

Preface: Development Geography

Development is a dynamic process with social, economic, environmental, political, cultural, and above all, geographical dimensions. Opportunities for development have never been equal on the earth, and research on development is intrigued by the dilemma of inequality between different continents and regions in the world. Why do some societies and cultures prosper while others suffer from poverty and negative trajectories? Sustainable development trajectories involve maintaining values that people consider important, may those be economic, social or environmental. In the local reality, sustainability requires motivation and capacity of the people to use land and other resources cautiously through time (Raquez & Lambin 2006). Equal and sustainable development requires identification of geographically and thematically scalable coping strategies. If we manage to identify these strategies, do we have tools to keep development on sustainable paths also for the future generations?

Geographers have traditionally been in the forefront of observing spatial as well as temporal dimensions of development. The question of how and why standard of living and quality of life vary between regions motivates geographical research on development. Regional dependence relations, roles of institutions, land property rights and gender issues are among the key issues in the development process. More recently the overall rise of environmental awareness, such as considering the role of biodiversity and climate change in human development, has broadened the scope of development research (MA 2003; UNEP 2007). Today, development geography and research on development issues in general is multidisciplinary, aiming to grasp the continuously transforming spheres of development in the midst of gradual and sudden changes of the societies and the environment.

The *Fennia* special issue on Development Geography is a glance on some of the ongoing development research activities of the Finnish researchers and their international colleagues. Articles demonstrate different approaches to development studies in terms of methodologies and applications, and they represent approaches of the natural

and social sciences and humanities. Together these articles work towards understanding the multiple dimensions of development. Articles share a common goal typical to geographical research. They study and try to solve development problems through holistic understanding of interactions between humans and the nature. With different case studies, articles take readers to development issues in Namibia, China, Ghana, Tanzania and Kenya.

The first article deals with one of the fundamental problems of development, that of land property rights and gender inequality. Author **Siiskonen** has worked for many years in an agrarian society in Ovamboland, North-Central Namibia, where access to arable land defines political and social status of society's members. Siiskonen focuses in his article on the property rights and gender inequality amongst widowed and divorced persons as seen from their life histories. The case study links parish registers with anthropological, ethnographic, socio-economic and cultural information and shows, for example, that remarriage has been a coping strategy for many widows and divorced women in the 1930s and 1940s, especially if they were at favourable childbearing age. The case study illustrates how parish registers can provide a useful source for investigating long-term societal and cultural changes, and how such research may open eyes to see the underlying linkages between land ownership and socio-economic development.

Forests are known to be key ecosystems in maintaining biological diversity and mitigating climate change. Simultaneously, however, forests are facing many land use pressures that degrade and threaten their viability (FAO 2005). Consequences of forest degradation are severe for the environment, and devastating for those societies, whose livelihoods are dependent on the faith of the forests (MA 2003; UNEP 2007). The second article by **Zhou, Luukkanen, Tokola and Hares** emphasizes the importance of forests biodiversity for local development and livelihoods. Suppressing the negative human influences on forests resources requires understanding the response of forests to human disturbance. The authors study forest degradation and their restoration potential in the Upper Min

River watershed in Sichuan, China, using quantitative stand characteristics and species diversity indices as indicators. Human activities, such as logging, combined with natural disturbances cause soil erosion and forest degradation in the area. The article demonstrates that human impacts cause different abundance, evenness and richness of tree species in the studied site, and suggests using near-natural forests as references when developing forest restoration strategies for the future.

The third and fourth article by **Juhola and Fagerholm and Käyhkö**, respectively, contribute to an important discussion of how to identify the key stakeholders when defining the value-base of the development. Development co-operation has been accused of being imperialistic in nature, neglecting indigenous knowledge at the expense of expert, top-down flow of information. Both articles combine indigenous knowledge and local perceptions in the process of defining sustainable development in rural communities. **Juhola** explores in her article the social constructions of the concept of agricultural biodiversity. The case study evolves around an idea that biodiversity conservation is promoted through understanding of the discursive positions on cultivated species. Discourses of an indigenous rice variety (*Oryza glaberrima*) in the Upper East Region of Ghana are studied using qualitative methods such as interviews and focus group discussions. Juhola identifies three positions from which she explores the construction and conservation of the rice variety drawing attention to different, often conflicting social meanings of the species. Furthermore, Juhola shows how these discursive positions become institutionalised into social rules, norms and practices, which further establish the efforts to conserve *O. glaberrima*. **Fagerholm and Käyhkö** explore spatial patterns of social landscape values in a rural community in Zanzibar, Tanzania. As people attach commonly approved social values subjectively to landscape, authors have mapped four social values (subsistence, traditional, aesthetic and leisure) of the local farmers through participation and analysed these patterns cartographically and quantitatively. This type of participatory GIS (Participatory Geographical Information Systems, PGIS) approach combines community participation with the use of geographical information techniques and allows analysis of stakeholder data in a geographical form (Voss et al. 2004). The case study reveals the uneven spatial distribution and clustering of these four social values in the landscape. The authors discuss

the role of PGIS and social landscape values in the planning and management of multifunctional cultural landscapes.

The last article brings up an important topic of empowering local people in the decision-making of land use and land management. Recently, local participation has been integrated into land use legislation and policies with an aim to allow local communities to manage natural resources efficiently and in a sustainable manner. The authors **Himberg, Omoro, Pellikka and Luukkanen** studied the benefits and constraints of participation in forest conservation and management among population groups engaged in forest-related activities in Taita Hills, Kenya. They focused specifically on local people's perceptions of participation during the transformation of forest policy. The authors concluded that efforts to conserve forests for ecological services were important, and emphasized sustainable uses of forest products. Shortcomings, such as inadequate access to updated information about management practices and legal rights, hampered participation. According to the respondents, the direction of development was good, although the tools for participation and the support from the government remained inadequate. This fact may gradually lead into unsuccessful conservation efforts.

When dealing with development research, it is fundamental to discuss about human capacity development as part of undertaking research, especially when developing societies and their problems are in focus. Academic research is not independent from cultural and social outreach of research. Thus, human capacity building should be extended into academic development research through shared research and teaching activities between partners involved. It is crucial that research teams learn from each other and that there is a flow of knowledge between people involved. In Finland, this type of teaching and research collaboration is promoted by UniPID, the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (<https://www.jyu.fi/hallinto/unipid/en>). UniPID network aims to establish research and development co-operation between universities in Finland and abroad, and to support sustainable development, research and education around the World. UniPID allows Finnish universities to accomplish their role in the promotion and implementation of sustainable development. It fosters exchange of knowledge between universities in Finland and in developing and transition countries by strengthen-

ing their partnerships in the fields of research and higher education. Furthermore, it links Finnish universities to national, European and global sustainable development networks. UniPID has kindly supported the publication of this *Fennia* special issue.

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