

### Conference Report: 8th Annual Meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography (Cologne, 19-20 January 2018)

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state order and asserted that emerging powers should be given equal opportunity to introduce demands into multilateral cooperation formats.

The event's outcomes illustrate how the security architecture in East Asia limits Taiwan's strategic options to ensure its national security. The attendees agreed on the preservation of the status quo as the most favourable option for Taiwan to ensure stability in cross-strait relations.

*Kevin Kälker*

## **8th Annual Meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography**

COLOGNE, 19 – 20 JANUARY 2018

The eighth annual meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography (Arbeitskreis Südasiens in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie [DGfG]) took place from 19 to 20 January 2018 at the Institute of Geography, University of Cologne. The meeting, which included thirty participants, was organised by Carsten Butsch and Alexander Follmann. The presentation of the “Geographies of South Asia” research prize for the best geographic thesis on South Asia was the highlight of the event. Raphael Pinheiro Machado Rehm received the award for his master's thesis presented at the University of Augsburg entitled “Small Scale Variability in Soil Hydraulic Properties in Headwater Catchment of the Indian Western Ghats”. This is the first time that a work on physical geography was awarded the prize, which was initiated by the working group in 2015. The selection was made by a jury consisting of Martin Franz (Osnabrück), Markus Nüsser (Heidelberg) and Matthias Schmidt (Augsburg).

The conference began on Friday afternoon with a presentation by Tatiana López Ayala (Cologne) titled “Workers in Global Production Networks: Local Labour Control Regime and Trade Union Organisation in the Bangalore Export Clothing Cluster”. She outlined how the control regime in the clothing production network at the local level is shaped by the complex interaction of strategies between actors at different levels. Three presentations from the field of high mountain research followed: first, Juliane Dame (Heidelberg), Julia Poerting (Bonn) and Stefanie Raschke (Heidelberg) talked about perspectives and challenges in introducing standardised cultivation systems in the high mountain regions of South Asia. In particular, they addressed power issues in (inter)national standardised food chains and the relationship between chang-

ing livelihoods and new markets. Corinna Wallrapp (Göttingen) then presented her research results on the commodification of the Yarshagumba mushroom. Under the title “Institutional Issues, Power Struggles and Local Solutions – Governance Systems of Yarshagumba Collection in India and Nepal in the Kailash Landscape” she showed which local and regional changes are triggered by the increased demand for the mushroom, which is used as a medicine. Miriam Wenner (Göttingen) completed the section. Focusing on a social movement advocating regional autonomy in Darjeeling, India, she analysed how ideal concepts of politics and anti-politics become effective in action and space and contribute to the legitimisation of political actors. Nicolas Schlitz (Osnabrück) was the last speaker of the day. He presented his findings on the social embedding of value production in informal recycling networks in Kolkatta.

The paper sessions were followed by a discussion on research ethics and the special conditions of geographical research by European scientists in the Global South and was moderated by Katharina Molitor (Cologne). She presented some insights from a survey conducted among the members of the South Asia Working Group on the research methods used.

The first session on Saturday morning dealt with the Indian diaspora. Pierre Gottschlich (Rostock) gave the first presentation on “The Indian Diaspora in the USA as a Transnational Political Actor”. He showed that the Indian community is well integrated and economically successful in the USA. Furthermore, he made clear that the diaspora is/was of particular relevance for the development of Hindu nationalism in India. Hindu communities in the USA have been shaped or infiltrated by nationalist organisations since the 1970s and have had a great influence on the identity of the second generation. Carsten Butsch (Cologne) presented his research results on remittances of Indian migrants in Germany. He revealed different motivations for remittances being paid to family members and friends or for charitable purposes and how these practices and motives change over time.

In the second session, on agriculture and land use change, Paul D. Wagner (Kiel) presented a model for assessing future landscape change in the Western Ghats. He showed that, in the past, a decline in near-natural areas and an increase in settlement areas were accompanied by an increase in arable land in the Western Ghats. However, for the future, his model forecasts urban growth at the expense of arable land. Luisa Knobloch’s (Göttingen) paper presentation on “Genetic Engineering in India’s Agriculture – A Policy of Knowledge and Ignorance” resulted in strong discussions among the participants. In particular, she outlined the mechanisms behind politicised technological transformations in India in the recent past. Katharina Molitor (Cologne) discussed the role of food price fluctuations in food security for small farmers and their inclusion in (local) markets, using Bangladesh as an example.

In the concluding session on economic developments in South Asia, Raquib Ahmed (Cologne) spoke about “Economic Integration in South Asia and the Regionalisation Process”. He presented various approaches to economic cooperation within South Asia and analysed the opportunities for deeper economic integration in the region. Satyendra Singh (Cologne) presented the results of his project “Informality as Instrument of Formal Sector Competitiveness – A Case Study of Women Homeworkers in Delhi, India”, examining the connections between female homeworkers and the formal sector in Delhi. He showed how women workers become competitive even though they are in a precarious situation without any form of social security.

During the general meeting of the working group on Friday evening, the speakers provided information about the activities of the past year. In addition to the annual meeting, joint sessions were organised at various conferences and two volumes were published in the working group’s publication series. Carsten Butsch, Alexander Follmann (both Cologne), Martin Franz (Osnabrück) and Markus Keck (Göttingen) were confirmed as speakers in the annual elections of the group of speakers. After a transitional period, Judith Müller (Heidelberg) will replace Julia Poerting (Bonn) as the coordinator of the working group’s publication series. The next annual conference will take place in Heidelberg on 25 and 26 January 2019. Further information about the working group and planned events can be found at [www.geographien-suedasiens.de](http://www.geographien-suedasiens.de).

*Alexander Follmann / Martin Franz*