

Fifth Annual Conference

Contesting Nature in Central Asia

ABSTRACTS

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economically motivated, environment and climate related factors do play a significant role in migration dynamics. Indeed, economic push factors of migration often have strong but hidden environmental causes. The high economic dependency on few economic activities such as agriculture and animal husbandry increases the population's vulnerability to environmental changes and shocks. In order to cope with environmental problems negatively affecting livelihoods, individuals and households often use international and internal labour migration as an adaptation strategy to increase income. This phenomenon entails both negative and positive consequences for rural communities. On the one hand, it allows households to increase their income and provides the youth with new opportunities to gain Authoritarian legacy, anti-elite

Relevant in the delimitation between economics and ecology is the distinction between descriptive and normative aspects. Given the widespread assumption that science is descriptive and value-neutral, ecology would not involve normative aspects such as questions of ethics. Norton (2011) pointed out that often such concerns are left to economists and ethicists. A crucial aspect of this distinction involves the presence of the human subject: descriptions of phenomena or natural systems are ideally independent from the experimenter's point of view, while norms are not observable in nature, being part of the subject's reflection. With certain caveats, as such, defining biodiversity can involve the ecological system being viewed as a relation between species (descriptive), or a broader view on resources measurable under a benefit/ cost analysis (normative).

This framework is vital for addressing contemporary understandings of biodiversity in Kyrgyzstan. A study on public perception of biodiversity in walnut forests (Jalilova & Vacik, 2012) noted that the most common view of biodiversity was as being 'diversity of living organisms and their interactions with each other', the second being "a natural wealth providing everything necessary for people's lives". The former view, shared by respondents with higher levels of education, fits the 1992 Rio convention definition of biodiversity that the authors described as a 'western concept of biodiversity'; the latter, we note, displays an æsimilation of economic interpretation. This is, we claim, a split between the descriptive and the normative. The normative, economics-oriented view on biodiversity involves the human subject's needs and their relation to natural systems.

We further hold that this division in popular understanding of biodiversity in Kyrgyzstan reflects the gap between the two fields. While Jalilova and Vacik imply historical background and experience to be the reason for this split, there may be more to the issue than merely striving towards a common understanding of biodiversity (problematically labeled 'western'). Since ecology and economics are defined by the absence and, respectively, presence of human perspective, an important issue is integrating normative aspects into the understanding of biodiversity. Consequently, any contesting nature in Central Asia will require a considered delimiting between these values (some of which cannot be subject to economic down from a global to a local scale, and whether this is changing local perceptions of natural landscape. Based in the multidimensional discipline of political ecology I will make use of the concepts of ideology, discourse and cultural hegemony in order to analyze and discuss the cultural transmission of ideas, values, and perceptions from a macro level down to a micro level.

Based on field research in the Issyk Kul region, the essay explores how tourism influence local perceptions of natural landscape. A comparative analysis of two villages, one where the tourism is in its infancy and one where tourism is more developed, is be carried out to investigate the questions raised above.

Waste and Environment in Bishkek

Commons (1990), *The Quality of Life: A Study Prepared for the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) of the United Nations University* (2005) edited by Martha Nussbaum, and Jurgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). This research should encourage developing both scholarly and public awareness of environmental hygiene and sustainable development, as a part of public educational movement, including teaching, research, operations and outreach programs in Kyrgyzstan.

The highland N aryn river: an absent presence?

Jeanne Féaux de la Croix (University of Tuebingen)

This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Naryn province and Naryn town, on the Naryn river. It outlines the role of the river as a dangerous boundary and crossing point on historic trade routes, as well as reflecting on the river as an 'absent presence'. While dominating the valley over the course of 300 kilometres, the topographic relief allows for little direct use of the river e.g. for irrigation or extracting drinking water. My findings reveal that while the small rivers intakes of the river are vital to people's livelihoods, the Naryn river itself is viewed mainly as a potential source of hydropower, and its flow viewed as 'wasted' if it reaches users downriver. Drawing on these findings, I reflect on the fit of emic river concepts with analytical concepts such as waterscape, envirotechnical system and water basin, and find a surprisingly strong 'resource-orientation' in thinking about and using water among Naryn valley residents.

Mysterious and abundant: many meanings of the river in northern Tajikistan

Mohira Suyarkulova (AUCA, Kyrgyzstan)

This paper presents preliminary fieldwork findings regarding the many meanings of the river for various actors in Khujand city and Sughd province of Tajikistan. Most Khujandis see the river that flows through their city as 'mysterious' ('sir' meaning 'a mystery'), seemingly quiet waters that flow slowly yet harbour hidden currents, the artistic practice into an ideological weapon. It was simply impossible for Kyrgyz artists to create outside the frame of the dominant doctrine. The only direction to stream their creative energy was into neutral themes, such as the depiction of nature and spectacular mountainous scenery. The result was the creation of the most wonderful landscape masterpieces and development of the unique Kyrgyz painting tradition characterized by a bright yet very Syr – tirishiliktin közi: Syrdarya as the source of livelihoods in the river delta

Aibek Samakov (University of Tuebingen, Germany)

Based on ethnographic research in Syrdarya delta (namely, Kazaly and Aral districts of Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan), I claim that locals mostly view and engage with the river as a main source of their livelihoods. This interaction is not limited to just the river bed but rather includes a ramified network of 'natural' and 'technological' elements that stem from the river such as dams and dikes, canals, ditches and pumps, lakes fed by those canals and pastures, which are flooded in spring and fall. Local livelihoods include herding (cattle, sheep and goats, horses and camels), gardening (bakchalyk), fishing