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International research project to engage expats

A Northumbria University academic has launched an international research project to explore the impact of ethnicity on expatriates in Asia.

The project, which has received a grant of £235,000 by the Economic and Social Research Council, is led by Historian Dr Tanja Bueltmann. The aim of the research is to advance understanding of present-day expat life and identity in Asia, particularly among policy makers, major businesses and the expat communities themselves.

Ultimately, the research aims to explore the changing role of ethnicity in British and German social networking in Asia with a view to enhancing expat community life.

The initial stages of research will identify the social make-up of ethnic clubs and societies, which are central engagement platforms for expats. Dr Bueltmann anticipates that these findings will uncover a specific set of characteristics. She said: "On the whole, expats living in Asia tend to be a fairly niche group and that is reflected too in the membership of ethnic societies. While different groups of people will travel to countries such as Australia in search of sun or a new way of life, the key driver for many expats in Asia is not the country itself, but the business for which they work.

"This often means that these expat groups are made up of wealthy, business focussed individuals and their families who are required to quickly adapt to their new surroundings."

However, how expats integrate varies between cultures, and an understanding of these diversities, and the role of ethnicity, will help not only ethnic associations, but also major employers and diplomatic missions to better cater for the needs of expats. Ultimately, this understanding can lead to greater confidence levels for expats themselves in terms of shedding new light on expat life and increasing the benefits of international working. For businesses, employing these findings can support recruitment and retention of expatriate work-forces.

The three-year project will involve field work in Asian countries to interview expats and explore the different experiences of German and British communities. In year three, key findings will be presented back to the participants, ethnic organisations and policy makers through a conference and other engagement activities to promote knowledge exchange.

For further information about the project, visit
www.ethnicandexpatriate.co.uk

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