

Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Programme for Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies (PIRS) University of Southampton

RECRUITMENT CYCLE for studentships starting: October 2024

SUPERVISORY TEAM

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STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE

Mapping Everyday Resilience in the Age of Anthropocene: Perspectives from the SMEs in India's Global City

OVERVIEW

This project examines the resilience strategies of small and medium-sized enterprises in Mumbai, India, facing climate change impacts. Through ethnographic fieldwork and interdisciplinary analysis, it explores how SMEs navigate environmental uncertainties and resource constraints. The project also includes policy research to inform strategies for enhancing SME resilience in Global South.

SUMMARY

This interdisciplinary research project focuses on exploring and mapping the everyday resilience strategies employed by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Mumbai, India's most international city, which faces threats to its sustainable future due to the impacts of climate change. By integrating perspectives from environmental anthropology,

the sociology of entrepreneurship, and policy engagement, the project aims to understand the challenges posed by the Anthropocene era and the strategies employed by SMEs to respond to these challenges.

The project will employ ethnographic fieldwork methods, with supervision from an anthropologist (KC) with extensive experience conducting long-term fieldwork in India. The candidate will study the daily activities and social interactions of low-end SME communities in Mumbai. Through this approach, the research aims to uncover the diverse strategies these communities employ to cope with environmental uncertainties, resource constraints, market dynamics, and political changes. Additionally, a sociologist specialising in entrepreneurship in constrained contexts (MVV) will provide supervision for innovative theoretical analysis of the entrepreneurial dynamics within these communities. This integrated supervision approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors influencing SME resilience.

Furthermore, the project incorporates a policy research component in collaboration with an expert in policy analysis and development in India (YY). This collaboration will enable the generation of policy recommendations based on insights gained from the fieldwork and interdisciplinary analysis. By bridging the gap between academic research and real-world impact, the project aims to inform policymakers and practitioners about effective strategies to enhance SME resilience, particularly in the context of the Global South. The PhD candidate will actively engage in policy research activities, translating findings into actionable recommendations.

In addition to the research activities, the project will provide opportunities for the candidate to participate in inter-departmental and faculty activities organized by the Sustainability & Resilience Institute, the Centre for Transnational Studies, the Centre for Political Ethnography, and the Debating Ethnography research group. These activities, including seminars, reading groups, and writing groups, will contribute to the development of the candidate's research and writing skills.

PROJECT CONCEPT

India's coastal city of Mumbai holds immense significance in defining the **rationale** of this PhD project. In India, Mumbai has been a dominant player in the import and export of a wide range of low-cost commodities, making it the country's most important hub for low-end global trade. However, SME traders operating within Mumbai's low-end local and international economy now face a pressing challenge posed by persistent environmental uncertainties in the Anthropocene era.

The impacts of climate change, such as increasing frequency of hot weather, rising sea levels, unpredictable monsoon rains, and more frequent flooding, threaten the city's SME traders and their related business sectors¹. These uncertainties weaken Mumbai's low-end industry and jeopardize the long-term sustainability of the massive job market and the interconnected supply chain economy that relies on it. As a result, SMEs find themselves

¹ See, e.g. Chandrashekhar, Vaishnavi. 2022. "Climate Change is Stretching Mumbai to its Limit." *The Atlantic*, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2022/02/mumbai-flooding-climate-change/621471/> (accessed 1 January 2024).

under tremendous pressure to reform their business operations in order to mitigate the impact of these environmental threats on their survival.

It is worth noting that the SME traders in Mumbai's low-end international economy, given their crucial role in the local economy and international trade², possess a significant potential to influence policy reforms and community engagement in dealing with the ongoing challenges in the Anthropocene era³. However, their capacity to bring about change is often overlooked, as they remain the least studied players in this domain. This research project aims to address this gap by exploring and understanding the challenges faced by these SME traders and their strategies for resilience.

The primary **objective** of this project is to gain insight into the impact of environmental uncertainties on Mumbai's low-end international economy. Through ethnographic fieldwork methods, the project seeks to uncover the daily activities, social interactions, and coping mechanisms traders put in place to navigate these challenges. By immersing themselves in the everyday lives of these SME traders and related communities, the researchers aim to document and analyze the diverse strategies and practices they adopt to cope with the environmental uncertainties, resource constraints, market dynamics, and political changes they encounter.

The project will primarily be supervised by an experienced economic and environmental anthropologist who has conducted extensive fieldwork in India (KC). The researcher will devote considerable amount of time to immersing themselves in low-end SME communities in Mumbai, actively observing and engaging with traders in their daily activities. This ethnographic **methodological** approach will yield rich qualitative data, enabling an in-depth understanding of the traders' experiences and perspectives.

In addition, the project will have a co-supervisor who specialises in the sociological aspects of SME entrepreneurship (MVV). This co-supervisor aims to help the candidate explore new theoretical possibilities by bridging the gap between SME studies and environmental/ecological studies, particularly in examining everyday resilience. Furthermore, another co-supervisor with expertise in Indian policy-making (YY) will contribute to the project, assisting the candidate in producing policy recommendations with real-world impact.

The project will also benefit from the research connections that the two supervisors, KC and YY, have maintained in Mumbai, specifically with institutions such as the Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research and Somaiya Vidyavihar University.

Overall, the project will have a **wide-ranging impact** on innovative interdisciplinary theorization and policy development in the study of SME resilience in the Anthropocene. The focus on Mumbai will facilitate important and timely dialogue, fostering the production of inclusive theories by drawing insights from experiences in the global South.

² See Jadhav, Radheshyam. 2023. "Not an even field. Why MSME growth in Maharashtra is concentrated in the Mumbai-Pune region?" *The Hindu*, at <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/why-msme-growth-in-maharashtra-is-concentrated-in-the-mumbai-pune-region/article67676012.ece#:~:text=41%20per%20cent%20of%20the,the%20Mumbai%20and%20Pune%20regions&text=A%20substantial%2041%20per%20cent,the%20Mumbai%20and%20Pune%20regions> (accessed 3 January 2024).

³ See, e.g. Lisa Björkman, ed. 2021. *Bombay Brokers*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies:

The interdisciplinary project's focus on Mumbai as a case study generates inclusive theories and knowledge by examining SME knowledge and practice of climate resilience in the global South. It challenges Western-centric perspectives in theorising resilience and contributes to developing a new theoretical dialogue between SME studies and environmental studies. As a major player in low-end global trade, Mumbai provides a unique setting to produce transferrable insights on the interactions between environmental uncertainties, market dynamics, policy frameworks, and SME resilience strategies.

Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project. *Note that students recruited into this programme will undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.*

Basic research-skill training in ethnographic research methods (e.g. interviews and associated tools), interdisciplinary theoretical analysis in SME studies and policy knowledge transfer.

Generic skill training in data management and research ethics.
