

**Chaudhary, Sunita<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography and Planning, Macquarie University, Australia

**Holy ponds and missed opportunities:  
a multi-scalar analysis of cultural ecosystem services at the  
Mai Pokhari Ramsar site of Nepal**

**Key words:** cultural services, local-global dynamics, Nepal

**Abstract**

Ecosystem services, a globalizing discourse referring to both material and non-material benefits humans gain from ecosystems, has been rapidly mainstreamed into scientific and political thinking of environmental management. However, non-material benefits, also known as cultural services, have been rather submerged within this dominating discourse. This paper identifies local cultural services in the Mai Pokhari Ramsar site of Nepal and adopts a cross-scalar analysis to explore the implications that the global Ramsar listing produces at local scale. The research, informed by political ecology, applies both qualitative and quantitative methods including a Q-methodology. Spirituality, sense of place and traditional practices were some of the important local cultural values identified contributing to ecosystem management. But such local values were marginalized at national and global scales, and when institutionalization into policy. The institutionalization of Ramsar listing at the case study site imposed restrictions on community activities and the possibility of resettlement, thus creating disenchantment among the local community. It shows the need to strengthen the value of local cultural services in policy-making, that links specific local sites into the global Ramsar network. This is important not only for refining the global conservation policy and discourse like ecosystem services, but also for securing just conservation and sustainable development outcomes.