

Globalization and Me: Environmental Impact



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Perhaps the strongest connection inhabitants of the globe share is in our reliance on the environment. This relationship crosses all boundaries of location, culture, even species. We breathe air, drink water, and grow food. Subsistence requires environmental interaction and though individual experience is isolated, each unique decision effects everyone in the globalized community. Challenges are presented by simultaneous demands on natural resources from political, economic, social and cultural entities. With such complex entanglement, solutions are often obscured and many who are genuinely concerned are unsure of how to take action. As stated by Leopold (1993), “We shall never achieve harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations, the important thing is not to achieve but to strive” (p. 156)

Many assaults on the environment are occurring in pursuit of profit, at locations far removed from public view. Those directly impacted are often those who are least capable of mounting an effective defense. According to Collins (2014), “There has not always been geographic equity in the protection of the environment and there are those who have concerns that those communities with the least have been disproportionately exposed to environmental hazard” (p. 19). Indigenous populations seem especially compromised by the influx of industry. Bode (2009), describes one such community in the Amazonian rainforest of northeastern Ecuador. The author was inspired to visit the region through the efforts of her former student, David Poritz, a dedicated environmental advocate. Oil conglomerates, specifically Texaco, have decimated the region in their desire to exploit natural resources. The Secoyan people who live there are deprived of health and welfare as a result of horrendous environmental degradation. Thousands of miles separate the victims of such profiteering from the beneficiaries, but in a globalized society, physical distance no longer inhibits the transfer of knowledge.

The high population density of Southeast Asia and the accelerated pace of economic development has caused the demand for electricity to skyrocket. These increases will largely be met

through the production of coal burning power plants in countries like Vietnam. Though the United States and Europe have been decreasing coal consumption over the past two decades, these attempts at emission control have not been mirrored in much of Asia. If changes are not implemented, the current projection suggests that the rate at which pollutants from Asian power plants enter the atmosphere will triple by the year 2030 (Koplitz, Jacob, Sulprizio, Myllyvirta, & Reid, 2017, p. 1467). The results of such environmental assault will not be restricted to a single species, a community, a continent, or even a hemisphere. Globalization has expanded our identity beyond these traditional constructs. Yet without the determined actions of concerned individuals these kind of issues remain largely unknown.

Through the application of technological resources and the dissemination of information in many forms, the global community is engendering activism. The once ethereal nature of comprehensive solutions is becoming achievable through tangible, incremental implementation. One organization which uses this model to address a worldwide environmental concern is Water.org. Access to clean water is a biological necessity for survival. Yet, for many, this critical component of life is unavailable. According to the organization website (2017), there are over 663 million people who do not have access to safe drinking water. Whether caused by geographic proximity, industrial pollution, lack of sanitation, or economic inequality, the issue is too great to be ignored. Until now, the monumentality of the challenge, its perceived insurmountable complexity, may have left many feeling helpless.

Globalization may have its most profound impact in its fostering of individual agency. Society has long been advised, by various indeterminate sources, to think globally and act locally. With the development of technology and the ability to share ideas across traditional barriers, people are gaining a better understanding of themselves as citizens of the world. Our sense of personal responsibility and awareness of the implications of our choices is growing. Unassailable proof of human impact on the environment is accessible through a simple internet search. Opportunities for action can come in a

variety of forms. Environmental advocates can connect with scientists, artists and filmmakers. We can generate creative solutions and implement them, effecting a worldwide audience. My recent experience at the a2ru Emerging Creatives Student Summit introduced me to a group of individuals who are committed to doing exactly that.

The summit topic, “Water: New Directions Through Arts and Science”, was intentionally broad and far reaching. The overriding principle was that water challenges cannot be addressed with the compartmentalized, restricted thinking of past proposals. Just as we thought of the problem as interconnected and fluid, so we were required to approach the solution. It was a genuine treat to be working with an interdisciplinary team, from varied backgrounds, with separate experiences, but sharing a common goal. As a confirmed tree hugger, an educator, and an artist, the summit was a way to synthesize many of my passions. The project which resulted from our group’s efforts addressed the specific human need for access to drinking water. We proposed an interactive installation with the goal of inspiring direct and immediate action through education. We were invited to submit the project for consideration of grant funding.

The artwork for my Globalization project was inspired by the summit presenters. Several artists with a passion for water resources shared their process and their artwork. The two I found most resonant with my own experience were local artists. Jennifer Adler is a PhD student at University of Florida. Her undergraduate degree is in marine biology, but her graduate project incorporates her background in science with stunning photographic studies of the Florida Aquifer. Margaret Ross Tolbert is an artist who works in various media. She also explores the subject of local freshwater springs through the themes of passage, time and journey. In my painting, I sought to express my sense of wonder at the natural world, my connection to my local resources, and my global commitment to environmental preservation.

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