

GRANTEE EXPERIENCE REPORT

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

experience 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

RWTH Aachen University

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 and association partners: DAAD, 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

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

As part of the IGCS scholarship grantees have agreed to provide an experience report to help IGCS evaluate their program. This experience report consists of two parts:

Part I: Written Testimonial

Prof. Axel Sowa from RWTH Aachen University and myself have recently completed a five-year long DAAD sponsored project, sanctioned under the Scheme 'A New Passage to India'. We are keen on working towards establishing a diverse academic consortium across India, Germany, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Our aim is to focus on achieving specific targets outlined in SDG-11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG-17: Partnerships for the Goals. We are working towards 'Developing a Framework for Sustainable Development of Himalayan Communities'. Indigenous materials, circular local economy and community-oriented development are the key areas of our focus.

Currently, I am working, based on citizen engagement, on - Smart City Initiatives; Vibrant Village Development; Craft Village Development and Reverse Migration; Rejuvenating Handicrafts and Handlooms of North - East India; Public Art and Community Well-being; and Sustainable Tourism (especially focusing on the Himalayan State of Uttarakhand). I believe, the mentioned body of work can ably represent issues from Global South, and these experiences and findings are well aligned with the objectives and core activities of the IGCS. I also hosted a student from the Alberta University, Canada, during August - October 2024, who got selected through the Indo - Canadian Shastri Program, to work with me, on the project 'Empowering Himalayan Communities: Strategies for Sustainable Development in Himalayan Villages'. Owing to my experience of working in the Himalayan region, for the past 11 years, I believe, I could contribute to the vision and mission of the IGCS, especially focusing on the area – 'Land Use/ Rural and Urban Development'. I could also benefit from attending diverse sessions, which were conducted as part of the Summer School – "Regenerative Urban Futures: Circular Economies and Societies". These interactions opened possible windows for collaborations between IIT Roorkee, IIT Madras and RWTH Aachen, strengthening the consortium that I have mentioned above.

My expectation from the research exchange, was primarily to develop a concept note on 'Higher Education Collaborations for Developing Framework for Vibrant Villages and Sustainable Communities in the Himalayan and Alpen Regions'. I could have discussions with Prof. Axel and his team (Architectural Theory); Prof. Marzia, Prof. Rose and their team (INAB); Prof. Woiwode; Prof. Ashwin; members of the International Office at RWTH Aachen; participants of the Summer School; and, the larger RWTH fraternity. Based on these discussions, some initiatives have been taken up, including proposals for upcoming project calls, aligned with the concept note, mentioned above.

Through this exchange, I could continue my long-standing efforts towards fostering Internationalisation and Higher Education Collaborations, and encourage mobility; exchange; joint initiatives. Moreover, it widened my perspectives on sustainability and circular economy, which I believe, will contribute to the seven PhD theses, related to diverse aspects of sustainability, currently being guided by me, at IIT Roorkee.

My most memorable experiences were – meeting people from different countries and ethnicities; cultural exchanges; sharing of trans-disciplinary ideas; expanding my understanding about the city and people of Aachen, through Strollology; experiencing gastronomical delights; brainstorming over coffee and peach tea; spending time in Prof. Axel's office, concentrating on materialising shared goals and future endeavours; a fabulous evening of Indian Classical music; and, near by excursions that highlighted varied aspects of sustainability, society and way of life.

The lecture titled "Sustainable Solutions: Bridging Food and Plastic Waste through Circular Economy in Mumbai, India," presented by Mr. Shakti Yadav, was the most inspiring session for me at the IGCS Summer School. Mr. Yadav's presentation offered a compelling narrative of his journey from the initial stages of his work to achieving impactful outcomes in waste management and circular economy practices.

I aim to leverage the connections that I have established, during this research exchange, to create inter-disciplinary projects and partnerships that enhance the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives in Global South and beyond. I plan to share the valuable insights gained during several discussions, within my academic and professional circles, and aspire to apply the learnings, while engaging with local communities; academic experts; industry representatives; individuals; citizens; and, global networks.

I have some suggestions for the future recipients of the IGCS grants and participants of the IGCS events:

1. Preparing your application: Prior to sending your application, feel free to have discussions with the International Offices at IIT Madras and RWTH Aachen University. Their teams are very cooperative and supportive. Approach your enquiry with an open mind. The diverse perspectives and experiences gained during the exchange, can provide profound insights and inspire new ways of thinking about research in general; sustainability, society and development, in particular.
2. Networking and Connecting: Take advantage of the opportunity to connect with fellow grantees, speakers, and experts. Building a robust network of contacts can lead to valuable collaborations, partnerships, and ongoing support for your projects and research.
3. Worldview: Engage actively in discussions, workshops, and interactive sessions, to contribute to global discourses and your own worldview, on important matters and Universal issues. Do not hesitate to ask questions, share your own experiences, and seek feedback. This proactive approach will enhance your learning experience and contribute to meaningful exchanges of ideas.
4. Applying the Learnings: Reflect on how the concepts and strategies discussed can be applied to your work and context, while simultaneously stimulating long-term, widespread and global applications. Make a plan to integrate these learnings into your projects and research, and consider how they can drive innovation and positive change in your field.
5. Ripple Effects: Continue exploring and learning beyond the grant and associated events, and use the momentum to push forward, your existing and new initiatives, focusing on research in sustainable development.

Additionally, take full advantage of the WhatsApp groups and email groups, created during the research exchange, to stay connected in the future. Continued efforts and active communication, are the keys to maintaining professional relationships, exchanging ideas, and supporting each other in advancing joint initiatives.

Part II: Digital Media

Share your experience in digital media- maybe photographs, illustration, or graphics. Share them in the space below.



