

Editorial

Geographies of South Asia: Empirical Research and the Pandemic

Carsten Butsch, Alexander Follmann, Markus Keck, Judith Müller

Introduction

Empirical research is essential for Geography as a discipline. However, due to the current pandemic, collecting data and conducting fieldwork abroad has become an impossibility. Under current circumstances projects can only be carried out with reduced scope or have been completely put on hold, while researchers and PhD candidates are struggling with a very difficult situation – not only data-wise. Against this backdrop, we would like to use the scope of this editorial to reflect upon the meaning of the current COVID-19 pandemic both for geographical research in South Asia and for Geography as discipline. First, we will provide an overview of empirical studies that members of the South Asia Study Group have recently conducted and published. Afterward, we will briefly illustrate how the pandemic has unfolded in South Asian countries and affected their societies. Finally, we will discuss how geographers are dealing with the current situation and what we can learn from it for the future of Geography as a discipline with regional competences.

Geographical research in South Asia

Research in Human Geography is largely fieldwork-based using quantitative and qualitative social science methods while, in recent years, ethnographic methods have increasingly been applied too. Physical geographers use different kinds of natural science methods including, among others, the collection and chemical analysis of soil and water samples, vegetation analysis, or repeat photography. Methods used by both subdisciplines include mapping techniques as well as remote sensing and other geospatial forms of data collection (e.g. satellite images) that are fed into and analyzed by means of Geographical Information Systems. In all cases, direct contact with the ground and access to the “field” is essential.

Geographical research in South Asia funded and conducted by German research institutions has focused on a broad range of topics. Members of the Priority Program 1233 “Megacities–Megachallenge – Informal Dynamics of Global