CDT Web Science Trip to Bangalore, India

By Allison Noble

On February 10th, Web Science PGR researchers representing Southampton University were fortunate enough to have the opportunity visit Bangalore, India and I was one of the lucky students to be selected. Having never been to India, I was both excited and nervous for the experience. Our outbound flight was shorter than expected and I spent the full eight hours chatting about life and research problems with one of my colleagues, also attending the trip. She and I were planning to stay three extra days outside of the Web Science trip in order to experience more of the Bangalorian culture (which did not disappoint!).

When we arrived in Bangalore, it was 5am and everybody was ready for a sleep. We were picked up from the airport by a bus which reminded me of both a party bus and a vehicle which would have fit right in at Woodstock. That being said, our journey into Electronic City was smooth and everybody enjoyed the wonderful sights on the way in. The traffic throughout the entire trip amazed me as it was both chaotic yet structured. There were unwritten road rules that everybody followed and the noise of horns and beeping traffic was a solid accompaniment to the entire trip. The scariest part about it was crossing the road as a pedestrian!

Brave Conversations, held on 12th February was led by the charismatic hosts Annie and Bel, and included:

- University of Southampton Researchers;
- IIIT Bangalore Institute Researchers;
- External participants (backgrounds in law, industry, education, tech and music).

The event allows participants to share experiences and use their diverse insights to come to conclusions about some of the most pressing concerns within the tech industry and the technologies being used by society. My favourite section of the event was the fishbowl method where six people at a time shared their thoughts and experiences based on pre-set subjects, these people would shuffle around and re-join the larger group as new faces appeared in the 6 chairs to share or argue. It was interesting to see people openly sharing their core beliefs and thoughts on technology, and their ideas of what should be important within today's world.

The next day was a day of presentations delivered by both visiting and resident lecturers, professors and experts. A very intriguing mixture of ideas and research were presented and I found myself being drawn into subjects that I had not previously thought to be relevant to me. These lectures also gave me the idea that my own personal project would benefit from a more focused sociological edge which I then discussed with people after the presentations.

The final day was the Student Symposium (which ran in parallel with the Datathon), where I presented the current stage of my research, which was met with some interesting and thought provoking questions. I took the feedback from this presentation and followed it up when I returned to Southampton.

This trip was very fulfilling in terms of thought provoking content which I could use in regard to my own research. However, I also made some new friends on this trip who I have kept in touch with and will hopefully see again if I return to India.

Many thanks to the Web Science CDT for this amazing opportunity.