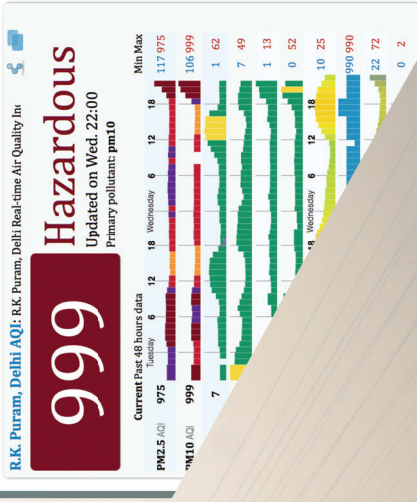


DELHI SMOG

AIR POLLUTION AND THE YOUNG URBAN MIDDLE CLASS



I. OVERVIEW

From October 2018 to February 2019 I was in India's capital Delhi where I did an internship for an environmental NGO and conducted a research project that took a look at how the young urban middle class of Delhi deals with and views the extreme air pollution in the city. For the past years Delhi has been experiencing increased levels of air pollution caused by industrial and agricultural processes as well as increased traffic and population growth. Air particle indexes can reach more than 15 times the level recommended by the WHO. This has an effect on health and life expectancy in the city as well as its overall aesthetic, with smog being a daily phenomenon.

Image 1: Analysis of pollution levels on 07.11.18, shortly after Diwali from a station in R.K. Puram, Delhi. - Source: <https://aqicn.org/city/delhi/r.k-puram/>

II. METHODOLOGY

My research project was divided into two parts: The first half of my stay was spent talking informally to a lot of people as well as analysing, through participant observation, discussions on the topic and how inhabitants act in regard to the pollution. I also kept up with news and media coverage of the air pollution in Delhi. Based on this input I designed semi-structured interviews and used the second half of my time to conduct around 30 interviews with people in my target demographic. Through these interviews I could discern aspects that clearly dominated how young middle-class Delhiites view and deal with the air pollution.

III. RESULTS & OUTLOOK

Reoccurring themes appeared in all interviews: Firstly, a feeling of collective responsibility for the situation. However, most could not name changes in their behaviour to curb their contribution to the air pollution. Secondly, the majority said that they never wear a respiratory mask although it is one of the most effective ways to protect your health. When asked why most could not really give an answer.

In both situations, one can observe a disassociation between personal feelings as well as knowledge and one's own actions. I think this phenomenon is a highly relevant and interesting point to further explore in my bachelor thesis:

1. Analysing the disassociation between the feeling of collective responsibility and missing personal action.
2. Analysing the disassociation between the interviewees' own knowledge about the harmfulness of air pollution and their inaction in protecting themselves.

Background image: Signature Bridge over Yamuna River in Delhi disappears in the Smog. - Source: Personal.



Image 2: Smog and trash at the Yamuna. - Source: Personal.