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Sustainable Environments and Community Health

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THEME 4: *Scientific Essentials & Sustainable Environments*

James Gregory, much like fellow historian Dora Polk, notes the importance of the perception of California as a place apart, but more from the geographer's perspective. "...home was essentially an island, surrounded by sea on one side, barely passable mountains and deserts on the others. For a thousand years, they had been safe from the kinds of warfare and invasions that remade tribal boundaries in other parts of the continent...In truth is it not geography per se but geography in an ever changing historical context that has shaped California's patterns of use since that first European Contact" (*Gregory, 2*).

Thus, we come to the point at which the socially constructed world meets the physical and scientific world. California's abundance, almost embarrassment, of riches in terms of resources has created a space in which there is both profligacy and stewardship of the natural world. California has become a leader on the local, national and international stage on nearly every environmental issue of concern from the algae to the eagle California is protecting those assets – while at the same time the state is also leading the way in the development of technologies, industries and business models that require ever more of those same resources while producing ever increasing amounts of waste.

The pandemic has highlighted many sharp turns and precarious bottlenecks in the modern world. Yet we can look to at least one silver lining of its impact in the way the world's research community was spurred to action to create vaccines on a timetable that would have seemed unheard of only twelve months prior. On the less positive side, the gulf between pure science and public debate has widened. Climate Change was once considered the low point of mutual misunderstanding, but today there seems little doubt that the toxic point/counter point of the COVID debate has done deep damage. According to Pew Research, only 29% of U.S. adults say they have a great deal of confidence in medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public (down from 40% who said this in November 2020). At the same time, the share of the population with a great deal of confidence in scientists to act in the public's best interests is also down - from 39% to 29% - and both below levels prior to the pandemic.

Given the impact of the pandemic and the ongoing struggle to return to normalcy, *csuglobal* is honored that Wenli Jen (Dominguez Hills) will help lead this section as she brings not only an expertise in Public Health and Health Services, but in Asian-Pacific Studies. This dual focus can be clearly seen in her offering to this issue as she outlines her own community-based work with Asian youth in the area of mental/public health as she makes her call for this section.

However, our plan includes a 'second set of eyes' for each area and so we are therefore looking for another Associate Editor for this theme. As rich in natural resources as California may be, we are keenly aware that the CSU is equally rich in scholars who make this area their life work, but we have not been able to find someone interested, willing and able. If you are interested in engaging with your CSU colleagues and the wider California community not only in the area of science but its impact and interactions across all these themes and fields – we would love to hear from you.

Dr. Alison R. Holmes, Managing Editor

Sustainable Environments and Community Health

Beyond California's warm sun and sandy beaches, there is more to what California has to offer as a state and global powerhouse. Within its borders, there are fertile agricultural lands, thriving ecosystems and bustling communities. California has a unique place in the world. With 3.37 trillion gross state product (GSP), California is currently poised to become the world's 4th largest economy. While California boasts \$23.2 billion in domestic agricultural exports abroad in 2017 (U.S. Department of Agriculture), California is also one of the leading states in renewable energy to address climate change. Undoubtedly, California's role in domestic and international affairs is significant and noteworthy. To ensure its continued prosperity, California must create sustainable environments through effective communication and leadership. Furthermore, collaborative approaches and strategic partnerships will yield better results in health, wellness, and sustainable environments.

Effective communication encompasses utilization of cross-coordination and leaders who speak to each other with the overarching shared goals in mind. Just as incident command systems employ structure, strategy and process, the communication of California's most precious resources require the structure, strategy and process that enables active participation in the programs and initiatives for public health and environmental health. Moreover, leadership from top-down and bottom-up are essential for the success of environmental programs that leverage existing community capacity. Transitions to collaboration and partnerships leverage resources, reduce costs and minimize siloed operations. Active communities can prosper when shared information using social marketing and media advocacy garner interest and investment in California's environmental wealth. With local, regional and state leaders amplifying the messages for coordinated efforts to efficiently work together, Californians can advance the mission for cohesive resource management.

At the community level, the transition to collaborate and partner with multiple community agencies and individuals can mirror the state-level initiatives of recommended multi-department and multi-agency coordination. Community-participatory approaches to design, build, and manage systems allow for active and engaged individuals who become assets to the overarching articulation of any given project. Truly impactful programs seek to engage

individuals at the community level, thereby extending their longevity. Individuals, who are agents for social, economic and community change, are paramount in the discussions of community health and environmental health.

Health disparities and health inequities have been paramount in the current discussions in public and environmental health. How can underserved and underrepresented communities receive the necessary tools to thrive? What are ways to enhance the existing programs and ignite the willingness among communities and its members to participate in engaged discussions and action steps for increased knowledge and improved health and wellness? Vital to overall health outcomes, mental health is one area that must be addressed as the global pandemic has undoubtedly created more mental health service needs across the nation and in California. The impact on vulnerable populations, particularly those underrepresented and underserved, was further exacerbated by the increasing anti-Asian hate in the United States.

Community Participatory Approaches to Mental Health and Emotional Well-being among Asian American Populations

According to Stop AAPI Hate, Asian Americans have been targeted and used in public health, national security, and economic scapegoating. Out of 11,500, 67% of Asian Americans reported being harassed with written or verbal hate speech (*StopAAPIHate.org*, 2022). At the same time, the pandemic has negatively impacted Black and Latino communities, where poor health outcomes are resulting from the lack of healthcare access (SAMHSA, n.d.). American Indian and Alaskan Natives have also been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (Indian Health Service, n.d.). Certainly, these have ramifications on minority youth development and wellness.

In the past, research studies (Payton et al., 2000) have been more focused on school-based programs, where parents and educators are the primary social planning individuals. However, youth can thrive with community-based programs for developing social emotional learning (SEL) for mental health wellness as evidenced in a five-day community-based pilot program that was designed and implemented with Asian American youth in the San Gabriel Valley and San Fernando Valley in collaboration with the civil rights organization Chinese American Citizens Alliance – Los Angeles in the summer of 2022.

The aim of the program was to involve youth, parents, and community partners in health education program design, planning and implementation. In setting up the program, parents were engaged at the outset which allowed for the development of trust and the creation of relevant materials. Community leaders and partners were also enlisted to provide their expertise and a strengths-based assessment of community partners allowed for maximizing expert areas in emotional intelligence. Experiential learning exercises and hands-on activities using online learning tools were incorporated into the program. More importantly, youth were also engaged as participants and facilitators, making the efforts more sustainable as they became more invested. Youth become active agents for social change. Not only does it provide procedural justice (Minkler, 2012), but the community approach also allows for more relevant, tailored services. With parent and youth support, some program interventions have addressed communities with large portions of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Nata & Cadima, 2019). As such, community-based programs for mental health centered on developing life skills for improving social and emotional well-being were created with cultural humility and culturally competent approaches in mind. The five-day topics included the titles: Discovering Yourself, Developing Empathy, Creating Self-Discipline, Becoming a Master of Emotions, and Acquiring Strong Social and Communication Skills.

The overarching topics were found to be germane to the current education and social welfare of children and adolescents in Southern California among Asian American youth. While the program was centralized in the Southern California region, the program's template and information can be shared and even replicated. The changing landscape of social and emotional issues among children and adolescents, as well as geographical regions where replicated programs will be hosted, will ultimately impact program planning and design. Appropriate needs assessments for identified populations and communities will require adaptability and flexibility in creating modified curriculum and content that effectively address the needs of a specific community. Through mindful leadership, communication, and community participatory approaches, creating healthy communities lead to sustainable environments.

For this section of **csuglobaljournal**, we are interested in exploring intersections of public health, environmental science, and technology in the context of California and the world from transdisciplinary perspectives. We seek work that evaluates scientific essentials and sustainable

environments in California. Scientific essentials could encompass common space, biodiversity, food systems, natural resources quality, quantity and management in addition to watershed planning and management. Sustainable environments may draw on the robust and thriving communities that represent California's local and regional areas while exploring California's role in the global context. California's rich, natural resources and its complex and dynamic systems are examined and explored in this theme. The advancement of science and technology, including emerging digital societies, are included in the layers of systems, infrastructure and management.

This theme offers authors the opportunity to examine California in the broad terms that bridge the other thematic sections of **csuglobaljournal**; Society, Culture, and Identity; Institutions, Structures, and Power; Networks of Economy and Trade; and **csuglobalaction** by demonstrating how the complexity of California can be understood from a global and transdisciplinary standpoint and California's domestic and international context.

Sustainable environments can continue to thrive with effective communication and leadership in public and community health. By doing so, individuals are brought into the fold with focus on the importance of creating the robust infrastructure to develop communities and systems that yield favorable outcomes. If infrastructures are the San Gabriel Valley Mountains and majestic Sequoia trees, effective communication and leadership are the coastal winds and gushing waters. Both context and process factors are important and complementary in creating and sustaining healthy environments that promote and support: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030).

Wenli Jen

Other themes could include, but are not limited to:

- Health, Communities and Society
- Digital Societies – Big Data and Artificial Intelligence
- Common Space – Ecological Footprints, Atmospheres, Biospheres, Eco-spheres
- Biological Diversity and Danger Signs
- Planning Food Systems – Security, Sovereignty and Agriculture
- Build and Design – Urbanization, Structure and Resilience

- Systems and Infrastructure: Leadership, Communication, Disaster Management
- Environmental and Public Health
- Natural Resources Quality, Quantity and Management
- Watershed Planning and Management: Environmental, Social, Economic

Notes

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