Biocultural diversity & human well-being

Linking nature & culture with social & psychological dimensions of health

Conor E Kretsch

CBD-WHO workshop, Helsinki, 22nd Oct 2017
Cultural as the fourth pillar

Social Equity
Social participation, Health, quality of life & well-being, Human rights

Environmental Responsibility
Ecological balance, Renewable energy, Wise use of natural resources

Cultural Vitality
Identity & Diversity, Creativity, Heritage

Economic viability
Material prosperity, Education & employment, Fair Trade
(Bio)cultural Diversity

- Languages / linguistic diversity
- Material culture
- Local, traditional & indigenous knowledge, technology & innovation
- Modes of subsistence
- Social & economic relations
- Belief systems
- Values
CULTURAL PRACTICES depend upon specific elements of biodiversity for their existence and expression.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
- diversity within species,
- between species and
- of ecosystems

Ensembles of biodiversity are developed, maintained and managed by CULTURAL GROUPS.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY
- diversity of knowledge and practices,
- ways of living together,
- value and belief systems,
- languages,
- artistic expressions

Courtesy Ana Persic UNESCO / John Scott SCBD
Cultural context of healthcare

• “re-engaging public health with the full complexity of subjective, lived experience and opening the door to a more systematic engagement with the cultural contexts of health and well-being”

• a more “people-centred, whole-of-society” approach to health policy, research and practice

• Necessarily requires consideration of biocultural connections
Cultural Competence in Health Care

• Understanding the importance of cultural influences on patients’ health beliefs and behaviours
• Considering how these factors interact at multiple levels of the health care delivery system
• Devising interventions that take these issues into account to ensure “health for all” – meeting needs of diverse patient populations
Increasing Socio-cultural diversity

- Ageing populations
- Increasing childlessness
- Increasing inward migration, Growing refugee populations
- Growing awareness and representation for minorities and marginalised groups
- Growing diversity of voiced opinion
- Growing biocultural diversity
- Hetero / Homogeneity in future....?
Clinical Cultural Barriers

- Occur when socio-cultural differences between patient and provider are not fully accepted, explored or understood
- Patients may have diverse socio-culturally-based health beliefs
- Diverse approaches to medical practice – home remedies, varying trust of medical professionals
- Diverse views on health risks or benefits of natural environment
ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

- Provisioning
  - Food
  - Fresh water
  - Wood and fiber
  - Fuel
  - ...

- Supporting
  - Nutrient cycling
  - Soil formation
  - Primary production
  - ...

- Regulating
  - Climate regulation
  - Flood regulation
  - Disease regulation
  - Water purification
  - ...

- Cultural
  - Aesthetic
  - Spiritual
  - Educational
  - Recreational
  - ...

LIFE ON EARTH - BIODIVERSITY

CONSTITUENTS OF WELL-BEING

- Security
  - Personal safety
  - Secure resource access
  - Security from disasters

- Basic material for good life
  - Adequate livelihoods
  - Sufficient nutritious food
  - Shelter
  - Access to goods

- Freedom of choice and action
  - Opportunity to be able to achieve what an individual values doing and being

- Health
  - Strength
  - Feeling well
  - Access to clean air and water

- Good social relations
  - Social cohesion
  - Mutual respect
  - Ability to help others

Source: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
Social-ecological context

Biophysical structure or process (e.g. woodland habitat, net primary production)

Functions (capacities) (e.g. regulation of water flows, waste assimilation)

Service (flows) (e.g. flood protection, food provision, genetic resources, disease regulation)

Benefits (e.g. reduced risk of illness or injury, nutritional benefits, enhanced mental well-being)

Values (e.g. financial gains or losses averted, "quality of life" values, existence values)

Σ Pressures / drivers of change (exploitation, pollution, climate change, invasive species etc)

Public Health Outcomes

Kretsch et al, 2018 (in rev), after Potschin & Haines-Young, 2010
Biocultural diversity & health

- Biocultural diversity underpins practices and beliefs for many communities
- May be particularly important for communities with specific social dependence on living resources
- Biodiversity-culture relationships can be harnessed to address some social and psychological disorders
- Endemism - environmental values – sense of place – attitudes and behaviour
- “Biocultural dislocation” can have profound negative social and psychological impacts
Celebrities voice opposition to forests privatisation

Several public figures, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dame Judi Dench, have urged the government not to sell off England's forests.

Nearly 90 signed a Save England's Forests letter claiming such a sale would be "misjudged and short-sighted".

It said a bill being debated by MPs would allow the sale of the entire public forest estate.

The government said its plans "will not compromise the protection of our most valuable and biodiverse forests".

A public consultation begins later this week and a bill to enable the sale is due to go before the House of Lords.

The state currently owns 18% of forests and woodland in England;
Biocultural dislocation

- Forced migration and displacement
- Loss of access to local community networks
- Separation from sense of place and identity associated with local landscape and biodiversity
- Loss of access to agrobiodiversity resources and separation from associated culinary and social traditions
- Separation from traditional approaches to health care
Living resource use by immigrants

• Pre- and post transit
• Tied with sense of agency, self-determination
• Use of food and medicinal plants sourced from home countries / regions
• Possibility of replacement with local varieties?
• Substitution of new ecosystems / ecosystem services for home landscape features?
• Impacts on social cohesion; Routes for social integration?
No “nature-based solution”? 

- Access to greenspace does not alone deliver health benefits
- Perceptions of safety, belonging, distance – correlate with socio-economic status and cultural background
- Use of greenspace limited for marginalised and disenfranchised groups, communities in deprivation
- Social dislocation impacts on nature-culture relationships
Thank you!

conor.kretsch@cohabnet.org