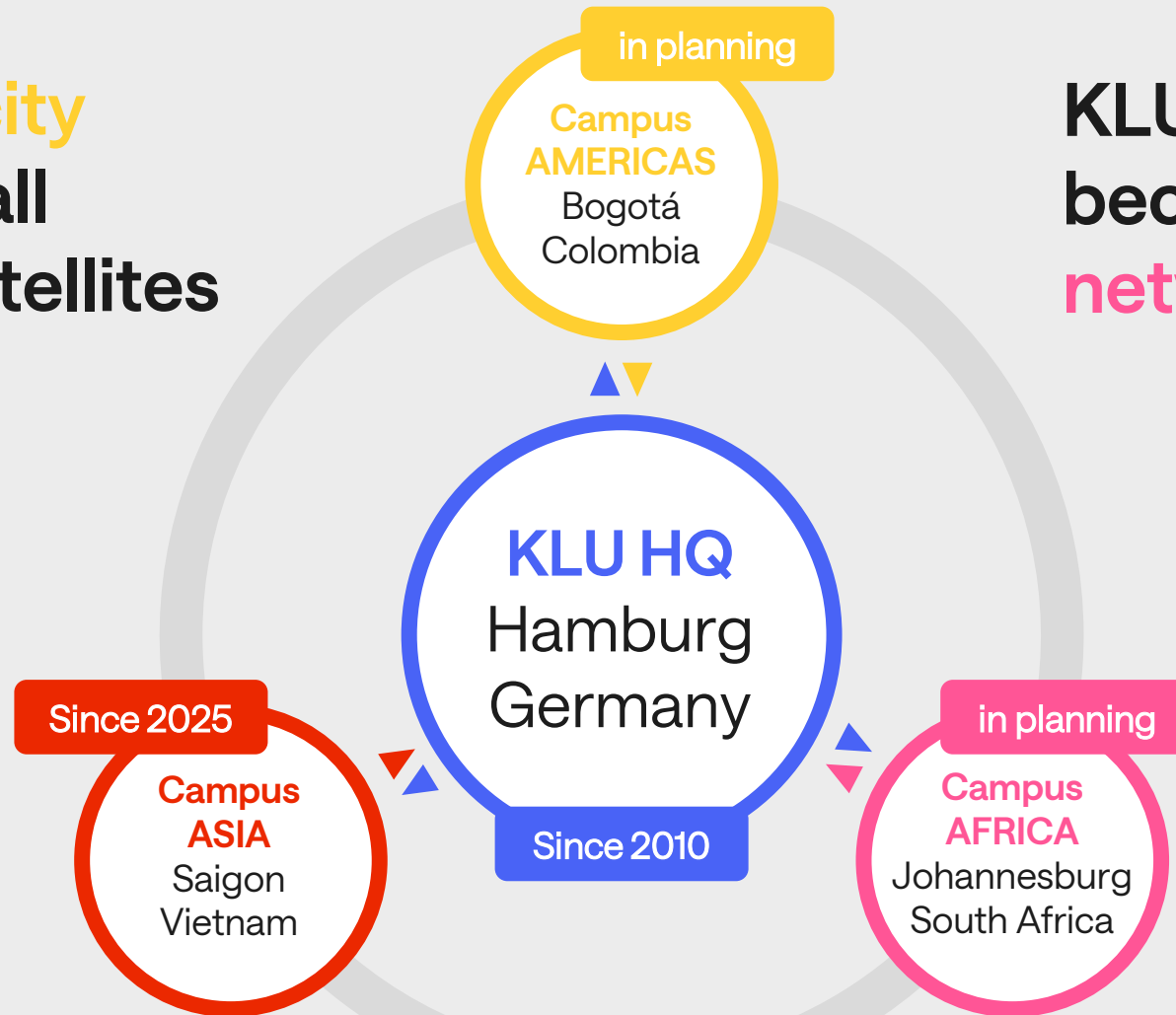
Private + non-for-profit: Financially backed and supported by the Kühne Foundation

Research driven + industry close

Starting point of reflections on international strategy: Global supply chains require a GLOCAL education

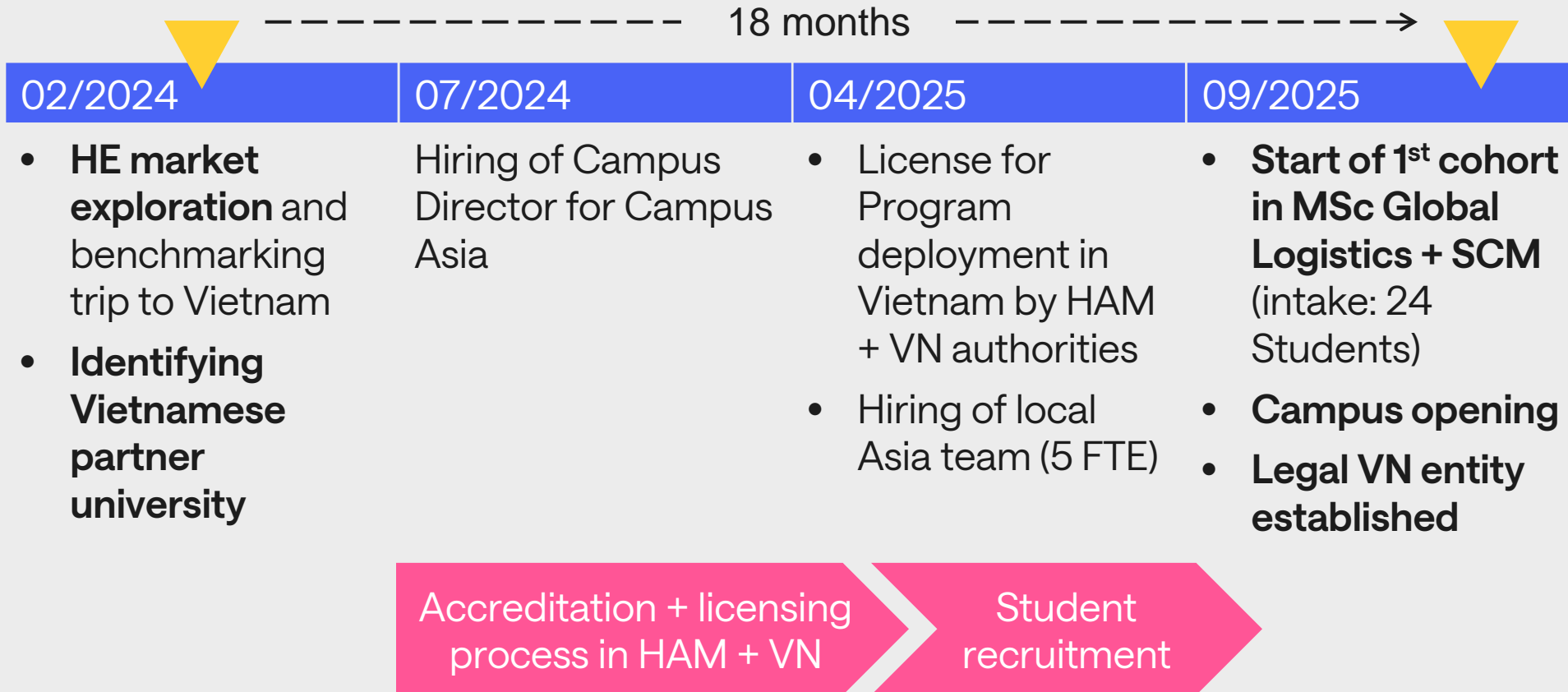
Regional Capacity Building via small regional KLU satellites offering degree programs

KLU will eventually become a **globally networked university**



In 18 months from market exploration to first student intake

An operational and bureaucratic sprint exercise



Let's found a branch campus in Asia!

OR: How to put a university system under pressure

KLU SAIGON

START-UP ORGANIZATION

Setting up a Program Portfolio

Setting up an organizational structure

Setting up processes + infrastructure

Hiring a team + creating a culture

Setting up a basic legal entity

How to speedily ramp-up operations, build a brand, convince a market of a new player?

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ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATION

Established Program Portfolio

Established Organizational Structure

Established processes + infrastructure

Established organizational culture

Fully licensed legal HEI entity

How to integrate a new international campus structure in an existing university system?

Let's Found a Branch Campus in Asia!

Navigating 1) Speed, 2) Strategy,
3) Culture, 4) Processes + Structure

Challenge 1: Navigating Speed

KLU SAIGON

- Building local **brand trust** and **awareness** from scratch in a competitive market
- **Hiring + onboarding a capable team** who believe in the mission despite limited time for training
- **Recruiting students** without established brand recognition or physical campus presence in VN
- **Establishing full campus infrastructure** in under two months

KLU HAMBURG

- **Securing program accreditation** and **licenses** on another continent in a **very tight time window**
- Defining the **right candidate profile** and hiring a trusted person to speedily ramp-up VN operations
- **Aligning and mobilizing headquarter teams** to support rapid operationalization

KEY LEARNINGS

- **Launch formal approval processes as early as possible** to avoid critical path delays (accreditation/licensing)
- Intensive **stakeholder management** and the ability to accelerate decision-making beyond normal institutional pace
- **Flexibility and adaptability** are essential when building in real time

Challenge 2: Navigating Strategy

KLU SAIGON

- **Expansion of Asia-focused student recruitment** to capture high demand from students seeking Hamburg pathways
- **Exceeded year 2 enrollment target by >40%** (50 vs. 35 planned), requiring rapid infrastructure and resource adjustments
- **Introduced curriculum flexibility earlier than planned** (electives) in response to high enrollment
- **Accelerated local faculty hiring** to reduce dependency on flying faculty model

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- **Adjusted legal entity establishment timeline** to accommodate delays created by Vietnam's administrative reforms
- **Managing unforeseen dynamics in Vietnam** (acceleration and delay of timelines) through continuous **reprioritization**
- **Integrating KLU Saigon leadership in KLU Boards** to support strategic alignment across campus
- **Deriving next strategic steps** for future int. campus developments from Asia experience

KEY LEARNINGS

- **Adjusting strategic planning** to accommodate local regulatory and operational developments
- **Local operations actively shape strategy**, not just follow it
- **The strategic decision-making pace must match operational reality**, not institutional norms

Challenge 3: Navigating Culture

KLU SAIGON

- **Contextualizing KLU's Northern German heritage** and Hamburg's maritime roots for Asian audiences
- **Finding staff capable of working in English and serving as on-ground translators** to bridge cultures
- **Establishing and organizational culture** with a local team in constant **ramp-up mode**
- **Balancing the mix of local, Asia-specific KLU start-up culture with headquarter culture**

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- **Shifting from default HQ/Eurocentric thinking to curiosity-driven understanding of local contexts**
- **Accounting for time zone and communication channel differences** when scheduling meetings and aligning work across Asia and Europe
- **Managing asynchronous holiday calendars (Vietnamese Tet follows European Christmas/New Year)** to ensure critical handovers

KEY LEARNINGS

- **Facilitate early in-person meetings between operationally involved teams** from both locations to build mutual understanding and perspective-taking
- **When decisions or actions from the other campus seem unclear, seek context** before forming judgments

Challenge 4: Navigating Processes and Structure

KLU SAIGON

- **Managing the consequences of outdated admission databases (Anabin)** when recruiting students across diverse Asian markets
- **Establishing cross-border financial flows across entities, currencies, and fluctuating exchange rates** (tax, compliance, IT integration)
- **Accelerating decision-making through Vietnamese leadership representation on KLU board**

KLU HAMBURG

- **Revising or redesigning existing processes for Vietnamese operational implementation**
- **Maintaining operational continuity** while integrating rapid branch campus developments into existing systems
- **Assessing IT infrastructure requirements** for key processes across locations
- Determining which services, operations and resources to **centralize vs. decentralize**

KEY LEARNINGS

- **Involve legal experts early in governance and compliance processes**
- **Build strong relationships with key stakeholders:** embassies (visa support), education ministries (licensing), legal advisors (compliance)
- **Plan for iterative process adaptation rather than one-time implementation**

Feedback appreciated!



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THANK YOU
for joining our
session!

Meet us 😊

Viet Dung Trinh

Campus Director
KLU Asia Campus, Saigon, Vietnam



Dr. Viet Dung Trinh is Director of the Asia Campus of Kühne Logistics University (KLU) in Ho Chi Minh City. He has over 15 years of leadership experience in higher education across the public and private sectors, spanning teaching, academic management, and strategic partnership development in Australia and Vietnam. Prior to academia, he worked as a consultant, advising organizations on brand strategy and market development. His current work focuses on logistics, supply chain management, and sustainable operations, bridging international academic standards with Vietnam's development priorities. His research interests include marketing, branding, innovation, and customer experience.

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Ina Litterst

Head of International Development
KLU Headquarters, Hamburg



Ina Litterst drives KLU's international development, establishing three university campus structures across Asia, Africa, and the Americas from the KLU headquarters in Hamburg. With over 10 years of professional experience in internationalization, digital transformation, and strategy in higher education and consulting, she leads agile strategy projects across diverse stakeholder groups and global contexts. She is a strong advocate for lifelong learning, intercultural collaboration on equal footing, and transnational education.

Ina holds a Master degree in Intercultural Communication, an MBA in Leadership and Supply Chain Management and has worked and studied in Germany, France, India, Vietnam, and the US.

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