

Indo-German Dialogue on Green Urban Practices: Social Innovation and change agents towards sustainable lifestyles and consumption

From 9 -11 March 2017 researchers, practitioners and activists from India, Germany and other countries gathered in Chennai for an Indo-German Dialogue on Green Urban Practices. The event was initiated and co-organised by Katrin Bienge and Kilian Topp from Wuppertal Institut and Dr. Christoph Woiwode, IGCS Visiting Professor. It was generously funded by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, New Delhi, and further supported with travel grants from the IGCS in Aachen. Several dignitaries addressed the participants during the opening of the event, Mr. Achim Fabig, Hon. Consul General, Chennai, Federal Republic of Germany; Dr. Axel Harneit-Sievers, Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation, New Delhi; and Prof Sudhir Chella Rajan, IGCS Area Coordinator Landuse, IIT Madras.

The three-day workshop was held at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai. Close to 40 participants from the civil society sector and academia engaged in three intensive days of dialogical interaction to share and explore their experiences about social innovation and change in an urban context. It was also an experiment in applying a relatively novel facilitation tool on the first two days of the event. The Collaboratory (collaboration laboratory), a temporary space of co-creation in which diverse stakeholders engage with each other around a complex burning issue, was conducted by the facilitators Dr. Markus Molz (Alliance for the Future, Luxembourg) and Prof. Ulrike Zeshan (University of Central Lancashire, UK). This included brainstorming, discussion rounds, and work phases in alternating groups using various interactive methods such as fishbowl and serious games, among others.

Based on the experience and discussions, participants started prototyping project ideas and concrete steps for Indo-German projects which may be carried out in the future. These include a plan to continue the interaction on a more regular basis with varying formats (workshops, festivals), as well as working on common themes such as urban gardening and local circular economies, car free days and mobility, and green decision making.

Day three was devoted to field visit to different locations offered by participants of the symposium. This included visits to three very different sites, that is, a residence with a rooftop permaculture kitchen garden in central Chennai (Magic Bean), a cooperative producer-consumer organic farm project on the western outskirts (Nallakeerai), as well as a start-up hydroponic enterprise for vertical, high-tech rooftop farming. All participants gained hands-on insight into local initiatives via the field trips on this day. There was overwhelming support among participants for continuing with dialogue meetings, so the event has carried some momentum, being seen as the starting point for further interactions.



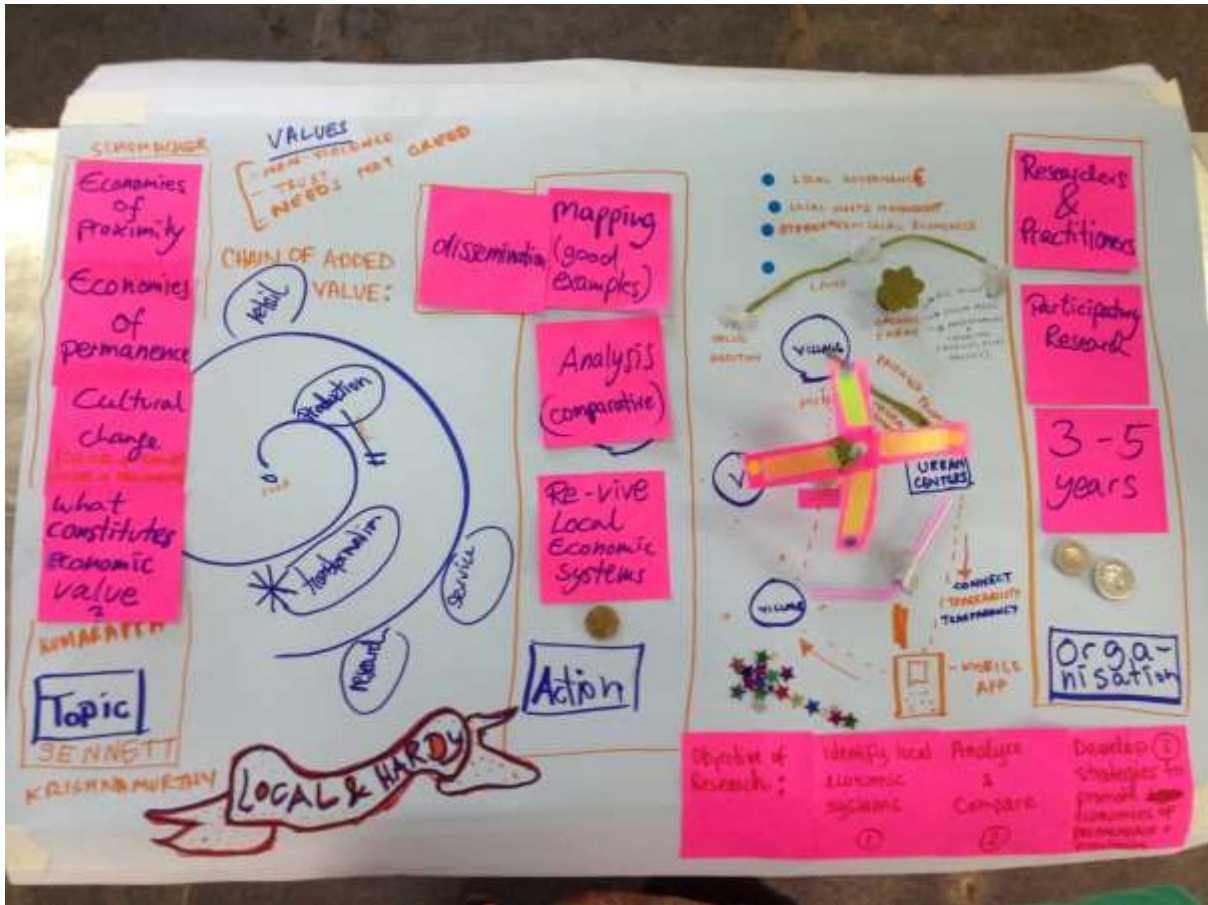
Participants of the Indo-German Dialogue



Painting for collective visioning



Working groups



Visual project planning



Roof top permaculture kitchen garden



Nallakeerai organic farm