

Editorial Preface

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The *International Journal of Public and Private Perspectives on Healthcare, Culture, and the Environment (IJPPPHCE)* in this issue presents four articles and one book review, each full of fresh ideas and approaches linking the relationships between culture, society and the environment.

Kingsly Awang Ollong in his article 'Issues of Justice and Sustainability in Banana Trade in the Light of Cameroon Case Study' describes and analyses the banana economy, particularly its social and environmental consequences. The detailed discussion is largely based on the case study of Cameroon, but there are good reasons to believe that many research findings are relevant for the whole banana industry as the global banana production and trade is heavily based on giant agro-industrial plantations.

There is, indeed, information from different important banana producing countries indicating that working conditions in the industry all too often include forced labour, child labour, lack of job security, low wages, and health and safety problems. The banana industry, as well documented in this article, is also linked to a range of harmful environmental impacts, including loss of animal habitats and biodiversity and pollution of land and water. Land conflict is one of the biggest problems associated with the production of banana and, therefore, banana industry is strongly connected with the political and economic basis of those societies where banana industry has become a major actor.

As for the specific issues in Cameroon, the article includes wealth of information. For instance, work starts at six in the morning and finishes around 5 or 6pm. But for a Cameroonian banana worker it is not uncommon to stay until 10pm in periods of high demand. Salaries are not based on an hourly rate but rather on the task assigned by managers each day. If the set quota is not achieved, pay is withheld. Working conditions are poor and outright dangerous to health due to use of dangerous chemicals without proper training. Compared to the large banana producers on Latin America one further difference in Cameroon is the strong presence of female labour, without much concern given to such issues as breastfeeding or pregnant workers. The article also contains discussion about the detrimental impact of banana plantations to the rest of agriculture, mostly based on small-scale producers who are responsible for the domestic food production. In particular, river water, formerly used by the inhabitants, is now confiscated and used for irrigating plantations and the chemicals used by the plantations are polluting the environment.

The main conclusion of the article is that among banana-consuming countries and individual consumers in Europe and North America, there is little awareness of, or interest in, the origin of the banana they buy. This raises doubts about the willingness and ability of banana-selling companies to verify that the sustainability policies they may impose on their suppliers are effectively implemented. Leading European and North American supermarkets generally have policies to mitigate the risk of unsustainable practices in their supply chains. However, addressing the range and complexity of the sustainability issues affecting the production of bananas requires more ambitious policies addressing the whole range of questionable practices.

The second article 'Policy narratives of formation of comprehensive support system for parenting and child care in Japan' is by Mutsuko Takahashi who in her article analyses the issue of decreasing births and total population in Japan and how the issue has been dealt with in the public policy. To establish one's own family and bear responsibility for family matters has been left in the private sphere, and, consequently, many decision-makers still tend to believe that the issue does not belong

to the realm of public policy. The demarcation between the public and private spheres has remained inflexible in Japan. Some domestic surveys clearly indicate that the Japanese youth nowadays feel rather hesitant to establish family and to have children because of strong worries about economic burden facing households with children, especially when they need to finance the cost of education. Meanwhile, the state has been reluctant to take any further financial commitments in the fields of care or education for children and youth. However, the author herself was involved from 2013 onwards first in attempts to change the situation and then in policy formation and local experiments to launch new kind of services for child-care. The model has been influenced by the Finnish *neuvola* centres (for advice and support for families with small children). For instance, the Finnish style of supporting expected mothers and their families is new in Japan, since it is the public health nurses who play the main role in basic medical check-up and listening to concerns and questions not only about pregnancy itself but also about living conditions of the family in question. In short, the model challenges also the rigid ideas about the roles of public and private sector.

In the third article Regina Hoi Yee FU explores the issue of ‘Corralling contract’, the indigenous fertilization system commonly practiced in the African Sahel area. The article examines the practice of the corralling contract between Fulani pastoralists and Nupe agriculturalists in the Bida region of Niger State of central Nigeria. This study follows carefully how the farmers and herders arrange the corralling contract, how they utilize this instrument and how it influences their social relationship. Findings suggest that pastoral Fulani groups have different strategies to maintain socioeconomic relations with specific villages through the adoption of corralling contract in order to ensure resources entitlement. Meanwhile, land sharing and pastoral camp rotation enable multiple Nupe village members to have access to manured fields. Contrary to the conventional description, findings do not show a strong tendency of increasing payment to herders for the corralling contract.

This study clearly has broader significance since it demonstrates how two groups of people with very different lifestyles and traditions have formed contracts that have proved to be very beneficial and flexible instrument that has helped also to maintain good relations between the two groups. The world has many other examples of less fortunate relationships between groups that have different lifestyles. Symbiosis and cooperation are the means to solve the problems of the world and the Fulani and Nupe have a lesson to teach the world. Furthermore, the corralling contract itself has still great potential especially in areas where social and environmental conditions require careful balancing and creative solutions that take into consideration different needs of people.

In the fourth article ‘Ideological construction of environment and its relationship with Japanese society, culture and politics’ Mika Merviö analyses Japanese environmental thinking within the context of politics and culture. Japanese nationalism has not relied particularly heavily on visual iconography of Japanese environment/nature. In fact, the Japanese state has been rather clumsy in its efforts to ‘use’ high or low culture to its ends and arts certainly do not enjoy particularly strong support from the authorities and political/ social elite. The same applies to the environment, the current Japanese elite still is more interested in other policy issues.

However, the environmental awareness has been duly registered in Japanese art and culture after largely anthropocentric concerns about pollution and environmental risks to humans became widely voiced in Japanese society and Japanese politics since the 1960s. Instead of direct criticism of social, political and economic interests that contribute to environmental destruction Japanese environmentalist art and thinking are prone to promote various forms of symbiosis (*kyôsei*) and co-operation. More radical ideas of biocentrism and deep ecology are rarely voiced in Japanese environmental thinking and environmental movements. Meanwhile, older religious ideas about sanctity of nature and life are often ignored when modern ideological constructions of environment are created and reinforced in Japan. To understand why green political ideas receive so little support in Japanese politics it is important to analyse the ideological construction of environment in Japan.

Finally, there is a book review by Mika Merviö on recently published *A World of Three Zeros. The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions*, by

Muhammad Yunus with Karl Weber, New York Public Affairs, 2017. For a journal focusing on public and private policies it is interesting to take a look at an attempt to find a simple solution to all the burning problems of our times and to put forward a very pragmatic action plan. This action plan involves “social businesses” as well as such forces as the young people, the old people, technology, good governance, and human rights. Muhammad Yunus remains optimistic about the future and has a positive message to all the naysayers and sceptics. Reading this book is an uplifting experience. Whether Muhammad Yunus and this book will change the world remains to be seen, but Mohammed Yunus has already demonstrated by his accomplishments that an individual can make a difference and that on the earth there are no real boundaries.

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