

Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on Sustainability and Tradition

The role of folk tradition – or intangible cultural heritage – in sustainability has been the subject of research under the rubrics of traditional knowledge and folklore. Much of this analysis has been conducted by legal researchers concerned with the protection and ownership of traditional knowledge in indigenous cultures. Other approaches include anthropological studies of traditional indigenous knowledge in relation to the ecological, medicinal and other values in flora and fauna. Valuable as this work is, it constructs tradition and the knowledge held by those who bear such wisdom as the “other”. Traditional knowledge is usually seen to lie in peasant, uncivilised societies and others not in the western world.

Tradition however is a dynamic process through which cultural forms, practices and meanings are continually reshaped in response to internal and external factors within any society. In this Special Issue, tradition is seen as not something that needs to be defended, altered or deployed but rather as a universal cultural process conditioning the specific ways in which different communities and social groups interact with notions of sustainability. The collection of papers also makes the argument that in order to face the challenges of transitioning to a sustainable future, societies need to draw on traditions that foster a lifestyle that is better for the natural environment and promotes social cohesion.

Our intention is not to undermine or decrease the importance of other aspects, but to clear a new space for discussion of the vital issues involved and to highlight the practical value of understanding the interrelations of culture and sustainability. In these ways tradition provides the context – the warp and weft – from which sustainability practices and initiatives need to expand if sustainable development is to be integrated into mainstream practices. In fact, the most powerful force we have for evolving and maintaining a sustainable world is human knowledge as represented not only through modern science and technology but also through indigenous and traditional wisdom.

The broad overview that emerges from this particular assemblage of papers highlights the possibilities that an understanding of folk traditions might have an important place for a more sustainable global society. This Special Issue contains contributions by 5 academics from four countries – Bangladesh, Brazil, Turkey and Pakistan who put the folk and indigenous traditions at the centre ground in the discussion of sustainability, be it through theoretical deliberations or practical examples. The issues covered range from education and alternative economic models to urban planning and food and they all bring to the surface the importance of the cultural dimensions.

Below is a quick overview of the four papers included in this Special Issue which need to be read in their full length in order to understand all intricacies that the authors have covered. The discussion starts with the paper by Reinaldo Fleuri who analyses interculturality, identity and decoloniality through research conducted in Latin American countries. It examines the postcolonial intercultural challenges and in particular how they deal with the culture of aboriginal and ancestral peoples. The author suggests that the world is facing challenges from globalised influences which redefine

the notions of being local and foreign. There is need to reframe the epistemological knowledge to deconstruct the modern colonial assumption of the universality of science and include the complexities and ambivalences that have emerged at the border between different cultures and knowledges. The paper also offers “Buen Vivir” or “Well-Living” in harmony with nature and society as an alternative to the capitalist exploitative model of development.

The contribution by Ramisa Shafqat argues the importance for sustainability of including a rural face in sustainable urban liveability using Pakistan as a case. It highlights the synergies between the two approaches in establishing proper rural-urban relationships. Sustainable food consumption contributes for building a healthy community spirit and social sustainability. İsmail Hakkı Tekiner takes this augment further through presenting the Turkish cuisine as planet-friendly because of the variety and diversity of vegan options. Finally, Saria Tasnim explores the place of folklore as a tool for sustainability education in primary schools. The paper includes examples from the rich folkloric tradition of Bangladesh and explains the potential they have to communicate important and long-lasting messages to children, particularly those who are immersed in the country’s contemporary urban culture.

Through all the papers in this Special Issue, indigenous knowledge, tradition and folklore come alive like a rainbow of colours – attractive, beautiful and promising of a better, more sustainable world.

Graham Seal
Dora Marinova
Xiumei Guo
Guest Editors
IJISSC