

Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on Tapestry of Discourses in Biodiversity and Sustainable Development: An Asian Perspective

Cecilia Fe L Sta Maria, University of the Philippines Baguio, Baguio, Philippines

What is biodiversity? Biodiversity is defined as the environmental or natural site or space which is “relevant and constitutive of diversity” (Stirling 2007, cited by Bartkowski 2017). It is thus safe to assume that because biodiversity is a systemic function of the ecosystem, any presence or non-presence of variety, disparity or non-disparity, and imbalance in the biodiversity space or site may be consequential to non-harmonious operations in the eco habitat; and, non-harmonious ecosystem may take a toll in the lives of the species. In this issue, we take off from Bartkowski’s purview on biodiversity “not as an entity but a property or quality of ecosystems” (Bartkowski, 2017). Asia, as the largest continent in the world, and a space for an “exceptionally rich” bio-diverse seascape and landscape, is also a space that is “in fast decline” (UNEP-WCMC, 2016). Biodiversity sites as a property of many Asian countries but the increasing challenges in preservation and conservation is also a primary pre-occupation of the Asians.

Why is biodiversity a necessary topic among Asian scholars? Within the clauses of sources and resources for food, water, the habitat of flora and fauna in seascapes and landscapes “that functions as a medical stockpile... [and] any human uses of nature (for ecotourism, waste disposal, pollination, crop breeding, etc.,” (Lomborg, 2001, pp. 250-251), biodiversity sites possess a value for individuals and groups of people. And, because these natural spaces have value, accompanied by its potential for income, the constant use and maximizing of natural resources by humans “has long been a cause of an increase in the extinction rate” (2001, p. 251).

This Special Issue focuses on Asian context and reality on biodiversity. Biodiversity studies as often linked to key concepts on sustainable development sees to light the establishment of the “effort to link the issues of economic development and environmental stability...” which “aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment” (Emas, R. 2015). Asia, as a continent, boasts of its natural sites and its numerous biodiversity spaces which have a strong potential and value for human survival and progress. In this Special Issue, we read on four articles that sets the tenor for sustainable development frames as linked to biodiversity. In a way, the articles become a pre-emptive series and serves as a “response to the problematization of survival motivated by the loss of biological biodiversity” (Wilson cited in Escobar, 1998, p. 54). Therefore, the context and *raison d’être* of the increasing number of studies on biodiversity in Asia is slowly operating as a “vast apparatus that systematically organizes the production of knowledge and types of power, linking one to the other through concrete strategies and programs” (1998, p. 56) aiming at unifying all these knowledge in order to implement a sustainable development program that will benefit both man and nature. Sustainable development programs become deeply enmeshed with ecological issues and challenges that are linked to biodiversity. Going beyond the scientific domain in understanding biodiversity, the four articles in this issue examines biodiversity knowledge based

on real and grounded contexts in Asia to provide an avenue for attempting at rendering discursive positions on biodiversity knowledge.

The first two articles in the issue elucidate prevailing issues related to biodiversity: water and food as linked to policy and responsible practices in the use of natural resources. Drinking water or water in general, is an ecosystem service... [and]...biodiversity is directly implicated in maintaining most ecosystem functions that deliver these services but it is also a co-beneficiary of improved ecosystem conditions” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2015). The track to sustainable development also includes accessibility of mankind to potable water but it also emphasizes the responsibility of man in conserving and preserving water sources. Mendoza, Cruz, et.al.’s article titled “Local Policy and Water Access in Baguio City, Philippines” focuses on water security and questions the current policies on water access. Baguio City, Philippines, with its many natural sources for water, experience inaccessibility and unavailability of water in many households. Mendoza, Cruz, et.al. writes on “how policy links to issues of water security [that] characterizes the economic and social aspects of the poor households’ access to water and their use of water source.” This article proves that “poor access to drinking water is in most cases a direct result of human behaviour” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2015). Further, even with the many sustainable development programs that support local policies and ordinances for providing water in the Philippines, inequality is still prevalent, and is magnified by unequal distribution and controlling systems in water access.

Food, as a basic need, in which most Asian countries are delegated the role of food granary of the world, takes a turn on agricultural production. Lomborg notes that “world’s agricultural production has more than doubled since 1961, and in developing countries it has more than tripled” (2001, p. 60). In a way, the challenge faced by many Asian countries is to sustain agricultural production, and at the same time, ensure that the agricultural practices will not harm the landscape. Hariadi and Widhiningsih’s article takes us to Yogyakarta, Indonesia and discusses the young farmer’s motivation and participation in organic farming. Supporting and implementing sustainable development programs that pertain to horticulture, the growing horticulturalists in Indonesia “create[s] the message of interdependence of human being on natural resources” by practicing responsible human activities (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2015). The article “Young Farmers’ Motivation and Participation in Horticultural Organic Farming in Yogyakarta, Indonesia” emphasizes the roles of agricultural extension workers in motivating young farmers to continue the practice of horticulture to support sustainable development and to conserve and preserve biodiversity spaces.

Reiterating the role of man in preserving and conserving natural resources to ensure ecological balance, Castro-Margate’s “Social Mediatization of Biodiversity: The Case of Mount Pulag National Park in the Northern Philippines” and Queri’s “Reg(u)arding Indigenous Environmental Discourses in Philippine (F)laws” articles forwards deepening of knowledge on biodiversity through media and study of the indigenous people’s cultural practices.

The role of media in biodiversity studies is instrumental for disbursing information on knowledge that “has to be able to describe overall developmental trends in society across different contexts and, by means of concrete analysis, demonstrate the impacts of media on various institutions and spheres of human activity” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). Information and knowledge presented by the media is consumed by numerous audiences, thus the need to create nuanced communication tools to embed knowledge in order to make informed decisions that pertain to environment is important. In her article, Castro-Margate examined Facebook posts that contain exchanges, debate and discussion on Mount Pulag National Park, a biodiversity site in Northern, Philippines. Facebook, a social networking site, became a platform for “negotiation of meanings” on biodiversity. A mediated form of engagement, Facebook became a tool for motivating social media users to take part in the debate on environmental issues, and to strengthen their willingness to take an active part in the protection of biodiversity sites.

Presenting narratives on the indigenous peoples of the Philippines, Queri focuses on the Agtas and their culturally rooted relationship with nature. Raising questions on inclusivity in biodiversity issues, Queri discusses man and nature as a cultural relationship. With the Agtas’ high level of environmental

conscientiousness, negotiating their cultural identity, history and roles as guardians of the biodiversity sites unfolds tensions between the environmental laws and the indigenous people's cultural practices.

The four articles in this issue take on “biodiversity as the variety of life on earth” and insist that “almost all cultures have their roots in our biological diversity in some way or form” (Shah, 2014). If biodiversity boosts ecosystem productivity where each species, no matter how small, all have an important role to play (2014), then mankind becomes the center and plays a major role in the discourse of biodiversity. In this issue, the articles deftly examine mankind's dual role in biodiversity. As the protagonist, mankind takes on the role of preserving and conserving natural resources and spaces through rooted cultural identity and improving agricultural practices to benefit both man and nature, and elaborating and deepening discussions on biodiversity through the use of social media. But alongside the discussions in the articles, are the role of mankind as the antagonist, who impedes equitable access to natural resources and spaces. As both roles of mankind in biodiversity are exacerbated in the discussions in this Special Issue, we leave you with a tapestry of discourses on the roles of mankind and its evolving relationship with nature. For the litany of biodiversity in Asia now is no longer a battle between man and nature, but a war of man against himself to the detriment of nature and other mankind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Gratitude goes to Prof. Alexander G. Flor, PhD, my co-editor, who encouraged me to take on this challenge.

Cecilia Fe L Sta Maria
Guest Editor
IJSESD

REFERENCES

- Bartkowski, B. (2017). Existence value, biodiversity, and the utilitarian dilemma. Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung (UFZ). Retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/157354/1/884605787.pdf>
- Emas, R. (2015). The Concept of Sustainable Development: Definition and Defining Principles. Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5839GSDR%202015_SD_concept_definiton_rev.pdf
- Escobar, A. (1998). Whose Knowledge? Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 5(1), 53–81. doi:10.2458/v5i1.21397
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change. *Nordicom Review*, 29(2), 105-134.
- Lomborg, B. (2001). *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*. Cambridge, UK: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139626378
- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. (2015). Water and Biodiversity Summary of the findings of the fourth edition of the global biodiversity outlook as they relate to water. Montreal, Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/gbo4-water-en.pdf>
- Shah, A. (2014). Why is Biodiversity important? Who cares? *Global Issues*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalissues.org/article/170/why-is-biodiversity-important-who-cares>
- UNEP-WCMC. (2016) The State of Biodiversity in Asia and the Pacific: A mid-term review of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Retrieved from <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/outlook-asiapacific-en.pdf>