

Editor's Note

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This inaugural issue of the University of St Andrews Journal of Sustainability contains a diverse array of pieces highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of ‘Sustainable Development,’ or, as it is often referred, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future, 1987). The impetus for the Journal of Sustainability’s foundation was initiated by a group of undergraduate students of Sustainable Development, who recognized the research generated by their peers as incredibly diverse, highly topical, yet largely inaccessible to even their own classmates. Furthermore, a growing interest from students across disciplines revealed the need for a publication available to all desiring to contribute essays concerning their particular interest within Sustainable Development. Indeed, this first volume embraces the interdisciplinary nature of ‘Sustainable Development,’ selecting pieces from the perspectives of not only students of Sustainable Development, but also from those of Social Anthropology, Management, Biology, and Geography.

As a fourth year student of Sustainable Development with a focus in Art History, my motivation to found the Journal of Sustainability was to demonstrate the pervasiveness of a degree that has allowed me to study far-reaching fields of interest to me. I felt there was a similar desire from peers in other subjects to learn more about my area of study but little opportunity to share relevant and interesting research from St Andrews across the various disciplines. As this is the first publication, this issue took a very general approach to the broad topic of sustainable development by creating a compilation of pieces from students in different years and different subjects. However, the scope of the publication will hopefully allow for more focused ‘special issues’ in the future.

That being said, certain crosscutting themes were emergent in the inherently diverse range of essays selected for publication, mainly concerning human activities in the face of climate change. The first two pieces provide both a reflective and a research-based approach to examining perceptions of climate change to introduce the contention between messages about global warming in individual experiences, scientific evidence, the field of Sustainable Development, and in public policy. Gnanapragasam's (2013) espousal of "practical hope" in the face of a warming planet provided an interesting reflection upon Scotland's future in sustainability. This contextualized Damgaard's (2013) thoughtful outline of the contention between scientific evidence, individual perception, and the emphasis of environmental issues in public policy nicely. The inclusion of these two pieces attempts to present a balanced and pragmatic approach to an issue long debated throughout literature of Sustainable Development.

Next, two quite different essays focus on the nexus of environmental change, globalization, and sustainable mitigation of social inequalities through the lenses of contentions concerning microfinance (Jachimowicz, 2013) and migration (Belesova, 2013). Both essays highlight the positives and negatives of the effects of the proposed changes on sustainable growth. Their inclusion in this issue demonstrates the importance of approaching sustainable development using a variety of perspectives. These papers cast light on the notion that setting populations on sustainable trajectories must carefully consider issues of social equality. By examining both the positive and negative effects of both microfinance and migration, both essays come to interesting conclusions that offer new takes on common discourses of innovative developmental solutions, calling for further investigation of how to most constructively address the challenges associated with globalization and environmental change.

Biodiversity management, an integral issue in the realm of human-environment relations, is examined through two informative essays assessing the importance of understanding the field as well as the importance of resilience thinking for biodiversity management. Crawford (2013) posits that the number of species on Earth is important to mankind for a variety of reasons while Bunse (2013) examines management of ecosystem dynamics in the implications of 'systems thinking' through the lens of 'ecosystem resilience.' Environmental conservation has long been investigated as human activities

have resulted in increasing degradation of biological systems, which clearly impacts human wellbeing. These two papers introduce the notion that humans have much to discover about the species existing on earth as well as the concept of phase shifts and ecosystem resilience in the broad field of human interaction with nature.

The next essays in this issue focus on a particularly recognizable impact of environmental degradation upon human wellbeing: agricultural production and the current food crisis. To start, a background about pollinator declines and implications for agricultural production provides a snapshot of a threat to human subjugation of crops. Individual consumption practices are examined in a reflective “ethnography” of dietary choices in St Andrews, a research project that reveals expressions of ethnographic interests in the context of our very own University town. While this is a very interesting read, I commend the subsequent articles for more details regarding the global challenges facing sustainable agricultural production and consumption. Tollan (2013) and Steenbergen (2013) scrutinised case studies of specific products, examining to what extent they could be considered ‘sustainable’ in the context of established agricultural practices and their global implications. Both pieces are informative and compelling, but are purposefully focused upon singular products, highlighting particular problems within the coffee and dairy industries.

The contention between ‘mainstreaming’ sustainable development in food production/consumption and working within contemporary commercial frameworks are investigated from what the editors felt was a somewhat one-sided argument that extends to many of the global issues integral to Sustainable Development. The realities of threatened food security can arguably be addressed through policies that deliver sustainability (Sustainable Development Commission, 2012). The call for a paradigm shift towards “agri-culture” (see Pretty, 2002) has the potential to both mitigate the adverse effects of agricultural revolutions spawned by unprecedented population growth; but also disrupts an established order that is increasingly integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) and emphasizing ‘ethical’ choices within modern capitalistic frameworks. The latter goal, albeit contrived in relation to arguably unsustainable systems, deserves further investigation in the broader context of sustainable development, as the aforementioned attempts to ‘mainstream’ sustainable development remains elusive.

To conclude, this first publication of the 'Journal of Sustainability' hopes to instigate debate at the University of St Andrews and beyond about global challenges such as 'mainstreaming' sustainable development in the face of climate change. It will be evident from this editorial that I believe the high quality essays included in this issue importantly investigate this subject from one of the cornerstones of Sustainable Development: interdisciplinary perspectives.

Pretty, J. (2002) *Agri-culture: Reconnecting People, Land and Nature*. London, UK: Earthscan.

Sustainable Development Commission (2009) Food security and sustainability: The perfect fit, *SDC position paper*. Available at: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=981>

WCED (1987), *Our Common Future*. Oxford,UK: Oxford University Press.