

GRANTEE EXPERIENCE REPORT

Indo-German Centre for Sustainability (IGCS)
IGCS Research Exchange, Grant Period 2024

scholarship report

Smriti Saraswat



IGCS Grantee

Dr. Smriti Saraswat

Home Institute

Dept. of Architecture and Planning, IIT Roorkee

Home Supervisor

Dr. Christoph Woiwode (IIT Madras); Self (IIT Roorkee)

Host Institute

Dept. of Architectural Theory, RWTH Aachen University, Aachen, Germany

Host Supervisor

Prof. Axel Sowa

Research Topic

Higher Education Collaborations for Developing Framework for Vibrant Villages and Sustainable Communities in the Himalayan and Alpen Regions

Focus Area

Land Use

Starting/End date of the student exchange period

08/07/2024 – 08/08/2024



The poster features a smiling woman with a backpack on the left side. The background is dark red with a white mandala pattern behind the woman. The IGCS logo is in the top right corner. The main text reads: 'Grants For Students and Researchers', 'Conduct Research on sustainability topics in India or Germany', 'APPLICATION OPEN', and 'Floating deadline for the year 2024'. At the bottom, there are logos for funding partners: DAAD, Ministry of Education and Research, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, RWTH Aachen University, C I A U, and TU9.

IGCS
INDO-GERMAN Centre
for SUSTAINABILITY

Grants For Students and Researchers
Conduct Research on sustainability topics in India or Germany

APPLICATION OPEN
Floating deadline for the year 2024

For more information: <https://www.igcs-chennai.org/grants/>

Funded by: DAAD, Ministry of Education and Research, Federal Ministry of Education and Research

In association with: RWTH AACHEN UNIVERSITY, C I A U, TU9

As a beneficiary of the IGCS research exchange scholarship, the grantee has committed to share the outcome of their stay in the host institution. This report is containing a detailed summary of their work, findings and expected outcomes:

Part I: Research Brief

Creation of a Concept Paper on 'Higher Education Collaborations for Developing Framework for Vibrant Villages and Sustainable Communities in the Himalayan and Alpen Regions': Exponential growth of urban population is becoming a serious threat to our sustainable future especially with the UN DESA (2018) predictions wherein 75 percent of world's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050. These predictions pose serious ecological, economic, and social implications against the successful adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals adapted by the UN in 2021. Revisiting and revitalizing rural communities through partnerships (SDG-17) are emerging out as key solutions to prevent excessive urbanization and successfully ascertaining SDG-11 (sustainable communities). Framework for comprehensive development and well-being of nations, by engaging local communities, is vital to address the above-mentioned issues. Based on the above, the proposed concept paper focused on steps to develop framework, which facilitated harnessing the wisdom nexus from the rural communities within the Himalayan Region (of India, Nepal and Bhutan) and Alpen Region (in Germany), which are an embodiment of sustainability and resilience. This research aimed towards fostering Internationalisation and Higher Education Collaborations, through identification of diverse stakeholders and creation of a concept note, focusing on developing the framework for vibrant villages and sustainable communities in the Himalayan context (India, Nepal and Bhutan) and Alpen region (Germany), which face similar challenges, and offer similar opportunities, in terms of addressing and accomplishing sustainable development goals, focusing on the mountainous areas. The concept note was developed, over a period of four weeks, during 01 July – 01 August 2024, based on regular discussions with the host at the RWTH Aachen University, and the representatives of the IGCS. The collaborative efforts focused on vibrant villages and SDGs; participatory planning; traditional built environment and design-build practices; indigenous crafts; material cultural studies; diverse interventions at material, technology, skill, entrepreneurship, and policy levels; and, climate change, while harnessing collective and transboundary knowledge across communities, in the four selected countries of the world. The grantee showcased the research works conducted in the Himalayan States of Uttarakhand and Tripura (North and North-East parts of India), especially highlighting the montaineous ecosystems; profound knowledge of communities; land use patterns; local resources; material pallettes; interior architecture; crafts; way of life of communities; and, traditional knowledge systems encapsulating innately, the concepts of sustainability. Starting with this exchange, an emphasis was laid in the concept note, on continued mobility and exchange, short and long terms courses, workshops, tutorials, symposia for vibrant village and sustainable development. The training and educational partnerships were proposed, to drive joint research, startups, scholarships, joint PhDs, engagement of graduate students, intuitive learning, oral knowledge sharing to generate information and database for sustainable development in the mountainous regions of the Himalayas in India, Nepal and Bhutan, and the Alps in Germany. The key objectives, which formed the core of this research, and informed creation of the shared concept notes are – 1) Development of comprehensive framework(s) for vibrant villages and sustainable communities, tailored to specific needs and context of the identified Himalayan and Alpen regions; 2) Fostering knowledge sharing and dissemination, exchange and capacity-building amongst higher education institutions in India, Germany,

Nepal and Bhutan, by building a consortium and steering a network, focusing on global circumstances, related to vibrant villages and sustainable communities; 3) Creating SDG-related study and qualification programs and improving the structure of the graduate education, focusing on vibrant villages and sustainable communities in the identified regions, offered by partner Universities in collaboration with non-university stakeholders; and, 4) Strengthening and expanding the organizational structures at partner universities with an aim to promote Sustainable Development Goals. Taking the above-mentioned research brief and objectives, as guiding framework, and driven by several discussions, concentrating on trans-disciplinary aspects of sustainability and land use, a concept note was developed, aligned with the two project Calls (DAAD and ERASMUS), which involve multiple partners, including RWTH Aachen University; IIT Madras; IGCS; and, IIT Roorkee. This base work shall provide useful insights and information, to further develop collaborative projects, initiatives and events. The other findings and learnings are – 1) need for popularising the philosophies and concepts related to sustainable ways of living, and taking initiatives to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges that play a vital role in developing a holistic understanding of the historic, cultural, social and symbolic value of sustainable communities and societies; 2) encouraging the participation of other-than-literate-people, who represent informal sectors and communities, in the formal set up of Schools and Universities, for promoting co-learning models of pedagogy and practice; 3) promoted the role of community representatives; craftspersons; youth, especially women, in the non-traditional sectors like education and encouraging their participation in varied courses, workshops, exhibitions and events at academic Institutes, which focus on cultural, aesthetic, material and economic sustainability; 3) creating IGCS Ambassadors and contributing to the shared goals and objectives, focusing on SDGs; 4) continuing to conduct joint exercises; studios; exhibitions; projects, focusing on sustainable development goals, especially SDG -11 (sustainable communities); SDG - 15 (mountaneous ecosystems); SDG - 17 (global partnerships). Overall, it was a very enriching experience, working on this research, as part of the IGCS Grant. The Home Institution and the Host Institution continue to work together, and build further on this fundamental note, envisioning future endeavours and joint projects.

Part II: Digital Media

Grantees are invited to share their experiences in digital media, encompassing photographs, illustrations, or graphics within the context of the IGCS scholarship.

