Between 28th of August and 3rd of September I attended the 2nd annual European Summer Research Institute (ESRI) in Germany (Freueninsel). It was a week-long event aiming to advance collaborative work in behavioural science, neuroscience, medicine and social anthropology, based on a process of inquiry, dialogue and collaboration with contemplative practitioners and scholars of Buddhism and other contemplative traditions. As my PhD project involves an ethnographic study of meditative practices in a contemporary Tibetan school in India, during the event I was able to benefit from an opportunity to identify collaborative and impact potential of my research.

The long-term objectives of the event were to advance the training of new generations of behavioural scientists, cognitive/affective neuroscientists and contemplative scholar/practitioners interested in exploring the influence of contemplative practice on mind, behaviour, brain function and health, including the potential role of contemplative approaches for characterizing human experience and consciousness. During the event, I benefitted from participation in academic presentations, informal breakout groups, poster sessions and periods of meditation, as well as a one-day silent retreat.

The presentations incorporated cutting edge work-in-progress research and educational projects in Europe (e.g. research by Tanya Singer’s group at the Max Planck Institute for Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Prof Catherine Weare’s SEAL programme, University of Exeter and University of Southampton, Prof Andreas Roepstorff’s team from Interactive Minds Centre, Aarhus University, Rebeca Crane’s Centre for Mindfulness Research, Bangor University) and in US (e.g. Prof David Germano, Contemplative Sciences Centre, University of Virginia; Clifford Saron’s group, Centre for Mind and Brain, University of California, Davis).

I believe the programme will have a significant impact both on my research and further engagement in the themes of intelligence, aptitude, memory, attention, consciousness and awareness within educational practice. As a Social Anthropology tutor I am interested in development of effective academic teaching methods. As expected, the ESRI gave me an opportunity to look at the ways in which contemplative practice and introspective contemplative inquiry can be used as tools both in research and in teaching.