

Conference report: 7th Annual Conference of the Study Group South Asia of the German Geographical Society (DGfG)

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prises. It is not clear what kind of guarantees the Pakistan government has given or is expected and prepared to give to Chinese investors. Most investment will be in transport and energy. Some roads have already been built: the Karakoram Highway that links Xinjiang with the Indus valley was reopened, after it had been interrupted for two years by a landslide that created a 22km-long lake, submerging the road. At the other end of the country, a direct road between Quetta and Gwadar has been built in record time. This allows the “ordered disorder” of Karachi to be bypassed and will soon be linked to the Indus valley, bypassing unruly Quetta as well.

Ecological concerns were raised especially with respect to the string of new power plants to be built and operated by Chinese companies. Pakistan has large deposits of lignite (brown coal) in southern Sind, mined in open pits. With their high carbon dioxide emissions, however, coal-fired power plants are considered to be especially harmful to the environment. The papers presented will be published with the proceedings of the conference in the annual issue of the *Pakistan Development Review*.

Postscript: Upon returning to Pakistan the author reads that the Economic Advisor to the Planning Commission expects 4 per cent of global trade to pass through CPEC by 2020, generating USD6-8 billion in tolls and rental fees per year (*Business Recorder*, 11 May 2017). Such unbounded enthusiasm for CPEC is not shared by everyone, especially as Chinese plans have been leaked to the press, indicating an agenda extending far beyond transport and energy, and raising fears that CPEC might develop into another East India Company.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

7th Annual Conference of the Study Group South Asia of the German Geographical Society (DGfG)

AUGSBURG, 27–28 JANUARY 2017

The South Asia study group within the German Geographical Society (DGfG) has grown steadily in recent years and now has eighty members in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The majority of its members are employed in universities, but also include teachers and practical working geographers from consulting companies and development cooperation. At this year’s meeting 33 members made their way to Augsburg, where they were welcomed by host Matthias Schmidt.

The highlight of the conference was the awarding of the research prize “Geographies of South Asia” for the best geographic thesis on South Asia. This year the award was given to two young scientists, Annabelle Jaggi and Marc Herter, both of whom presented their work at the conference. Annabelle Jaggi’s master thesis is entitled “Affirmative Action Practices by Development Actors Targeting Dalits in Nepal. Shedding Light on Theory and Practice Using the Case Study of Helvetas’ Employment Fund”, and was supervised by Ulrike Müller-Böker and Miriam Wenner. The master thesis of Marc Herter with the title “Development as Spectacle: Understanding Post-war Urban Development in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Case of Arcade Independence Square” was supervised by Pia Hollenbach and Benedikt Korf. Both works were written at the University of Zurich and are released in the publication series of the South Asian study group (available free of charge at <http://crossasia-books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/xasia/catalog/series/gsa>). The award winners received a voucher from the publisher Franz Steiner Verlag and a one-year subscription to the magazine *Geographische Rundschau* of the Westermann Verlag.

The main idea of the study group is the generation of a platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge on current geographical research and practical reports concerning South Asia. This year the papers were subdivided into six thematic blocks: on Friday, “Migration”, “Education” as well as “Consumption and Value Chains” were debated; on Saturday the topics of discussion were the sessions “Rural Worlds”, “Urban Worlds” and also “Development Research and Tourism”. Andreas Benz (Augsburg) opened the migration session with the results of his project on translocal networks of Ismailis from the Karakorum in Pakistan. Raphael Schwegmann (Münster) reported on his study on the life course of migrants who migrated to England during the colonial period and who told their life history in the 1980s. Carsten Butsch (Cologne) presented the results of his habilitation project on Indian migrants in Germany. He depicted the transnational networks that they possess and how they describe their transnational identities. In the session on “Education” Annika Seitz (Cologne) presented her work on the networks of Indian students, who were previously exchange students in Germany. Afterwards Tobias Aberle (Heidelberg) asked whether “Entrepreneurship Training” offers a future perspective for socially disadvantaged young people in rural Bihar (India). Basabi Khan Banerjee (Hanover) talked about the changes in geography as a school subject in India. Lutz Meyer-Ohlendorf (Potsdam/Cologne) opened the session “Consumption and Value Chains” with a discussion of the relationship between lifestyle, consumption dynamics and climate change, using the example of Hyderabad (India). Shantenou Abe and Amelie Bernzen (Cologne) presented their ongoing DFG (German Research Foundation) project on the livelihoods of small farmers in India involved in the production and trade of organic or fairtrade products.

The first presentation of the session “Rural Worlds” on Saturday was broadcasted via video chat from Nepal: Stephanie Leder (Kathmandu) could not be present in person but reported from a distance on her studies on the effects of emigration on the agricultural structures in the eastern Ganges Plain. This was followed by the presentation from Michael Spies, who studied the agricultural changes in the Pakistani Karakorum using the Actor-Network Theory. Afterwards Raphael Pinheiro Machado Rehm (Augsburg) presented the results of his investigations on the land-use-specific variability of soil characteristics in a headwater region in the West Ghats (India), which he worked on together with Christoph Bail, Peter Fiener (both Augsburg), M.S. Bhallamudi (Chennai) and S. Kumar (Pune).

Peter Dannenberg and Alexander Follmann (both Cologne) opened the session “Urban Worlds”. They presented a study on the peri-urban area of Faridabad (India), where they linked methods of remote sensing with personal encounters and qualitative interviews. Afterwards Manisha Jain showed the results of her joint research with Xiaoping Xie (both Dresden) on informal urbanisation and the impact of urban planning. The changing food practices of urban middle classes in Bangalore were analysed by Mirka Erler (Göttingen). The session on “Development Research and Tourism” began with Markus Keck (Göttingen), who talked about the necessities and possibilities for realigning geographic development research. Finally Tatyana Thimm (Constance) gave a lecture on sustainable tourism in Kerala and asked whether this could serve as a model for other regions.

This year the general meeting focused on the debate about the future of the study group. The question was whether the study group should have a stronger internal structure and if therefore a registered association should be founded. But scepticism prevailed, and thus the study group remains in its present form. A further topic at the annual general meeting was the highly successful publication history of the study group, which will be continued through further jointly planned special issues in journals. Special thanks was given to Alexander Follmann for the redesign of the website (www.geographien-suedasiens.de). During the annual elections of the speakers’ team, Carsten Butsch (Cologne), Alexander Follmann (Cologne), Martin Franz (Osnabrück), Markus Keck (Göttingen) and Julia Poerting (Heidelberg) were confirmed. Matthias Schmidt (Augsburg) left the team. The next and eighth annual conference of the study group South Asia will take place on 19 and 20 January 2018 at the Geographical Institute of the University of Cologne. Further information will be published as usual at www.geographien-suedasiens.de.

Markus Keck / Matthias Schmidt