

Editorial Preface

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The *International Journal of Public and Private Perspectives on Healthcare, Culture, and the Environment (IJPPHCE)* is proud to present in this issue four different articles that all illustrate the strong linkages and relationships between culture, society and the environment.

Andrea Janku in her two related articles delves deep into the Chinese culture to analyze how the environment is given meanings and in the case of famous “must-see” landscapes of Linfen in Shanxi Province the landscape becomes an important element of cultural identity of people and their understanding of themselves. To really understand the Chinese approach to environment it is important to carefully analyze both the changing ideas about the environment/ landscapes and the how the environment is actually being used by the people. In a Journal focused on distinguishing public and private perspectives and social & cultural diversity it is opportunity to have articles that shed light on Chinese attitudes toward nature and environment, which sometimes may appear contradictory or difficult to understand if the historical and cultural background is ignored. Of course, the Chinese themselves, just like most other people, are constantly re-interpreting the meaning of their environment.

This article shows how landscapes and environments end up meaning different things to different people. In the case of Linfen, the rural residents cherish the Guye Mountains most for their resources, such as fuel and timber, while still cherishing the spiritually nourishing aspects of this landscape. Urban residents may be more inclined to value landscapes per se as sites for recreative leisure activities, while being less aware of the extent to which they also satisfy their material needs. Political and cultural authorities might even think of the exploitation of landscape for the construction of national identities, when they identify particular sites for protection on the provincial, national, and global level. It is important to notice that in China there have been over centuries people who have voiced concerns over the changes in man-nature relationship and how those will detrimentally impact the environment. The historical experience suggests that maintaining the precarious ecological balance of the environments people live in, of which they are a part, is not an easy task. People in China have seen the chaotic results of Maoist policies and the subsequent high-speed economic development and its detrimental impact on the environment. In the case of Linfen, especially the water resources and air quality suffered. However, the more profound teaching is that there is a never-ending quest for a sustainable balance between production and consumption, because ultimately human bodies need to consume stuff, spiritual and material stuff, in order to stay alive. It is this balance that the contemporary Chinese society needs to find, and it is likely that the historical and cultural understanding will play a significant role in this pursuit of transformation.

Andrea Janku also points out that Landscapes can serve as mirrors one can look at as representations of one’s own world-views. Thus, time and again, the not so nice consequences of all the forms of consumption to which people subject their environment, unmercifully show themselves. For instance, people might have different opinions about the grandiose construction of the Yao tomb and the touristic development of the Guye Mountains, but regardless of what we might identify as the true meaning of these places, both certainly represent how the locality wants to be seen, and the fact

that they are opened up for consumption also enables the continuing maintenance of these places. The relationship between reality and appearance (representation) will always be in a process of negotiation.

It is easy to see that this case study that starts by analyzing very local issues of landscape and environment in the end turns to analyze the policies of China and the general issues of environment, consumption and production everywhere. This article provides very urgently needed insights about Chinese environmental thinking. This study may also be used to illustrate that Chinese environmental issues and thinking have much in common with the rest of the world.

In the next article Essien D. Essien analyzes the issue of female circumcision in Africa. Elsewhere the practice is generally known as the female genital mutilation and is linked to patriarchy and the control of women's sexuality. Essien in his article explains how the practice is understood so differently in different cultures and why the practice still remains so widespread in many African societies. The study contains representative samples of interview data collected in six African countries. The study indicates a significant correlation between the religio-cultural context of female circumcision in Africa, human rights and the social status of the people regarding communal rights to cultural self-determination. The campaigns to eradicate female circumcision in Africa seem to have neglected the complex nature of relationships between politics, culture, rights and history of the people and institutions in African societies. This article most likely will be found rather controversial as few scholarly journals have wanted to spare room for articles containing actual interview data concerning female genital mutilation/ female circumcision while the practice continues to be a major cultural, political and health issue in Africa. There clearly is a need for further research.

Finally there is an article by İrem Şanal, where she introduces the idea of 'Green Concrete'. The concept of "green concrete" is an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional concrete. While many people may have rather critical opinion about the environmental impact of concrete this article seeks to demonstrate how a greener concrete may instead contribute to future generations' sustainable development, and will be of interest to architects, engineers, policy makers, contractors and clients, as well as others involved with the design, construction or operation of buildings and infrastructure. The main objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the key sources contributing to CO2 emissions from concrete and compare 1) traditional concretes with "green concretes," 2) concretes produced with blended cements, and 3) fly ash used as partial replacement of cement, in order to diminish the environmental impact of concrete production.

In short, there are strong social, environmental, economic and aesthetic reasons that stand in favour of developing green concrete and using it wherever possible. This study shows that engineering may often play an important role developing new more sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions. However, in order to introduce new policies it important to increase awareness of problems caused by less green "conventional" solutions and what can be achieved by greener alternatives.

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