

(Re)constructing borders through the governance of tourism and trade in Ladakh, India

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Research at HCRI and Jindal Global University draws on debates around spatial governance in Ladakh, the process of how spaces and social interactions are governed in particular places. It does so to analyse how regulations around tourism and trade affects economic, cultural, and social boundaries in areas around national borders affected by conflict. It explores the processes by which these spaces are regulated by looking at the historical and current political organisation of Ladakh, India. Finally, the article addresses the implications that the current regulation of tourism and trade have on how borders and social boundaries are understood in the region and between different conflict parties.

This research identifies how these key regional economic activities reinforce national boundaries and conflict around territory. This is particularly critical as the area in parts is claimed by India, Pakistan and China which are involved in territorial dispute over the former State of Jammu and Kashmir.

The research argues that tourism and trade, which are usually regarded as mitigating conflict, can in fact accelerate disputes and reimpose divisive ideas of nationhood in contested zones.

Informing practice

Economic based peacebuilding projects have gained traction in the past decades. The research shows that economic activities, such as tourism and trade, do not lead to improved relationships per se, and policymakers and NGOs should carefully consider the context they are implemented in and which narratives these activities may serve.

Disciplines: geography, international relations, peace and conflict studies

Key words: peacebuilding, tourism, trade, spatial governance, bordering, economy