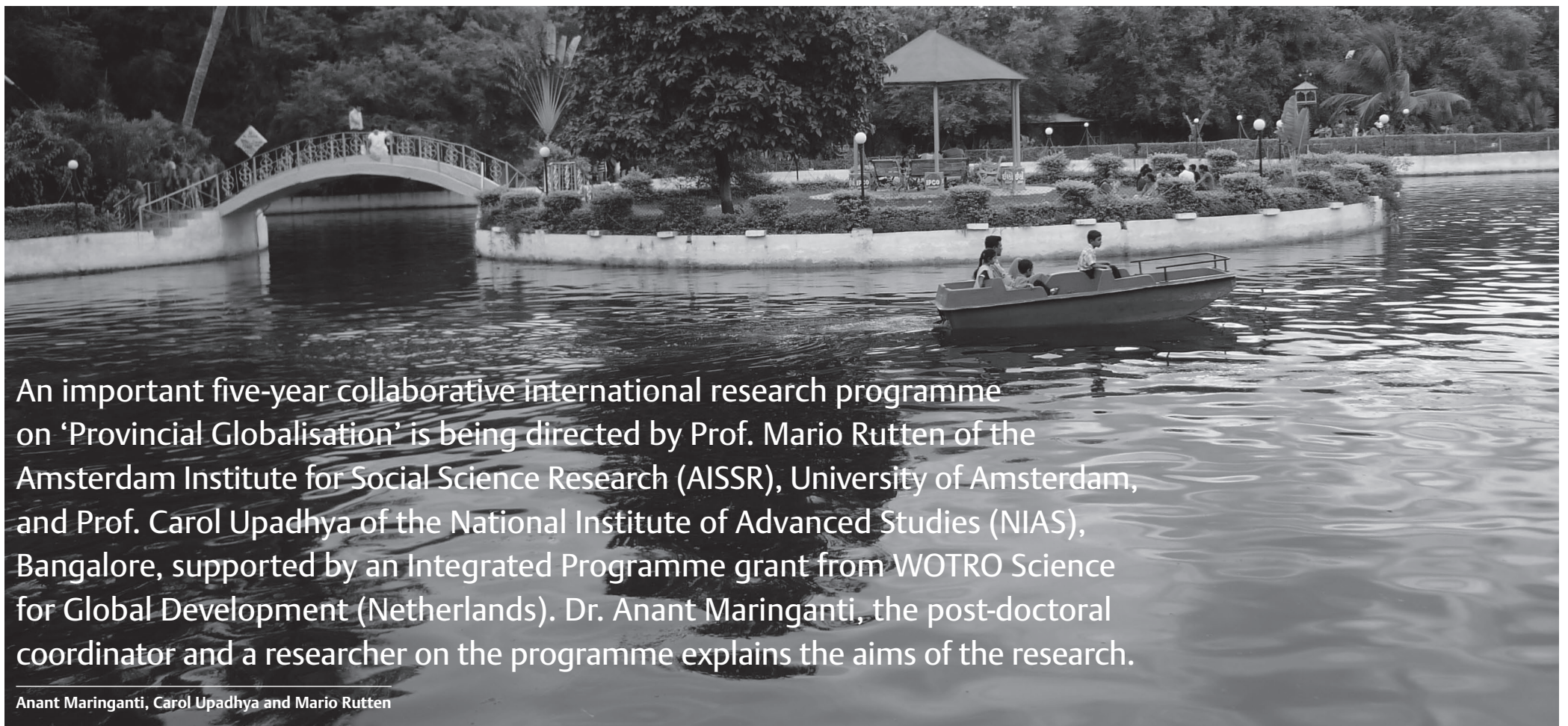


Provincial globalisation: the impact of reverse transnational flows in India's regional towns



An important five-year collaborative international research programme on 'Provincial Globalisation' is being directed by Prof. Mario Rutten of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam, and Prof. Carol Upadhyia of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, supported by an Integrated Programme grant from WOTRO Science for Global Development (Netherlands). Dr. Anant Maringanti, the post-doctoral coordinator and a researcher on the programme explains the aims of the research.

Anant Maringanti, Carol Upadhyia and Mario Rutten

THIS IS ALL ABOUT 'GENETICS'! Harish Bhai, a prominent member of Dharmaj village community in central Gujarat proudly declares. The genetics that he is referring to is the fact that the village has a history of transnational migration that dates to the 19th century. People tracing their lineage back to this village live on three continents – Africa, Europe and North America. Although Harish Bhai himself rarely travels outside Gujarat, he plays a crucial role in mobilising remittances from members of this extended transnational village community, deploying these resources for village development works, maintaining family trees and records of donations and marriages, and encouraging people to come back to the village for special annual occasions that coincide with the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas – India's official annual event when thousands of Overseas Indians congregate with government officials, business organisations and local cultural associations and NGOs to reinforce their ties with the motherland.

Although one may not come across such confident references to 'genetics' as the organising principle of transnational communities in other regions, such pride in linkages with relatives and community members overseas, in which family and kinship, business sense and philanthropic spirit, go hand-in-hand, is not unusual in India. How and why do people maintain such loyalties? What material and non-material resources flow back through the transnational networks that connect migrants with local communities? What are the implications of such connections and flows for development and for development policies in rapidly globalising India?

Such are the questions that drive the research programme on 'Provincial Globalisation'. The programme revolves around four central themes or propositions related to India's international migrants and their ties to India:

- 1) transnational migration is an important driver of globalisation and globalisation is experienced differently in medium and small-size urban centres in their peripheries, in contrast to metropolitan centres;
- 2) these differences may, in part, be related to the greater salience of caste and kinship networks in the provinces, which tend to get concealed by modernity in the metro cities;
- 3) such towns and their surrounding rural regions are not passive recipients of remittances and other migrant transfers, but rather are active nodes in forming and strategising around transnational flows and, hence, in the remaking of globalisation;
- 4) there is an urgent need to counter the sharp divide in much of the recent scholarship between research on remittances and migration and between studies on transnationalism and development studies.

The programme is built around five projects designed to examine transnational flows around three towns in three different Indian states – Anand in central Gujarat, Mangalore in coastal Karnataka and Guntur in coastal Andhra Pradesh. It will assess both quantitatively and qualitatively the social character and developmental consequences of 'reverse flows' of material resources such as household remittances, investments in land or businesses and charitable donations

to NGOs; 'social remittances' such as new ideas and know-how; and cultural and religious transactions such as donations to temples, mosques and churches, or support for spiritual organisations. Using a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, the programme will develop new methods for studying transnational processes.

Background

While there is a large literature on transnational networks and increasing interest in the impact of transnational flows on development in the home countries of migrants, conventional datasets generated in relation to nation-state boundaries do not do justice to the complexity of these processes. Thus, there is need to develop new types of data and methods of analysis in order to capture these processes. The Provincial Globalisation programme will uncover new and unconventional data sources on resource flows and map the key mechanisms and sites of resource transmission. It will also examine the influence of such transactions on political and economic processes, social development, and cultural/religious institutions and identities in the selected regions.

From the Indian policy perspective, there has been increasing interest in Overseas Indians who are seen as a resource base for national development. The motivations for migrants to share their resources with their communities of origin are often related to a cultural need to reinforce collective identity. The consequences of such transnational connections and flows, however, have neither been uniformly benign nor evenly spread across regions. For example, high volume investment in real estate by overseas Indians in their home regions has been known to have led to an escalation in land prices and increased polarisation of landholding. In this context, the research programme makes a case for a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of such reverse flows, which will include an analysis of the social structuring of economic exchanges as well as their broader implications.

Programme structure

The programme consists of five independent but inter-linked research projects located in three states of India, to be carried out by three doctoral students – Sanderien Verstappen, Sanam Roohi and Sulagna Mustafi – and two post-doctoral researchers – Anant Maringanti (geography) and Puja Guha (economics). The PhD projects will be intensive micro-level studies of the selected regions, while the two post-doctoral projects will provide macro- and meso-level mappings of transnational linkages and flows at the regional, state and national levels.

Research sites and comparative analysis

The project sites, located in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, have been selected to represent contrasting patterns of migration, transnational flows, and development outcomes. They also share common features – all are productive agricultural regions that are rapidly urbanising, where the dominant landowning/agricultural groups have diversified economically – processes that, in turn, are linked to out-migration. However, the time-scale, type, and destination of migration differ in each case. These include a range of actors

Above: Boat ride on the lake in the community park and fodder farm at Dharmaj built with contributions from NRIs. Photo by Anant Maringanti.

from domestic workers and other unskilled and semi-skilled labour going to the Middle East, to highly skilled and mobile professionals such as doctors and software engineers. While some receiving countries' policies do not permit permanent residency, in other cases the migrants actually become permanent residents or citizens. These diverse environments shape the character of reverse flows. Although different types of migration are found in all the regions, for the purposes of this research programme the focus in each case will be on particular groups of migrants who appear to be most significant in terms of driving transformations in their home regions.

This multi-disciplinary perspective, encompassing the disciplines of sociology, social anthropology, economics, and geography, is essential to capture the diverse ways in which transnational flows are embedded in social networks and permeated by cultural values or political aspirations. The overall programme has been designed to facilitate comparative and multi-scalar analysis by integrating the results of the individual research projects at different stages. The skills of the research team will be supplemented by consultations with development practitioners and a range of other stakeholders.

Significance

The research programme will produce significant academic as well as policy outputs. The programme will contribute to the literature on globalisation and transnationalism, as well as on migration and development, especially in the context of South Asia where such studies are inadequate, by moving down from the global and national levels to the region and locality. The research outputs will also contribute to national and international policy debates on migration, development, and the contributions of Overseas Indians to India's development. In India, the debate on migration and development has been focused mainly on the economic impact of remittances. In this context, one of the main goals of this research is to bring material, social and cultural dimensions of migration into the same framework in order to arrive at critical insights into contemporary globalisation processes.

Anant Maringanti
AISSR, Amsterdam University, the Netherlands

Carol Upadhyia
National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, India

Mario Rutten
AISSR, Amsterdam University, the Netherlands

For more information contact
Prof. Carol Upadhyia
National Institute of Advanced Studies
Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bengaluru, India 560 012

Telephone: +91-80-22185000, Fax: +91-80-22185028
Email: provincial.globalisation@gmail.com
www.nias.res.in/researchgroups-sss-provincial-globalisation.php