‘Hazaribagh’- development trajectory or trap? – A case study of a leather processing unit in Bangladesh

Abstract

The extensive alteration of global ecosystems, especially the changes caused by globalized and industrialized economic development activities over the last fifty years, have urged for a better understanding of the human-in-nature management system. Bangladesh, a densely populated developing country, is witnessing rapid environmental degradation while passing through different phases of industrial growth. Leather, one of the oldest industries in this country, provides a very positive picture in the country’s national economy and at the same time produces severe ecological and social crisis in a mutually reinforcing way. At first sight, it seems to fit the SES concept of social ecological trap. The previous scientific studies on ‘Hazaribagh’ leather processing unit in Bangladesh have investigated social, economic, ecological and stakeholder’s perspectives but did not address the pathway that has shaped the present situation. The objective of this case study was therefore to explore the reasons why change of this ‘Hazaribagh system’ has been impeded for so long and if the social-ecological trap concept could help to clarify the reasons for the chronic delay of the relocation of ‘Hazaribagh’ leather processing unit. This study has observed, through a historical investigation that a path dependent social ecological trap situation is persisting in the ‘Hazaribagh system’ where the economic opportunity is playing the role as a juncture between the phases of the process; and power mechanism and the disconnected SES has influenced and strengthened the claim. This study has also addressed some other underlying substantial social issues, which are influencing the process and might contribute to outline further research, and consequently provide insight to escape from the trap situation.