
Introduction: Interdisciplinary Approach to Regional Cooperation in South Asia

Sumana Bandyopadhyay, André Torre, Paulo Casaca,
and Tomaz Dentinho

South Asia is one of the more important and central spaces of the twenty-first century globalization. Therefore, the interactions between people, institutions and countries in this part of the world have a fundamental effect not only for peace, development and sustainability in the region but also for the wealth, harmony and welfare around the world.

On-going globalization creates opportunities and threats for all the world but those challenges are even more fundamental for South Asia where globalization is rooted. But, notwithstanding the growing global proximity between peoples and places all over the world there still remain major communication barriers, knowledge gaps and missing understanding of each other which limit trust and cooperation between various groups of people.

The aim of the book is to contribute to reduce these communication barriers, knowledge gaps and missing understandings by highlighting the major issues that emerge for regional cooperation in South Asia, in different ways. The publication is a participatory look into various themes and topics: the socio-economic issues, infrastructure networks and adapted spaces; environment and ecological problems and institutional themes.

S. Bandyopadhyay
University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India
e-mail: sumona_bm@yahoo.com

A. Torre
INRA – Agroparistech, Université Paris Saclay, Paris, France
e-mail: torre@agroparistech.fr

P. Casaca
South Asia Democratic Forum, Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: paulo@sadf.eu

T. Dentinho (✉)
University of Azores, Angra do Heroísmo, Azores, Portugal
e-mail: tomas.lc.dentinho@uac.pt

For each of these broad areas, the book focuses and analyses the major facts that occur in the past and present and highlights the consequences that these facts could have on regional cooperation and development in South Asia and the challenges they generate for its societies, scientific knowledge and public entities policies.

The book identifies, justifies and clarifies the major challenges and opportunities for regional cooperation and development in South Asia. In light of the ongoing globalization process, the contributors investigate how socio-economic developments are changing the spatial organization of production and the profile of cities and landscapes, stimulating the creation of routes and channels, however, putting increasing pressures on natural and environmental resources.

The book is divided into four parts: The first part analyses the increasing intensity of human interaction through trade, investment and migration; the second focuses on channels and adapted spaces; the third one addresses sustainability and natural resources, while the fourth highlights institutional issues. This introductory chapter goes along the different parts and chapters of the book and proposes some integrated reading guidelines for the various texts, identifying challenges for further research.

1 Human Interaction in Space

The First Part of the book focuses on human interactions in space. In the contribution written by Rajat Acharyya the author looks into the international trade and wage gaps using a general equilibrium framework. The contribution written by Tomaz Dentinho and Joaquim Ramos Silva, analyses the causes and the effects of foreign direct investment in South Asia. Finally, the contribution authored by Mizanur Sarker proposes an analysis of migration flows in South Asia.

Rajat Acharyya discusses different theories to explain the impact of trade liberalization in the widening of the wage-gap in developed and developing countries, providing some examples regarding the relation between India and the World. It is a very enlightened and pedagogic exercise that makes a robust review of the literature and suggests alternative theoretical frameworks to explain the changes in the wage-gap. The argument is that, beyond the influence of production factor abundance, other elements such as production specificities, initial level of protection and segmented labour markets may cause the widening of wage-gaps, as has been observed in develop and developing countries.

Tomaz Dentinho and Joaquim Ramos Silva also examines globalisation, while assuming South Asia to be in the core of the process. The authors argue that the institutional barriers that constraint the flows of goods, investment and knowledge will strongly influence the structure of globalisation. Using an econometric model to identify the factors that shape the flows of investment to and from the region they show that institutional barriers are the main constraints that influences FDI, cooperation and development in the region.

The First Part finishes with the contribution of Mizanur Sarker that analyses the causes and categories of migration in South Asia and looks into the major

outcomes—such as the allocation of remittances and the income multiplier effects they entail—and side effects concerning gender violation and children trafficking. The author concludes that in South Asia remittances have been gradually becoming the main engine of GDP growth.

2 Role of Infrastructural Networks on Cooperation and Development

The Second Part of the book explores the role of infrastructure networks on cooperation and development. The text written by Ram Upendra Das, looks into the South Asia Connectivity. The contribution developed by Siegfried Wolf, raises awareness on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Vijay Pandey looks into the urbanization and infrastructural needs in South Asia. And, finishing the part of adapted spaces, Chinmoyee Mallik, scrutinizes the issue of land dispossession in Rajarhat and Singur.

Ram Upendra Das argues that connectivity is not just infrastructure but also claims that in South Asia the limitations of the infrastructure network constitute a strong limiting factor for human, commercial, informational and financial flows. Ram Upendra Das favours the private sector to play a major role in infrastructure investments to boost the growth of South Asia as a region. In his conclusions some concrete recommendations are provided, namely South Asian agreements on railways, motor vehicles and energy.

Siegfried Wolf focuses attention on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that links the South West of China to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan. The author puts CPEC in the contexts of terrestrial and sea connections between China and the outside world and refers to its implementation. In a second point the texts highlight the interests of Pakistan in attracting FDI, the interests of China in improving security and development in South West China, and the worries of India associated to the possibility of changes of the equilibrium of forces in disputed territories or the creation of a Chinese naval base in the Indian Ocean. The chapter proposes a set of recommendations for a future agreement between India and Pakistan stressing that infrastructure is not a sufficient condition for a fruitful interaction between people.

Still in the scope of adapted spaces, Vijay Pandey pays attention to the infrastructural gap in urban areas which the increasing urbanization process reinforces. The countries under analysis are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and its focus is not only transport infrastructure (and its impacts on the access to education, health and security) but also in housing, water supply, sanitation, sewage and solid waste management. The author argues that, beyond other, there is a need for improved urban governance involving coordination and decentralization, adequate taxes and subsidies, competition, autonomous regulations, accountability, corruption control, attraction of FDI and improving the performance of local financial markets.

The Second Part of the book finishes with the contribution of Kanika Basu and Nila Pandian that addresses the important issue of housing in South Asia centring

the analysis on India. The argument is that the supply of housing is behind the demand coming from increased urbanization which leads to the growth of slums in the urban landscape. The chapter synthesises the eleven Housing Plans since the fifties until today and tries to find the policy gaps that allowed the proliferation of slums in urban areas. The problem is that the construction programmes were made but not taking into account those who need them, at a place and price that is suited.

3 Sustainability and Natural Resources

The Third Part of the book looks into the allocation, sharing and sustainability of natural resources in South Asia. The contribution written by Chinmoyee Mallik, looks into the importance of land property rights. The text written by Klara Feldes, analyses inter-state water conflicts in India. Kalyan Rudra looks into water sharing between India and Bangladesh. The reflections developed by Habibullah Magsi and M. Javed Sheikh, focus on seawater intrusion in coastal areas of Pakistan. Also related to coastal issues, Anisah Lee Abdullah looks in the sustainability of marine resources. Finally, Humayun Kabir, Jakariya and Syeda Shahida Maknun, analyse energy interdependency in South Asia highlighting the role of renewable energies.

Chinmoyee Mallik, looks into the processes of land requisitions in the deployment of the new city of Rajarhat and the industrial site of Singur, both in the region of Kolkata. The study shows that, first, those whose land were not requested are better off than the ones whose land was requested; second, landlords gain more than tenant cultivators; and, thirdly, those who sold land to private entities have better outcomes than those who sold their land to the State. Summing up, asset poverty is a key issue in transition livelihoods. Therefore, it is not strange that land is the most contentious element for policy makers that deal with the territory.

Border disputes on water between Indian States are analysed by Klara Feldes. It looks at the case of Polavaram Dam, a dam planned within the scope of the Indian National River Linking Project. The author argues that the multidimensionality of water issues has real difficulties in being generally accepted by simplistic agreements defined at State level. She also highlights the lack of effective law enforcement schemes for the developers of the projects.

Transboundary water issues are analysed by Kalyan Rudra focussing on water sharing between India and Bangladesh. The author says that rivers are political entities, and that sustainable balance between water use and water flow should be reached. The chapter highlights the disruptive impact on river flows of the delimitation of the border based on religion affiliations of populations. The cases analysed are the diversion of the Ganges by the Farakka Dam and its impacts on irrigation, salinization, navigation and soil composition; the water sharing plan of the Teesta river, which not only overestimated available resources but also did not sort out conflicting demands of urban ecological flow, water supply, irrigation and hydroelectricity. These conflicting demands mobilize stakeholders in both countries.

The issue of seawater intrusion in the coastal area of Pakistan caused by the dams in the Indus River is analysed by Habibullah Magsi and M. Javed Sheikh. Using a questionnaire made to a representative sample of farmers the study concluded that most of the affected farmers had to switch from agriculture either to livestock herding and fishing as an alternative source of employment and income, or to migrate. The chapter concludes that the dissemination of salt tolerant crop varieties, the improvement of infrastructure and soil reclamation can enhance social and economic conditions of local populations.

Anisah Lee Abdullah highlights the issues of shrinking biodiversity, reduction of fish resources, sea level rise, climate exodus and human health hazards related to environmental issues. Examples of severe cases in South Asian coastal areas suffering from increasing population pressures are shown. The importance of the text comes from its integrated proposals on urban infrastructure; waste recycling; river cleaning and long term strategic action for biodiversity restoration.

The analysis of sustainable management of natural resources in South Asia ends with the contribution of Humayun Kabir, Jakariya and Syeda Shahida Maknun dedicated to energy interdependency. The main argument is that the economic growth of the region is increasing energy demand which, associated with the actual distribution of energy resources and production capabilities, is requiring further energy cooperation in the region. Issues related to rent allocation for the use of natural energy resources are getting more attention. The strategy proposed involves the creation of a regional market of energy based on suitable infrastructures, supported by good rules for trade and investment on energy.

4 Institutional Issues

The Fourth and last part of the book explores the institutional issues related to land, trade, infrastructural investments, world organisations and international relations. Roxane de Flore looks into land practices in the process of city-making in South India. Wolfgang-Peter Zingel analyses Indian trade relations with Europe. Muazzam Sabir and André Torre look into conflicts on the creation of big infrastructures in Pakistan. The text developed by Arjun Sharma, Anna-Luise Chané and Idesbald Goddeeris, focuses on the differences between South Asian countries regarding human rights. Finally, Siegfried Wolf proposes an analysis of democracy in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Roxane de Flore pays attention to the design and impact of laws and practices of land acquisition and land conversion in the creation of cities. The paper emphasises the way the Indian Government acts when there is a need to use space for some huge investments. It is explained how individual strategies and social networks play a crucial role in the determination of land prices that have impacts on equity, power reconfiguration, project sustainability and the profile of conflicts. The paper shows that land acquisitions for big projects are complex because users and owners are historically, socially and territorially rooted.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel begins by a synthetic historical and geographical contextualization of India; compares the growth path of India with the one of China along the twenty-first century and discusses the pros and cons of regional integration, explaining why India keeps the protection of the service sector while highlighting that South Asia is the least integrated region of the world. Nevertheless, the author notes the good trade relations with the Arab countries and Israel, increasing trade with South East countries, on-going negotiations with European countries and understandable queries on the impacts of Brexit. The basic assumption is that with the weight of India any change in trade relations will have an important impact.

The role of proximity in institutional relations is discussed by Muazzam Sabir and André Torre. It analyses land use conflicts arising from the project of construction of a dam in Pakistan, trying to understand how geographical and organized proximities influence these conflicts. There is a description of the region and the project, an identification of the main conflicts related to compensation payments to common and private land as well as to ethnicity and how these conflicts are associated with geographical and organized proximities. The text concludes that strong negotiation skills and involvement of third parties may be helpful for improving the situation of local actors and affectees.

Human rights in South Asia are the focus of the analysis of Arjun Sharma, Anna-Luise Chané and Idesbald Goddeeris. Using social network analysis, the authors show that a majority of South Asian countries do not participate actively in (co-) sponsoring resolutions at the Human Rights Council. Nevertheless, it is shown that South Asian countries share a common commitment to socio-economic rights and to the protection of women and children and some common agreement to disagree with western countries.

The last chapter of the book analyses the state of democracy in South Asia, focusing on the political systems of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Siegfried Wolf addresses the challenges for democracy in these countries and argues that other than looking into the regularity of elections it is also required to look on the electoral regime, civil rights, participation, separation of powers and governance in those countries. All countries have now regular elections. Nevertheless, media controls are still enduring, human rights violations are high, separation of legislative, executive, judiciary and military powers is blurred, and effective governance is clearly missing. The chapter concludes that although a smooth progress is sensed in the region regarding embedded democracy, there are major constraints related to inequality and major threats linked to terrorism.

5 Conclusion

Nowadays, South Asia is one of the more remarkable places of the globalisation process and an example of reflection in terms of development processes, with implicit challenges and opportunities for regional cooperation. Along this book different authors show the enormous growth potential that can be generated if

agreements on free trade, wise migration, adjustable investments and development of strong and adequate local institutions can be effectively implemented in the region. They should be seconded by route and energy links and by sensible urban network policies regarding accessibility, housing, employment, sewage and waste and associated with prudent policies on water, land, coastal and conservation management. All these changes are difficult to implement without smooth institutional changes in water, land and trade negotiations. For these changes, human, organized and geographical proximity play a crucial role, a role that should be complemented by the smooth development of an embedded and resilient democracy.