

BIOPOLICY – SETTING BIOETHICAL PRIORITIES THE INTERACTIVE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Abstract

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Abstract: In the constantly evolving world of information technology, the media have a decisive role to play in facing the challenges of our times. The fate of the environment and “bios” – all forms of life – is becoming of increased importance in decision-making at the national and international level. One of the primary goals of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) since its inception in 1985, has been to mobilise the media to be actively involved in environmental protection projects and to use their influence and infrastructure to promote international cooperation and education for the environment. In the search for “bioethical” priorities for the millennium, the media have the power and responsibility to make a strong and urgent appeal to all leaders – governments, business, academia, civil society – to change the direction of their thinking, not only for the sake of humanity but for the very continuity of life on our planet.

Joining forces to protect bios – a new role for the media

In the constantly evolving world of information technology, the media have a decisive role to play in facing the challenges of our times. The fate of the environment and “bios” – all forms of life – is becoming of increased importance in decision-making at the national and international level. Global warming, dwindling natural resources, scarce or unsafe water supplies, soil degradation, and marine pollution are problems that place the continuity of life on our planet in jeopardy.

How can we mobilise humanity to join forces against these universal dangers? How can we make sure that every individual on the planet is sensitised to the joy of possessing bios and takes action to save the environment? Despite years of space research, life has only been found on our planet. Yet this most precious gift is threatened by arrogance and oversight. We cannot stop progress, but, with the right ethical considerations, we have the possibility to guide it in a life-supporting direction.

Public actions and attitudes toward environmental protection are largely being shaped by the media. The media is an instrument that can manipulate public opinion and overall belief systems, and affect the formation of social norms and values. The importance given to some issues over others in the news media reinforces the fact that if environmental concerns receive greater media attention this raises their importance in the eyes of the culture. This crucial role, along with increased access to technology conveying information (i.e. television, the internet, radio, etc.), gives the media an unprecedented opportunity: to motivate and inspire every member of society to take action for the protection of the environment and bios.

One of the primary goals of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) since its inception in 1985, has been to mobilise the media to be actively involved in environmental protection projects and to use their influence and infrastructure to promote international cooperation and education for the environment. This can be achieved through:

- Satellite environmental education to reach every individual on the planet
- Coverage of environmental issues as a staple item on news shows (the way sports and weather reports currently are)
- More extensive coverage of environmental issues in newspapers and electronic newsletters
- The application of the infrastructure used by the media (internet, satellites, etc.) for the effective dissemination of projects in environmental education

- Training of journalists and media professionals in environmental issues in order to increase their awareness of the need to place the environment as a priority in the media
- Promotion of environmental e-learning programmes through websites operated by the media
- A World Referendum for the environment, in the form of a worldwide electronic vote with the support of the media, so that every citizen on the planet can affirm their willingness to save bios
- An interactive role for the media in the form of a “Bank of Ideas” to receive feedback from citizens and elicit a global participation in the development and dissemination of information concerning the protection of bios

Biopolicy – the ethics of bios in every field

The goal of B.I.O. has been to introduce respect for bios into every field, be it scientific, cultural or social. The hope is to transform destructive trends, which have led to the deterioration of the environment and life, into productive strategies for the growth and development of society. To achieve this goal, B.I.O. has been proposing that bioethics be expanded into an all-encompassing concept, beyond the confines of biomedical research, and include every human endeavour.

The ethics of bios affect us all and, for life to continue, it is crucial to set bioethical priorities in areas such as public policy, education, architecture, business, agriculture, legislation, diplomacy, and economics. Biopolicy promotes bioethical guidelines in every profession and provides the framework for all human endeavours to be guided by life-supporting strategies and technology. In the right bioethical context, defined by a true respect for and appreciation of bios, progress in every field can be assessed based on its contribution to the protection of life. The Hippocratic Oath in medicine sets guidelines for the medical practice and has been serving as a code of conduct for physicians since the 5th century BC. Codes of ethics such as the Hippocratic Oath, defining our obligations towards the environment and all forms of life, need to be developed in every profession, in order to set the pillars of a new society of hope. For this to happen, we need to curb the current crisis in values and this can serve as the greatest challenge for the media in the 21st century.

World Referendum and the media

Access to knowledge with modern communication technology enables global participation in the race to save the environment, empowers sustainable development, and increases awareness of our bioethical responsibilities. As first proposed by B.I.O. in 1992, communication technology can help humanity to dynamically voice its concern over environmental deterioration and all its bioethical considerations. A “World Referendum” for every citizen on the planet to simultaneously cast a vote for the environment, would result in a global mobilisation for the reversal of destructive trends and would guarantee a brighter future.

A world vote on the environment cannot be successful without the contribution of the media. The media coordinate and correlate information, thus shaping and inspiring social and cultural attitudes. The power of the media in influencing public opinion as well as the infrastructure available can make the implementation of a simultaneous vote on bios a reality in every corner of the world.

Bank of Ideas – interactive information for bios

To be effective in responding to environmental and bioethical challenges, it is essential to stop reinventing the wheel. Owing to poorly coordinated efforts, valuable time and resources are wasted while damage to bios persists. The knowledge and technology to prevent further destruction are available, but they have to be disseminated more efficiently. An electronic “Bank of Ideas,” where any interested party may contribute information or thoughts concerning the protection of the environment and bios, can promote an expedient transfer of know-how that will help to harness pollution and environmental deterioration and put an end to wasteful and unethical practices.

News is a product that needs a variety of voices to be produced. By receiving feedback from citizens through the “Bank of Ideas,” the media can assume an interactive role and become more distinctive in both their news-gathering and writing/broadcasting processes. The voice of each citizen can be invaluable in guiding the media to make the right decisions. A global concern for bios can be enhanced with the participation of every member of society.

Corporate social and environmental responsibility

Around the world, corporate citizenship is being influenced by deeper social changes that make it necessary for companies to espouse environmental standards. With pro-environmental shareholders entering into dialogue with decision makers, corporate behaviour on the environment can be steered towards a direction that can meet the needs and demands of the global public and civil society. To succeed in capturing new markets, the enterprises of the future will have to align their growth strategies with providing solutions to the world's most pressing challenges: clean energy, the protection of natural resources, safe water and food. Corporate social and environmental responsibility have entered the mainstream, as companies are facing growing pressure to be responsible citizens.

When companies minimise their environmental risks and foster ethical policies, they may also gain a competitive advantage by reducing costs, improving the quality of their products and services, and gaining access to new markets. As many public and private investors refuse to endow companies that pollute the planet and place the health of the world's population at risk, investments are increasingly directed towards businesses that meet the basic standards of environmental responsibility.

The media is a lucrative business, therefore it is essential for media decision-makers to realise that they need to achieve a developmental framework that places people and the planet before profits. Owing to the expanding maze of environmental laws and regulations and the growing public expectations regarding environmental protection, business strategies at every level must be based on an overall framework of bioethics for saving the environment and life on our planet. A good profile of the media as a business within the community can be strengthened by displaying a strong environmental ethic, with responsible policies and activities playing a major part in this.

Green Salary

It is in everyone's long-term interest to build a society that enhances the potential of every citizen, based on initiatives for environmental appreciation and protection. Industrialisation and growth without concern for the environment will further marginalise disadvantaged groups in society and also seriously limit regional aspirations to prosperity, thus hindering efforts to fight poverty. Moreover, many young people are entering the labour market with few skills and even fewer opportunities for productive work.

This points to the urgency of developing a knowledge base to create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Sustainable employment in the environmental field opens the possibilities for disadvantaged groups and youth to develop their employment potential and also creates new jobs and work opportunities. Moreover, the magnitude and urgency of addressing the global problems of unemployment and environmental degradation suggest that a mutual solution may be available.

The creation of new jobs, particularly for youth, is an ethical imperative for relieving hunger and poverty and regenerating the world's economies. Rather than providing conventional benefit payments to the unemployed, they could be offered the opportunity to work in some area related to the protection or restoration of the environment and earn a "green salary" for their contribution. The opportunities abound, and the media can assume an active role in promoting environmental projects for the unemployed, as well as ensuring that people everywhere are imbued with a love and respect for the environment.

Eradicating poverty and fighting hunger

Poverty and food security are social and economic issues, but are also at the root of many environmental problems in developing countries. With population expansion in these regions, the ability to provide basic necessities is threatened. In the 21st century, bioethics will have to complement development policies and programmes with the aim of increasing food production and personal incomes in developing countries without further degrading local environments.

Food security – providing all the people with sufficient food at all times to meet their daily dietary needs for a healthy and productive life – is an essential precondition for economic and social development in every country. It depends on the availability of and access to food, and on proper food use. Achieving food security is more than just an issue of food production, nutrition, and food aid. Hunger is a severe manifestation of poverty, and alleviating it depends in the long run on sustainable and broad-based economic growth and income generation. In most countries, these depend on a productive, competitive, and environmentally sound agricultural sector. To

achieve these conditions, underdeveloped countries must invest in rural areas to strengthen infrastructure, and to restore and conserve critical natural resources for food production.

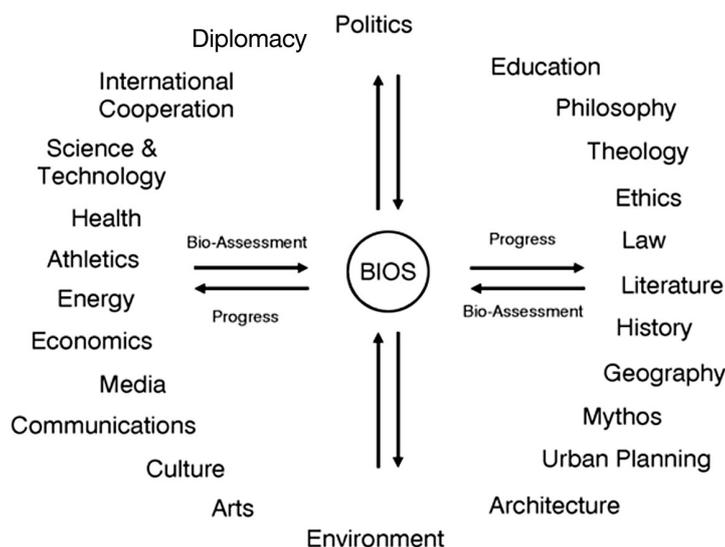
This requires both public and private investment, and the political will to implement the necessary changes. The role of the media can be decisive in this endeavour, as there is little doubt that they can affect individuals and society to adopt bios promoting ethics and values as a priority in economic and social and development.

Bio-education for a global responsibility – education through the media

To meet the ethical challenges of the new millennium, education requires a radical shift away from intra-disciplinary entrenchment and into creative and thoughtful action for the development of the highest potential of each individual for the benefit of the world and future generations. The purpose and responsibility of bio-education is to uplift the spirit of humanity and to reverse the crisis in values that has resulted in serious environmental deterioration. By providing interdisciplinary models with environmental considerations and bioethics in every speciality, bio-education seeks to apply environmental protection to every human endeavour.

To further this vision, B.I.O. launched the International University for the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.) in 1990. The I.U.B.E. urges scholars, decision-makers, diplomats, business leaders, teachers and students to actively contribute to the development of a bioethical society. Bearing in mind that universities should be, by definition, “universal,” the International University for the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.), launched by B.I.O. in 1990, promotes a model bio-education by introducing interdisciplinary educational reforms on a worldwide basis. Rather than focusing on the award of degrees, the I.U.B.E. acts as a catalyst to accelerate environmental awareness and impart a bioethical message to students and training professionals around the world. Leading educators and decision-makers infuse existing educational institutions with bios promoting values. The aim is for the I.U.B.E. to become a world-calibre initiative for the development of multidisciplinary environmental concepts leading to a revised educational system for the entire planet.

BIOS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM



One of the primary goals of B.I.O. since its inception has been the promotion of environmental education with the use of satellites, a proposal many times made to leaders and decision-makers around the world. The application of the infrastructure used by the media (internet, satellites, etc.) for the effective dissemination of projects in environmental education can give the media a primary role in the development and implementation of educational projects with long-lasting added value.

Accessibility and social justice – the promotion of bioethics by the media

Environmental values and ethics must be directed towards the enhancement of quality of life as defined by all the stakeholders in society. A society that is open and accessible to all should be our goal for the millennium. It is an

ethical imperative that barriers to the disabled be identified and removed. Poverty and social exclusion of the disabled can be tolerated no longer. Changing attitudes towards people with disabilities in the area of employment is a key issue, along with accessibility and social justice.

The environment belongs to all. It is a precious gift, a fundamental human right. Accessibility to all elements of society and the environment is a critical responsibility we have towards the present and the future. Access of the disabled to all facilities and services of society is a fundamental right. City environments are particularly hostile to people with disabilities, mainly due to the fact that access to most places is very difficult or almost impossible. While most people commonly associate barriers to access with physical impediments as in the case of the wheelchair user who cannot enter a building due to flights of steps, in fact, the concept of accessibility is much broader. It encompasses the availability of information services, economic activity, culture, religion, and language, in addition to the physical environment. Each type of barrier must be carefully evaluated and understood in relation to its impact on the mobility of the disabled; it must then be removed or corrected. The disabled are equal citizens and an appreciation of bioethics requires that they are assured of the ability to live fully in society and pursue their aspirations.

These dimensions ought to be supported promoted by the media which can thus achieve a socially-conscious bioethical role. They can effectively contribute to the equilibrium of society through their function as agents of accessibility and social justice.

Bio-diplomacy and peace

Bio-diplomacy – international co-operation in environmental protection – is a concept pioneered by B.I.O. at a time when civic leaders, international organisations, and the world community as whole had not fully realised the urgency of adopting common environmental policy as a priority. It focuses on the interdependence of all forms of life and calls upon diplomats and people of influence to engage in a collective endeavour in defence of the environment. Joint efforts to protect the environment can boost international relations and act as a bridge between global impetus and decision-making at the national and local levels.

Bio-diplomacy is an opportunity for the aspirations of sovereign states and civil society to converge in pursuit of long-term international environmental policy and action. At the same time, bio-diplomacy actively supports efforts to maintain biological and cultural diversity and seeks to improve human relations and to attain the goal of world peace by replacing current diplomatic attitudes with a complete international and intercultural perspective. Within this framework, respect for human rights and the existence of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies is an undeniable principle.

Peace cannot be achieved in a world ravaged by pollution, hunger and disease. We need to build a sound society, which can lead humanity to a brighter future. A bios-promoting vision, one that places the ethics of bios at the heart of societal structure, can provide the necessary framework to end wars and civil strife and to achieve a world in which the gift of bios is truly appreciated.

Environmental pollution and degradation do not respect international treaties and state boundaries. Unless a universal understanding of bioethics evolves, the very continuation of the chain of life on our planet will be at stake. Informing the public and soliciting their active participation in the debate about ethics concerning the environment is a crucial and urgent task if destructive trends are to be curbed. Assessing technological developments on the basis of environmental criteria would contribute greatly towards elevating bioethical considerations into a priority in decision-making at every level.

Stopping the ticking clock of destruction – an urgent appeal for enlightened leadership

The clock is ticking too fast. How can our leaders not hear it? Great nations were built on ideals, and great leaders are equated with values and morals. Why are we allowing misery and devastation to prevail? Let us change the ticking clock of destruction into a vision of hope. Let us achieve enlightened and far-sighted leadership. The media have the power and responsibility to make a strong and urgent appeal to all leaders – governments, business, academia, civil society – to change the direction of their thinking, not only for the sake of humanity but for the very continuity of life on our planet.

Victory is found in sharing, in participation, in rebuilding. Variety in language, culture, and religion needs to be

maintained as our richness. Enlightened policy may contribute to the understanding that division only results in loss. Superiority can be measured in cooperation in planting trees, cleaning water, saving biodiversity, sharing a common future. Sensitising public opinion about the urgency of joining forces in realising this goal should become the priority of all media decision-makers.

Wars and environmental destruction are examples of the misuse of technology. But the technology to save life exists, and it can be more profitable to mobilise world action to save life and to involve every individual. It is urgent to invest in efforts to protect and enhance human, plant and animal life. Who can feel the tragedy of the tree being felled? Who can see the polluted air and the numerous health problems it creates? Who can appreciate the oceans, the main source of the oxygen we breathe? We need to listen to our hearts and direct our energy and creativity into combating the true enemy, the destruction of life.

If bios is destroyed in the name of progress there can be no gain. It is our unquestionable ethical responsibility to assess progress in the context of partnership, equity, and balance among all forms of life on our planet. This is the goal and vision of biopolitics. With the support and active engagement of the media, this goal and vision can become a reality.

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Author's Note: All of the above references are available electronically at www.biopolitics.gr