

## GRANTEE EXPERIENCE REPORT

Indo-German Centre for Sustainability (IGCS)  
IGCS Research Exchange, Grant Period 2023

# experience report

Shiva Kumar Rajendra



Experience Report on IGCS Research Exchange, Grant Period 2023

**IGCS Grantee**

Dr. Shiva Kumar Rajendra

**Home Institute | Home Supervisor**

University of Mysore, Mysuru | Prof. Jayashree P.

**Host Institute | Host Supervisor**

RWTH Aachen University

Supervised by: Prof. Martina Fromhold-Eisebith

**Research Topic**

Spatial Dimensions of Urban Agriculture in India and Germany: A Comparative Study Between Bengaluru and Aachen Cities

**Starting/End date of the student exchange period**

01.06.2023 – 30.08.2023



**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, CIAU (Carl University of Applied Sciences), TU9 (German Association of Universities of Applied Sciences)

**About the IGCS Grants**

IGCS awards scholarships to students and researchers from India and Germany with excellent academic records, very good English, and intercultural communication skills. The scholarship consists of a mobility grant and an accommodation grant according to DAAD funding rates, as a rule. Learn more about the funding opportunities at IGCS [here](#).

## Experience Report on IGCS Research Exchange, Funding Period 2023

*As a beneficiary of the IGCS scholarship, the participant has committed to sharing their valuable experience. This report is designed to encompass two distinct parts:*

### **Part I: Written Testimonial**

Only I am responsible to the content of the experience report.

#### **Preparation**

While preparing for a postdoctoral scholarship, I was conducting an intensive search for promising prospects. Eventually, my attention was directed to an IGCS DAAD scholarship announcement on their official website. This sparked my interest in the Indo-German Centre for Sustainability Scholarship, which is funded by the DAAD and sponsored by the BMBF and is intended for short-term postdoctoral research.

My initial steps included thorough research on RWTH Aachen University offerings and faculty. Recognizing the relevance of my research to the field of Economic Geography, I reached out to Prof. Fromhold-Eisebith Martina, the Head of the department, to express my interest in the scholarship. To substantiate my application, I meticulously compiled a research proposal that aligned with my academic ambitions, coupled with my Academic CV, academic transcripts, PhD certificate, and a copy of my passport.

A focal point of my research interest was urban agriculture, a topic that resonated deeply with my academic pursuits. Interestingly, our institution practiced an annual celebration known as "soil day," which further fueled my fascination with this area of study. After the arduous wait of 6 months, I received a positive response from Prof. Martina, expressing her approval of my proposal. This validation was a significant milestone, followed by the thrilling news of being selected as a recipient of the scholarship by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).

Amid unexpected health setbacks in 2022, my intended journey to Aachen faced an unexpected delay. However, my persistence led me to request a deferment of my scholarship to 2023, spanning three months. I was thrilled when my plea was approved, granting me a renewed chance to pursue my academic goals in Aachen. This process, from initial application to the subsequent deferment, marked a journey defined by deliberate planning, thorough organization, and unwavering resolve.

#### **Accommodation**

When it comes to accommodation in Aachen, securing a guest house can be quite competitive. Planning well in advance is crucial, as guest houses often require booking up to 6 months ahead. In my case, my visa confirmation came at the very last moment of the exchange period, which posed some challenges.

Access various resources like Facebook and WhatsApp groups tailored for room seekers in Aachen to discover available rooms. These platforms facilitate direct connections between prospective tenants

and room providers. Join notable groups like AISA e.V, INCAS Aachen on Facebook, and AISA Family, Kannadigaru in Aachen on WhatsApp for instant updates on accommodation options. Various websites, like wg-gesucht.de, immobilienscout24.de, eBay Kleinanzeigen, and more, assist in finding accommodation apart from social media groups. Numerous online platforms, including housinganywhere.com, immowelt.de, and wunderflats.com, are valuable resources for locating suitable housing options. Engage with online resources and local groups to improve your chances of finding fitting accommodation in Aachen. Stay proactive and utilize these platforms to secure the best option aligned with your preferences and schedule.

### **The Host Institution**

Throughout my research exchange at RWTH Aachen University, I aimed to deeply explore sustainable urban agriculture methods, delving into the spatial intricacies within this field. This investigation in Aachen, Germany involved the exploration of advanced methodologies and technologies, aiming for a comprehensive comparison between Aachen and Bengaluru's urban agriculture, with a strong focus on sustainability.

The core of my study revolved around analyzing the spatial patterns and temporal dynamics supporting urban agriculture in both cities, requiring a detailed examination of their distinct sustainable practices and community involvement. To achieve this, I employed semistructured interviews, engaged in key informant interviews, and conducted thorough field observations to comprehend Aachen's urban agriculture practices comprehensively.

Along with my research, I attempted to actively participate in academic gatherings to promote information exchange and enrichment. However, due to the limits of the academic calendar, I was only able to attend one conference i.e., "6th International conference in Ocean Engineering coastal and Marine engineering: Challenges and trends" from 4th to 8th of June 2023 and one workshop – Integration into international teams working in Germany in the month of June offered by the welcome centre for international researchers. Because of the overlap with students' exam schedules and faculty vacations, my participation in these activities was limited, but this did not decrease their importance in widening my academic horizons.

Prof. Martina provided me with invaluable support and exceptional guidance. She possesses a high level of intelligence and has achieved significant excellence in the field of Geography. Her teaching approach was both relaxed and friendly, consistently delivering information in the most optimal manner to enhance research outcomes. Professor Jayashree, my supervisor at the Indian university, maintained regular communication with me and stayed informed about the progress of my research. She offered constant support and guidance whenever it was needed.

My studies in Aachen culminated with the completion of my research, offering deep insights into urban agriculture's spatial dynamics and sustainable practices. This journey at RWTH Aachen University provided invaluable experiences and extensive academic growth opportunities. Through inquiry,

comparison, investigation, and interaction, I gained a global perspective on urban agriculture and sustainable development methods.

### **Working and living with local students and researchers**

My immersion into RWTH Aachen University's academic sphere was greatly facilitated by a fellow research scholar upon my arrival. This welcoming interaction set a positive tone for my integration into the department. Acquiring a dedicated workspace within the Economics department from the university added to the supportive environment.

Collaborating with the vibrant community of researchers at RWTH Aachen University was truly inspiring. Despite their busy schedules, they graciously shared their expertise, particularly in Geospatial Technologies, aiding me with software installations, data analysis, and practical insights into urban agriculture locations. Beyond their academic pursuits, the camaraderie among researchers was evident in weekly shared lunches and departmental meetings, fostering a sense of solidarity. The community's adept organization of events showcased their commitment to both academic and social interactions, offering moments for cultural exchange and relaxation.

This engagement with the local academic community not only enriched my academic journey but also exposed me to their strong work ethic, collaborative spirit, and adept organizational abilities. My experience at RWTH Aachen University was deeply shaped by the welcoming and supportive atmosphere fostered by the academic community.

### **Everyday-life and free time**

Aachen stands out as a picturesque city with impeccable streets and a populace strictly adhering to traffic regulations, a rhythm I naturally fell into. Despite lodging in Rothe Erde, a distance from RWTH Aachen University, I navigated daily via buses, trains, and cabs. While the city offers a diverse array of hotels, evenings and weekends often found me in Indian restaurants.

The university canteen became a regular haunt for its delectable breakfasts and lunches. Field observations on urban agriculture led me across community gardens, allotment areas, and urban agricultural zones, facilitated by Google Maps. Engaging in semi-structured interviews with urban farmers offered invaluable insights into their methodologies.

To deepen my understanding, visits to RWTH Aachen University's Architecture department and interactions with urban agriculture experts were crucial. Key informant interviews at Gut Hebscheid and Büchel Garden expanded my insights. Beyond Aachen, exploring urban agriculture techniques in Wuppertal and utilizing the university library for relevant materials furthered my research.

Although constrained by research demands, I managed to explore nearby cities like Cologne, Dusseldorf, Koblenz, Dortmund, Trier, and Bonn. Aachen's surroundings beckoned, urging me to

discover Monschau, Simmerath, and the tri-border point linking Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The pinnacle was a visit to Amsterdam, a cherished part of my European escapade.

Germany's efficient train system facilitated intercity travel. Engaging in campus programs, attending gatherings like summer parties and the supervisor's birthday dinner, and savoring field trip meal camaraderie became a part of my experience. Sundays, marked as a day of rest with most shops closed, offered tranquil moments within my apartment. Aachen created a mosaic of cherished moments, blending travel escapades, culinary joys, research explorations, and scenic wonders into an unforgettable chapter of my life's journey.

### **Other Information**

The journey to my host university posed its own challenges, requiring assistance from friends to ensure timely arrival. Commencing from Mysuru, I took a taxi to Bengaluru airport, embarking on a comfortable Emirates Airlines flight to Frankfurt. This leg of the journey provided excellent customer service and navigational information via the in-flight entertainment screen. From Frankfurt, an astounding ICE train swiftly covered 300 kilometers to Cologne in under an hour. Subsequently, boarding the regional train (RE-1) to Aachen's Rothe Erde station, I arrived in the city around midnight.

All expenses, including food, travel, and accommodation, were settled before reaching Aachen. An early request for the one-month scholarship funds from the IGCS coordinator was fulfilled within 20 days, aligning with their standard process. To ensure comprehensive coverage during my three-month stay, I purchased TATA IAG insurance amounting to Rs. 250,000.

Securing a visa posed considerable challenges. Despite applying in February, my visa was rejected in late March, leading to a complex situation. Extensive efforts contacting VFS centers and the German consulate yielded no results. Resorting to an appeal letter addressed to the German embassy and seeking assistance from IGCS and my supervisor, I finally obtained visa approval after a month-long process.

The visa rejection resulted in significant financial losses due to ticket cancellations, rescheduling, insurance expenses, institutional certificates, and other arrangements. This ordeal emphasized the intricate nature of visa applications and their potential financial implications. My journey to Aachen showcased the interplay between practical arrangements, unforeseen obstacles, and the crucial support network. Overcoming these hurdles required determination, collaboration, and strategic maneuvering, ultimately realizing my stay in Aachen.

### **Conclusion**

My exchange stint in Aachen has profoundly impacted both my personal growth and academic journey. Despite significant challenges, my dedication led to a wealth of insights into urban agriculture techniques. The well-organized city setting provided an ideal backdrop for a fruitful learning experience.

Beyond academics, the controlled environment offered diverse cultural engagement, new dietary habits, and exposure to innovative urban agricultural practices, enriching my learning journey. My supervisor's unwavering support was pivotal in achieving academic milestones. Their guidance uncovered gaps, refining my research methodology and enhancing my skills.

Reflecting on my experience, I propose dedicated guest housing for short-term researchers. Current booking practices, demanding reservations six months ahead, pose difficulties, especially with unexpected disruptions like Visa changes. Implementing this change would alleviate stress, easing researchers' transitions and fostering smoother integration into academic environments

"Grateful for the opportunity to embark on this Post Doc journey under exceptional guidance. Looking forward to staying connected with the incredible IGCS family for future collaborations and opportunities."

**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.

