

*Graduate School of Global Studies, Sophia University*  
*Symposium and Workshop Series 2021-22*  
*Author/Organizer: Nico Mira*

**Symposium Report**  
**“Environmental Engagement: Linking Individuals and Nature in Times of Polarization”**

**Date and Time:** January 22nd, 2022 (Sat.) 14:30-17:45

**Place:** Online Event, through Zoom

**Participants:**

*Student Presenters*

- Apolline Cros, Graduate Program in Global Environmental Studies, M.A student, Sophia University  
**“Urban Areas & Environmental Awareness: Reducing the Gap between urban citizens and nature.”**
- Nico Mira, Graduate Program in Global Studies, M.A student, Sophia University  
**“The Generational Divide of Climate Change: Understanding Climate Action Among Older Citizens”**
- Ai Iwamoto, Sustainability Science, MSc student, United Nations University  
**“Human security and coastal disaster risk governance: Case study of Kesenuma City and Katoku Beach of Amami Island in Japan”**

*Commentators*

- Maiko Nishi, Research Fellow for the International Satoyama Initiative, United Nations University
- Takeshi Ito, Professor in Comparative Politics and Political Economy, Sophia University

*Keynote Speaker*

- Makoto Hatakeyama, Vice Chairman of “The Forest is the Ocean’s Lover; member of Kesenuma-shi Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Citizen's Committee; oyster/scallop farmer

*Moderator*

- Takehiro Watanabe, Professor in Anthropology, Sophia University

## **Symposium Summary**

The symposium had an overarching question that it wanted to contribute to: how we encourage meaningful action to address climate change and other human-induced impacts on the environment – despite the various divisions surrounding these issues. The symposium aimed to introduce unexplored perspectives on the topic and to initiate a discussion of practical suggestions that goes beyond academia.

The symposium was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of the student presentations and commentators' feedback, and was conducted in English. The second part consisted of the keynote speech and following panel discussion, before concluding with a Q&A session, and was conducted in Japanese. Simultaneous translation was available throughout the symposium.

After opening remarks by moderator Prof. Watanabe, Dean of GSGS, Prof. Wank, and organizer, Nico Mira, the symposium kicked off with the first student presentation by Apolline Cros. Inspired by the potential impact of the campus farming project by her research group, KASA Sustainability, she had wanted to examine how the vicinity of green spaces affects one's emotional attachment to nature. By collecting answers from an open-question questionnaire shared with urban farmers, she could conclude that farming influences positive environmental behavior and improves environmental knowledge. The second presentation was held by Nico Mira, and he had examined how older citizens reflect on their responsibility of climate change to younger generations. After creating a theoretical framework to define older citizens within an intergenerational context, he conducted a series of in-depth interviews with older climate activists. One of his main findings was that youth needs to be careful of not blaming their elders if they want to increase their climate engagement. Lastly, Ai Iwamoto presented her research, which had examined the conflict point of development and nature conservation in Japanese coast communities, during constructions of seawalls. While not finished with her data-collecting, she had started conducting interviews with citizens in Katoku Beach, where discussion of a seawall was ongoing. Early findings pointed to that confrontation is dependent on individuals' perception of security, and that itself is influenced by past experiences.

The feedback given from both commentators Dr. Nishi and Prof. Ito focused on clarifications on theoretical concepts, as well as potential links for previous and future research. In particular, the commentators were interested in the role that perceptions play in creating conditions for engagement on environmental issues.

The keynote speech by Makoto Hatakeyama, concretized many points of environmental engagement raised in the research presentations by sharing his own personal experience as an oyster/scallop farmer and community activist. He pointed out the need for people to understand the interconnectedness of nature; that a healthy forest upstream, also benefits the fishers at the coast, by conserving biodiversity. His NGO "The Forest is the Ocean's Lover", conducts tree planting and environmental education together with his local community, and his speech shared some of the successes and challenges of his work.

On the following panel discussion three points were discussed: the importance of community and group cohesion in environmental action; how to increase intragenerational conversations on environmental issues; and the conflict between development and environmental conservation. It led to a lively conversation with active participation from everyone that carried into the Q&A session as well, with many interesting questions from the audience pushing the discussions even further.

The symposium concluded with a call for continued research on the topic of environmental engagement and that the practical suggestions presented are employed in combating the many outstanding environmental challenges of our world.