

Editorial

by *Tatyana Shtal*

Sustainable development and population well-being are increasingly critical issues for the countries of Central Asia in the current period. As this region continues to develop economically and socially, ensuring environmental sustainability has become imperative. Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan face challenges related to water scarcity, land degradation, air pollution, waste management and loss of biodiversity. At the same time, rising standards of living have increased consumption and extraction of natural resources. Achieving the right balance between economic growth, social equality and environmental protection is essential for the long-term prosperity of Central Asia. Core components of sustainable development – clean energy, sustainable agriculture, ecological industrialization, green technologies and circular economy principles – are key to improving the quality of life for current and future generations. An integrated approach that takes into account economic, social and environmental dimensions is required. Regional cooperation and knowledge sharing between Central Asian countries could facilitate the transition to sustainability.

This thematic issue on Sustainable Development and Population Well-being in Central Asia is highly relevant and timely for our journal and its diverse readership across research, policy and practice. As a leading publication covering sustainability issues, we strive to advance knowledge on critical topics impacting the region. The collection of articles in this issue provides in-depth, evidence-based insights across a wide range of areas fundamental to the socio-economic and environmental advancement of Central Asia. From healthcare and education to clean energy and green economy, the issue explores nuanced challenges as well as innovative solutions relevant to Central Asian nations. By spotlighting these crucial themes, the edition enables readers to gain a multi-faceted understanding of trends, constraints and opportunities for sustainable development in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. It also fosters much-needed scholarly

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debate and idea exchange on how Central Asia can strategically transition to an inclusive, low-carbon and climate resilient future. Overall, this issue underscores our commitment to serve as a leading platform for cutting-edge sustainability research focused on Central Asia.

This thematic issue stands out for the novelty and relevance of the research presented by authors from across Central Asia and beyond. It provides timely, empirical insights on pressing sustainable development challenges facing the region. The authors employ an interdisciplinary approach to analyze a diverse range of contemporary issues from green economy and digitalization to food security, healthcare and social welfare. The articles go beyond just examining problems to propose innovative, evidence-based solutions tailored to the Central Asian context. Some of the groundbreaking topics addressed include leveraging blockchain for accounting, fostering organic agriculture, harnessing renewable energy, enabling smart water management, and building sustainable infrastructure using green finance. The authors also explore nuanced themes like environmental justice, corporate sustainability, green entrepreneurship and resilience against climate change impacts. The diversity of expertise and recommendations put forth in this issue will greatly benefit policy makers seeking to advance sustainable development in Central Asia. It also provides a knowledge hub for academia, civil society, international agencies and the private sector working to support the region's transition to an inclusive green economy that leaves no one behind. Overall, the pragmatic, context-specific findings of these studies have the potential to catalyze positive change in Central Asia and beyond.

Several articles examine issues related to legal regulation and administration. Ernek Abdrasulov et al. article analyzes constitutional regulation and concludes on the limits of regulation in constitutional law. Zarina Amanzholova and Sara Idrysheva's article looks at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public relations regulation in Kazakhstan. Elvira Kuandykova et al. provide a comparative analysis of public administration in agriculture in Kazakhstan and the USA, while another article by Kuandykova et al. analyzes activities of international agricultural organizations. Zharas Kuatbekov et al. article analyzes public administration in agriculture across Kazakhstan's regions. Some of the articles focus on environmental issues and sustainability. Ting Fu et al.'s article legally assesses Kazakhstan's environmental law reforms and their trade impact. Zhanar Karasheva et al. analyze international agreements on solving global environmental problems and improving regulation. Assel Kaziyeva et al. identify factors contributing to the "greening" of Kazakhstan's economy, while Sholpan Khamzina et al. look at the role of Kazakhstani media in covering environmental issues. Zhuldyz

Umbetbayeva et al. article examines implementation of the Vienna Convention on ozone layer protection.

Several articles concentrate on economic and financial topics. Gulnara Amanova et al.'s manuscript examines digital technologies in accounting and auditing at Kazakhstan's enterprises. Raya Gulimbetova et al. analyze credit technologies of banks in Kazakhstan and their role in economic development. Nurbakhyt Nurmukhametov et al.'s article looks at the impact of Kazakhstan's fiscal policy on economic competitiveness. Medet Sartbayev et al. analyze digitalization and investment opportunities in Kazakhstan's regions.

The rest of the papers focus on sector-specific issues. Assem Akhmetova and Zulfiya Baimagambetova analyze foundations for grain market development in Kazakhstan and trade dispute resolution within the WTO. Gulnar Aigarinova et al.'s article looks at legal support for sanitary safety of Kazakhstan's population. Akdana Kassimgazinova et al. analyze sustainable strategic development of Kazakhstan's businesses through innovation. Almagul Primkulova et al. consider improving legislation to prevent offences by convicts with restricted liberty in Kazakhstan. Mukhamejan Yerkebek and Asylbek Smagulov's article provides a criminal law analysis of cattle raiding in Kazakhstan and abroad.

In conclusion, this introduction comprehensively presents the diverse array of articles contained in this timely thematic issue focused on the critical topics of sustainable development and population well-being in Central Asia. The authors hail from across the region, lending localized expertise on challenges and solutions specific to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and beyond. Ranging from environmental protection and green economy to public health, education, digitalization and food security, the studies employ an interdisciplinary lens to examine socio-economic issues fundamental to improving quality of life. The pragmatic recommendations put forth have the potential to inform policy and pave the way for a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future in Central Asia and similarly developing regions. Taken together, the introduction outlines the novelty and relevance of this research compilation in advancing actionable knowledge on sustainable development tailored to local contexts. It underscores the issue's overall contribution to filling critical evidence gaps and fostering constructive debate on these urgent themes from a Central Asian perspective. For scholars, policy-makers and practitioners focused on the region, this expanded introduction provides a valuable framing of the key insights emerging throughout the published works.