
Guest editorial: Circular economy and climate change: valuing indigeneity and sustainability

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273

Introduction

The goal of this special issue is to connect the discourse regarding circular economy, environmental sustainability and climate change to community life. An emerging concept taken up in this issue that emanates from the environmental and social connection – and its impact on cultural landscapes and spaces – is the “circular economy.” It is basically a system in which fabricated materials consumed by people never become waste and the natural environment is regenerated. Human processes often tied to traditional and indigenous knowledge that enable this system include reuse, refurbishment, recycling, remanufacture and composting, among others. To spark dialogue and innovation, the editors invited essays exploring mutual relationships between groups, heritage, economy and environment that benefit people, their communities and nonhuman species. The editors sought projects that feature interdisciplinary collaborations and use the concept of circular economy to study biodegradable craftsmanship, storytelling and customs that help to cut waste, avoid pollution, mitigate the ravages of nature, reuse materials, protect and regenerate ecosystems and promote social and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the editors urged authors to propose solutions to environmental problems linked to the “disposable service and information economy” that arose with the spread of industrialism and became heightened in the digital age. The applications of research that authors proposed creative, data-informed (qualitative as well as quantitative) ways to guide protection of heritage, governmental policy reform, regional planning, human and industrial engineering, land and water use and economic reform. The authors align these proposals with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set forth in a global agenda initiated by the United Nations in 2015 to be achieved by 2030 (www.un.org/en/exhibits/page/sdgs-17-goals-transform-world).

As part of the localized analysis of environmental and sociocultural connections on a global scale in this publication, several authors take up the impact of colonialism and its aftermath on reckonings in different national contexts between embracing modernism that was often denied to colonized societies and revitalizing suppressed traditions that gave peoples cultural, and spiritual, identities as well as value systems based on relationships with the natural and social environment. Authors point out that the modernism experienced in colonized societies frequently included the replacement of indigenous, locally driven systems with rapid consumer-oriented, profit-driven social as well as economic superstructures. With the imposition of these overarching structures dictating everyday life, colonizers often brought racist and classist attitudes and valorized individualism over collectivist ways of living characteristic of traditional or folk cultures at the grass roots. Historically, white Euro-centered empires typically assumed that indigenous, traditional and folk communities were disadvantaged, unsustainable and nonfunctional in modernity. In short, they believed in the superiority of European “civilization” and were convinced in light of cultural evolutionary doctrine fashioned after Charles Darwin’s theories of natural selection (Darwin’s famous 1859 book *The Origin of Species* published at the height of British imperialism was subtitled *The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*) that native groups were incapable of social and intellectual progress – and therefore of modernization. Authors in this



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issue challenge this presumption and show ways that communities that held on to their traditional systems are able to maintain their livelihoods within a beneficial circular economy. They demonstrate through various case studies the ways that different tradition-centered communities reproduce and redefine themselves, thereby progressing culturally, intellectually and economically. In contrast to much of the early European-generated scholarship on cultural landscapes and indigenous communities, many of the authors in this special issue as natives to the areas they study have insider perspectives of life and economy at the grassroots. Such studies have implications for nature-based solutions of maintaining green economic growth and increasing the resiliency, equity and connectedness of modern societies for current and future industries, communities and generations. Examples of applications include building awareness of a traditional community's medical/scientific/ecological systems, folklife functions (e.g. cultivation methods, craftsmanship, apprenticeship systems and foodways), and people- and planet-positive spiritualities (or worldviews) and practices, innovation, application and pragmatism (e.g. recycling traditions, adaptive reuse of material culture and conservation of natural resources).

The hope and aim of the editors are to expand research-informed, solution-oriented projects internationally so as to strengthen the application of local cultural capital, community-identified values, local knowledge systems, place-based economies, circular pathways and locally valued nature-based actions in a dramatically changed world. As we present this issue, signs are apparent that the adverse effects of climate change and global warming have accelerated, and we feel an urgency to advance our agenda for applied scholarship. Authors working on these issues often labor in isolation on different continents and through this global digital medium are able to share their insights and build a world-wide network of scholars using their academic resources toward turning the tide of environmental – and social – disaster. We praise other simultaneous efforts around the world to address various aspects of the problem. We view our particular contribution with this set of essays as drawing attention to knowledge and practices that can be applied from indigenous and traditional ways of life.

The first essay featuring a collaboration of scholars from Bangladesh and Australia highlights a decision model for sustainable informal entrepreneurship in cities. This article explores how strategies such as legitimate frameworks, waste management and urban public space allocation can significantly contribute to operational sustainability improvements. By proposing a decision model, policymakers and city managers are required to prioritize sustainability and implement optimal strategies for lasting impact.

Following this opening article that connects environment to social spaces, team of authors from China, South Korea and Egypt examines transformations occurring within the Gwadar fishing community in Pakistan in response to climate change. As climate-related challenges exacerbate existing poverty and political instability, the essay underscores the invaluable role of traditional knowledge in navigating these changes. By leveraging fishermen's traditional wisdom of local ecology and culture, the authors present an analysis of the complex relationship between people and their rapidly changing environment with significant lessons for improving marine resource management in Gwadar and beyond.

Complexity of the environmental-social-indigenous interconnection is also a theme of the next article on the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) in China by Jing Li of China. Through quantitative methods including multiple regression analyses and theoretical derivations, the essay sheds light on the relationship between economic development and environmental degradation. Crucially, it highlights the necessity of urgently curbing carbon dioxide emissions from a geophysical climate perspective.

The article that follows by a pair of scholars from Taiwan – Chun-Chien Lin and Yu-Chen Chang – interprets the impact of circular economy network building as a strategy of climate

action involving resilience and revitalization. Using structural equation modeling and post hoc multigroup analysis, the study reveals the critical importance of cooperating through business networks to strengthen collective pressures to raise standards and initiate progressive change. The author sends a reminder especially to multinational corporations that public relations spun to persuade the public that an organization's products and policies are environment friendly (often referred to as "greenwashing" or "green sheen") can result in complacency.

Looking to futuristic scenarios, a team of researchers from Thailand, China and Hong Kong next considers the impact of digital systems on the environmental-community connection. The authors analyze public perceptions of China's "sponge cities" which are cities deliberately replacing concrete with surfaces that absorb water. By analyzing data from social media platforms, the paper provides public opinion on sponge cities that were positive, and it explores the positive contribution of flooding management and city branding as nature-based solutions. The authors underscore the importance of aligning public perceptions with policy objectives for effective urban planning and development.

The volume concludes with an examination of the African continent, focusing on perception and cognition by Girma Asefa Bogale, an Ethiopian native. It investigates the thoughts and actions of smallholder farmers in eastern Ethiopia in response to climate change. Using cross-sectional surveys and econometric modeling, the author uncovers the upstream determinants of climate adaptation options, emphasizing the critical role of education, farm size and access to agricultural extension services in shaping farmers' decisions.

In sum, this special issue presents a diverse array of research findings and insights aimed at advancing understanding of sustainability, climate change adaptation and circular economy practices with a focus on Asian and African communities. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and leveraging knowledge referred to as folk, traditional and indigenous – not as a symbol of a residual or lesser category of wisdom but rather as a valuable cultural resource – we can expedite an urgently needed movement toward more resilient and sustainable futures for communities and generations in our interconnected world.

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