INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE: CONNECTING THE DOTS

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ABSTRACT: Integration of knowledge and ideas in reality is increasingly becoming relevant as the call for transdisciplinary gains momentum in recent times especially in the face of many global changes. The search for long-term, sustainable solutions ought to be multidisciplinary in nature so as to provide transformative changes, rather than an incremental and linear alternative. For example, the severity of the climate crisis demands a change in the conventional framework to one that is more impactful with a radical outcome. Open innovative approaches that cover beyond technological outcomes to enable social, communal and institutional dimensions are imperative for a success sustainable change as the real-world drivers in the transformational process. This means the need for an integration of knowledge and ideas through both multi- and transdisciplinary approaches are crucial in delivering the oft quoted goal of "no one left behind" – a global objective in embracing the overarching goal for humanity as depicted in 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. INTRODUCTION

Integration of knowledge and ideas in reality is increasingly becoming relevant as the call for transdisciplinary gains momentum in recent times especially in the face of many global changes. The search for long-term, sustainable solutions ought to be multidisciplinary in nature so as to provide transformative changes, rather than an incremental and linear alternative. For example, the severity of the climate crisis demands a change in the conventional framework to one that is more impactful with a radical outcome. Open innovative approaches that cover beyond technological outcomes to enable social, communal and institutional dimensions are imperative for a success sustainable change as the real-world drivers in the transformational process. This means the need for an integration of knowledge and ideas through both multi- and transdisciplinary approaches are crucial in delivering the oft quoted goal of "no one left behind" – a global objective in embracing the overarching goal for humanity as depicted in 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1). At its core, the 2030 Agenda is aimed towards the 5Ps - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership in an integrated way connecting the dots with 17 SDGs that caters to the 5Ps. It highlights how the SDGs are an intertwined framework instead of a group of siloed goals since the progress on one P must balance and support progress of another. Delivery on the 5Ps greatly depends on promoting

and protecting the Dignity and Justice of the People, especially the poor and marginalised so that "no one *is* left behind" with an urgent call to action in a global partnership.

Similarly, other global threats to humanity too require broad-based complex problem-solving strategies unlike the traditional, siloed and incremental options. In other words, integration of knowledge and ideas as a transdisciplinary approach ought to be mainstreamed and recognised as a future-proof basis for quantum change. This article draws on the experience of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) to reflect upon the experiences involved in pushing the boundaries of knowledge and translating ideas through transdisciplinary undertakings aimed at developing and providing a wider range of alternatives to move forward. It involves a paradigm shift to co-create a "new" identity by integrating knowledge and ideas continuously. In so doing, explores new perspectives across the board, cutting across several related issues as well as challenges. Adopting a dynamic and progressive learning structure by aligning it to transdisciplinarity, and removing limitations facilitates the accomplishment at the desired integration of knowledge and ideas.

In the book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (2) by renowned socio-biologist E. O. Wilson, the author discussed methods that have been used to unite the sciences and the need to further unite them with the humanities. The word *consilience* (~~consilience~~ refers literally to "a jumping together" of knowledge) was originally coined as the phrase "consilience of inductions" by William Whenwell (1841-1866). The word is said to come from Latin *consilent* from assimilated form of *com-* "with, together" and *-siliens* "jumping" (as in resilience) (3).

2. WHY INTEGRATION?

Wilson uses the term consilience (also convergence of evidence or concordance of evidence) to describe the synthesis of knowledge from different specialised fields of human endeavour. Basically, the text is said to a well-written manifesto for inter-disciplinary studies where Wilson proposes that fields of study may have become too rigid and isolated, at the expense of the "unity" of human knowledge. He argues for a wider relationship between arts, sciences, histories and religions.

In science and history, consilience is the principle that evidence from independent, unrelated sources can "converge" on strong conclusions (4). That is, when multiple sources of evidence agree, the conclusion can be very strong even when none of the individual sources of evidence is significantly so on its own. Most established scientific knowledge is supported by a convergence of evidence: if not, the evidence is comparatively weak, and there will probably not be a strong scientific consensus.

The principle based on unity of knowledge (whereby all the sciences form a unified whole), measuring the same result by several different methods should lead to the same answer (5). It should not matter whether one measures distances within the Giza pyramid complex by laser rangefinder, by satellite imaging, or with a metre stick – in all three cases, the answer should be approximately the same. For the same reason, different dating methods in geochronology should concur, a result in chemistry should not contradict a result in geology, etc. When results from different strong methods do appear to conflict, this is treated as a serious problem to be reconciled. For example, in the 19th century, the Sun appeared to be no more than 20 million years old, but the Earth appeared to be no less than 300 million years (resolved

by the discovery of nuclear fusion and radioactivity, and the theory of quantum mechanics); or current attempts to resolve theoretical differences between quantum mechanics and general relativity.

Integration of knowledge and ideas can also draw on contemporary theories of knowledge democracy that emphasise the importance of what the authors refer to as 'co-construction of knowledge' (6). It argues for the respect for knowledge-creating powers of local people and local organisations, and those arguing for transdisciplinarity and sustainability in higher education. It rightly highlights that knowledge creation has been liberated from the monopoly of universities, but it can be complex requiring in many ways a paradigm shift 'with new forms of knowledge or recovered indigenous forms of knowledge coming to the fore.' This in turn can lead to 'much more relational (and less individualistic and scientific) modes of knowing, doing and being.' As noted, it pushes the boundaries way beyond the oft-mentioned academic axiom of 'publish-or-perish' towards as holistic outcome in order to realise 'The World We Want' as envisaged by UNESCO.

In so doing, the integration of knowledge and ideas, according to Seanarae Smith (7) requires the activation of prior knowledge to aid in the comprehension of the concepts and ideas presented in the various types of text. Those who are sighted gain knowledge about many ideas or concepts through seeing things in the environment or participating in a variety of activities on a daily basis, thus providing them with lots of prior knowledge about concepts or ideas. Generally, therefore, to meet the goals of integration of knowledge and ideas one must be provided with meaningful experiences to assist them in the understanding of concepts or ideas in various text genres. This includes the use credible sources and materials (like braille for those needing one) as well as the appropriate technology. This is to enable the activation of the prior knowledge, and how to use resources that could further expand the knowledge in an integrated way and creating novel ideas.

2.1 Islamic perspectives

From the Islamic perspective, Saphic Omer (8) provides a refreshing interpretation when he wrote: "They [Muslims] need to revive the notions of holistic knowledge and education as vehicles of absolute and transcendent truth. The concepts of integration, rather than separation; inclusiveness, rather than contraction; harmony, rather than dichotomy; cooperation, rather than conflict; comprehensive excellence, rather than mediocrity; and dynamism, rather than lethargy, are the main thrusts that need to be subtly interwoven into the fabric of Islamic education. While doing so, sporadically learning from others and other systems in the East and the West should never be frowned upon. It yet should be welcomed, as wisdom is the lost property of a believer; wherever he finds it, he takes it – as expounded by the Prophet (pbuh)."

More importantly: "It is grossly inappropriate that the worldview, teachings and values of Islam are taught in Islamic departments and syllabi, but elsewhere it is business as usual, whereby alien-to-Islam ideologies and value systems are directly or indirectly applied and promoted. It is equally inappropriate that in the latter, Islamic precepts and solutions are indeed consulted, but only as secondary, inferior, outmoded and symbolic options. Imposed foreign irreconcilable paradigms remain nevertheless favoured and in force. Islam must not be a footnote in Muslims' educational obsessions and systems."

"It is high time that the thinking, according to which Islam is only for the purely religious sciences, purely religious institutions and establishments, and purely religious people, be rescinded once and for all. It is really astonishing why after all the events and episodes of the past century, Muslims still cannot come to terms with the fallacy and absurdity of such a philosophy. The philosophy was served as a poisonous chalice by the colonial masters and their numerous collaborators for their well-known agendas and programs. At present, such thinking is an unmistaken sign of intellectual and spiritual backwardness."

Consequently, therefore, "integration of knowledge begets the harmony, peace, coherence and consistency of being. Whereas separation of knowledge and fallings-out between its diverse segments ultimately beget the disharmony, inconsistence, contradiction and despondency of being."

Omer raises the dilemma as to "why in most parts of the Muslim world there still cannot be place, nor opportunity, to integrate in the realm of humanities Islam's paramount principles of man, life, society, humankind, gender issues, history, geography, environment, law, politics, aesthetics and ethics; why in social sciences there is no room for integrating Islam's overriding values and doctrines concerning human and social development, human behaviour and wellbeing, economics, psychology, health, sustainable development, justice, equality, linguistics, society, culture and epistemology; why in the diverse fields of science there is no place for incorporating Islam's perhaps most fundamental tenets and teachings in connection with life and death, universe, earth, ecology, biology, matter, astronomy, mathematics and ethics."

3. THE WEIRD WORLD

In response to this, we need to come to terms with the notion that is world today is largely Western-centric, best described by the acronym WEIRD, that is, Western- or White-biased, Economic-centric, Industry-driven, Reputation-obsessed and consequently Dehumanising, or a resultant inhumane world (9). The Covid-19 pandemic makes this clear for each item in the acronym. Yet the discussion today has not shifted much from what is considered "weird" in the real sense of the word. The pandemic controversies affecting humanity across the planet are the latest that comes to mind.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims around the world are increasingly thinking, planning, and working like the Westernised. The ideological orientation of modern western civilisation as determined by the Renaissance (14th-16th century) and the Enlightenment (Age of Reason) (17th-19th century) formed the larger framework of WEIRD. The first and second Industrial Revolutions in the 18th-19th century, and the 19th-20th century respectively were their immediate (ill)-consequences which at the same time, presented a future scenario of dynamic processes and continuous advances to shape the "new" world. Ideologies like capitalism and socialism were then introduced to further fracture the fabric of humankind, followed by modernism and postmodernism as the so-called culmination and a perfect embodiment of everything that represent the new civilisation and all its implications. Authors Noami Orekes and Eric Conway in the book, The Collapse of the Western Civilisation (10), points to the decaying state of affair with the emerging Anthropocene era (11) as well as the on-going Sixth Mass Extinction (12). These could be understood as crucial signals as to the end of history and the last human not least because knowledge(s) in all forms and genres failed to be integrated to arrive at a better understanding.

"Islamisation" is often used to argue as an option and an alternative method of inquiry to that of the West or WEIRD. It is a platform that offers different answers to questions about equality and justice, rights and duties, accountability and responsibility - or what it means to be human in an Islamic sense. Islam is not just a religion, but a complete way of life (*ad-din*) leading to a higher order lifestyle and civilisation. It produces a way of looking at the world and creating it into a holistic and integrated way of knowing, being, living and doing. Since for Muslims knowledge (*'ilm*) is sacred regardless of the magnitude of the challenges they are in, seeking them and living by their provisions is the goal as the vicegerent of God on earth, or *Khalifah.* It is an obligation (*amanah*) to be fulfilled for *rahmatan lil 'almin* (mercy to all). For Islam, knowledge is synonymous with faith, light, and virtue. Ignorance is the opposite. As Islam does not distinguish between spiritual and material realms, the mind-matter or physics-metaphysics divide does not exist in Islam. The binary complements each other for the realisation of a higher order of truth, meaning, and experience for which the world was created.

4. EUROCENTRICITY

Thus, being Islamic is another way of perceiving the world in its own right. The categories of knowledge emerging from the West, such as the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, are both a product and an embodiment of this desire to know; or want to ask questions in exploring knowledge and ideas in the context of human history within the Muslim faith. Some scholars even proposed re-examining the relationship between Muslim civilisation and the written word described as the Islamic heritage ~~to be re-read~~ and subjected to a critical analysis. Others have shown that many Western categories of knowledge are inherently Eurocentric because they promote Western growth and material prosperity at the expense of the rest of the world, in contrast to the precept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (13). Though many of these have evolved and changed due to the pressure of the over time, but some have become more, not less, Eurocentric driven by the advances of (high) technology. Notably the notion of "white" artificial intelligence. Just as the notions of modernity represent a more sophisticated form of Eurocentrism than colonialism, the evolution of knowledge categories has made them likewise.

So not surprising that Eurocentrism prevails everywhere, if not so easily discerned. The West is likely to stay given its advanced science, technology, and warfare, at least its stranglehold on the minds of many of the former colonies. Similarly, Muslims could not reject everything served by and in the name of the West and its civilisation, by living aloof from what is going on. While it is impractical for Muslims to reject them altogether and start over in relation to these aspects, sadly, most are not even aware of the mindset crisis that they are in. This is despite, according to Samuel P. Huntington of The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order fame: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion […] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." (14). Although Islam does not sanction religious formalism, theological fatalism, and defeatism, likewise, Muslims cannot import, and accept and ape everything that of the West, especially like that described by WEIRD. To do so, would tantamount to renouncing Islamic worldview, ethics, and values and disavowing Islamic identity as form colonialism. That said, Muslims could reject unforgiving components and integrate the compatible ones in the attempt to live as expected of good Muslims instead. In this, the Andalusian experiences at the height of the Muslim civilisation around the 10th century served as a remarkable example in the present era.

More specifically in the context of the Bayt al-Hikmah or the well-known House of Wisdom (15) referred to as a major public academy and intellectual centre beginning from the 10th century Baghdad (16). Then many of the intrinsic aspects and qualities of Greek (western) civilisation that were unproblematic were readily adopted. Aspects that are deemed problematic were rendered "useful", after undergoing the appropriate assessments and modifications before being they are integrated into the Islamic knowledge ecosystem. Today, this is generally understood as "Islamisation" of knowledge and ideas, a term coined in the early 1980s. But have in there much earlier to the days of the Prophets of Islam (pbuh). The more problematic ones were subjected to the more complex and intensive "Islamisation" process. Only features that were found to be irreparably un-Islamic, were kept outside of the Islamic knowledge domain as measured by the "revealed" Islamic sources and those interrelated based on the credibility of the evidence(s).

5. VARIETIES OF ISLAMISATION

The concept of Islamisation of knowledge which gained momentum in the 1980s can also be attributed to the changing global consciousness due to the "resurgence of Islam" barely some 10 years before. It somewhat coincided with the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah in 1977 (17). Since then more scholars have been engaged deeply in this epistemological, social and political issue. Secularism and the great speed with which secularisation has engulfed the Muslim world stirred Muslim intellectuals from their indifference and motivated them to act. The amount of discussion that was generated led to an extensive body of literature on the subject spanning the social, human, and natural sciences, and driving a pathway to an integration of knowledge and ideas internationally.

Despite the massive discussion and literature, they have not struck a common chord among themselves. All scholars speak the same language, and their intentions and goals are expressed in similar identities. But their methods, approaches, and strategies remain irreconcilable somehow. According to Abdul Rashid Moten in his book, *Varieties of Islamisation* (18), it is almost impossible to find two scholars who agree on the mere definition of the Islamisation of knowledge, its scope, and approach. Another notable feature is the "acceptance" of definition and methodology of Islamisation that lasted only so long as its proponent holds an authoritative position in an organisation or institution. Otherwise, this phenomenon renders instability and disagreement on the framework which seriously hampered the progress in harmonising the various meanings, definitions, and interpretations related to the Islamisation project, and impeding the integration process at the same time, even among the relevant scholars. Some from among them eschewed a strictly inclusive and exclusive position, while others speak of a broader label intended to convey the more general sense of the term, and its priorities (19). That said, most would agree that modern education is defective as it downplays morality and values and relies excessively on empiricism with little or no consideration for spiritualism. Meaning that Islamic revivalism initiated on the "Islamisation of knowledge" is not a mere slogan, a symbol, or empty rhetoric.

Of late, the State of Perak's Sultan Nazrin Shah was reported to say that "higher education today in general has failed to instil integrity in scholars, which has led to corrupt leaders and has hampered national development." He said that development of the nation needs holistic progress in all areas which looks beyond economics and infrastructure (20).

"We must be clear that a nation's development is linked not only to how much money we have or how many modern buildings and highways we can construct.

"There are countries with the finest state-of-the-art buildings that money can buy, yet where unemployment and poverty – in the sense of economic as well as spiritual poverty – are still widespread," reminded Sultan Nazrin. During the Perak state-level *Maulidur Rasul* 1438H celebration, the Sultan said: "When power was regarded as an opportunity to fulfil personal interest and not as a trust, the functioning of the government would be impaired and ultimately resulted in its downfall and collapse of a civilisation."

In this regard, universities in Muslim countries in particular should take heed of this seriously to produce a generation of scholars who would probe the boundaries of knowledge and synchronise modern knowledge with the teachings of the Qur'an and sunnah in a holistic rather than piecemeal manner. These institutions must strive to achieve correct perspectives of life, the universe, and human. *Tawḥīd* and its concomitant principles of equality, integration (*ummah*), knowledge, justice, and the decision by consultation come to play an important role in the story of humankind in the future. It argues that Islam is a way of life in which spiritual and temporal lives are fused, and has something important to offer about how society should be ordered and implemented in some sustainable and transformative ways. Today, when Muslims stand at the crossroads of their cultural and civilisational consciousness and performance, the subject of integration of knowledge and its sciences becomes overriding. It perhaps denotes the most critical issue that must be addressed and resolved. There is no aspect of human physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual existence that Islam did not address, one way or another. A complete [integrative] paradigm has been revealed by the Omniscient Creator and Sustainer of humans, life and universe. Using it as a developmental blueprint is incumbent upon all Muslims (8). In a nutshell, the WEIRD needs to quickly give way to a more wholesome, inclusive, sustainable or *sejahtera*, equitable and resiliency (WISER) framework that will lead to a just and humane world as a higher purpose of life. It calls for social cohesiveness and intellectual solidarity that public could benefit from through a meaningful integration of knowledge and ideas, humanely.

6. SEJAHTERA

Sejahtera as cited above is another integrative concept coming from the traditional or indigenous cultural practices. It has a more complex and comprehensive meaning than the word "wellbeing" – as often rendered which is uni-dimensional in character. *Sejahtera* is indeed a multi-layered (read, integrated) concept that conveys a deeper meaning that any single word could convey. As such, it has no equivalent in other languages, neither can it be accurately translated into different languages due to its close cultural leaning and nuances to the local Malay(sian) tradition.

To understand it from a one-dimensional perspective is to miss the whole point and can even give a very distorted meaning instead. What would be most sorely missed is the qualitative-cum-intangible aspects that are today's major concern. Health, especially mental health, for example, is not just about the absence of disease or illness that may be quantifiable, one way or the other. Instead it a unified knowledge and idea which is universally recognised as the state of socio-emotional being, sans "physical" diseases, that could lead to a situation of *tidak sejahtera* (non-*sejahtera;* read, depression, stress, violence) without any clear signs and symptoms until perhaps it is too late to deal with. In the days of the Covid-19 pandemic, the

elements of *sejahtera* must be fully understood, internalised and practised because it is the fountainhead of good values/virtues that are innately human (and spiritual/divine too) that will lead to a righteous and balanced way of life in nurturing the "whole" human person. In no uncertain terms it forms the basis of the Malaysian national education system from pre-school to the university in a continuous, holistic and integrated manner (as enshrined in the national education philosophy.)

Until this happens integratively, *sejahtera* in all its forms and taglines are nothing but empty clichés with an outcome that may fall terribly short of what the word is supposed to truly convey in the context of local and indigenous knowledge qualitatively as a way of life embracing in-depth values and virtues. Indeed, quality of life (QoL) as a concept is another area where *sejahtera* is predicated on as "socio-economic wellbeing" alone is inadequate to address the issue (21). It fails to grasp the full meaning of the "whole" human person as a life form. "Life" as in QoL is invariably related to the "spiritual being" first rather than the material being as economically defined, understood and determined. ~~In short~~ Otherwise, values/virtues such as happiness, love and mutual respect, to name a few, that "makes" the person human is totally marginalised, if not lost. Any learning centres therefore should aim to achieve *sejahtera* in creating a better world and an even better future for the entire humanity in the context of mercy to all as mentioned above. Learning is not just about what we want to be or work in the future, but also including the learning about nature and environments around us as part of the WISER (22) framework.

In summary, like all traditional worldviews, *sejahtera* is about the rebalancing life on the planet earth until the end of our time (23). It is not a concern directed to a particular, but all people the world over. Foremost, it is about keeping a fine balance in all the ten aspects that make up *sejahtera* described as SPICES. 'S' referring to the *Spiritual balance*, 'P' stands for *Physio-psychological balance*, 'I' for *Intellectual balance*, 'C' representing *Culture balance*, also *Cognitive balance,* 'E' pointing to *Ecology, Ethical, Environmental* and *Economic balances* and lastly, 'S' - *Societal balance*. In all, SPICES is in itself about maintaining an overall balance integratively covering aspects of life as a whole which is truly necessary to co-create a well-balance life that we all sought after.
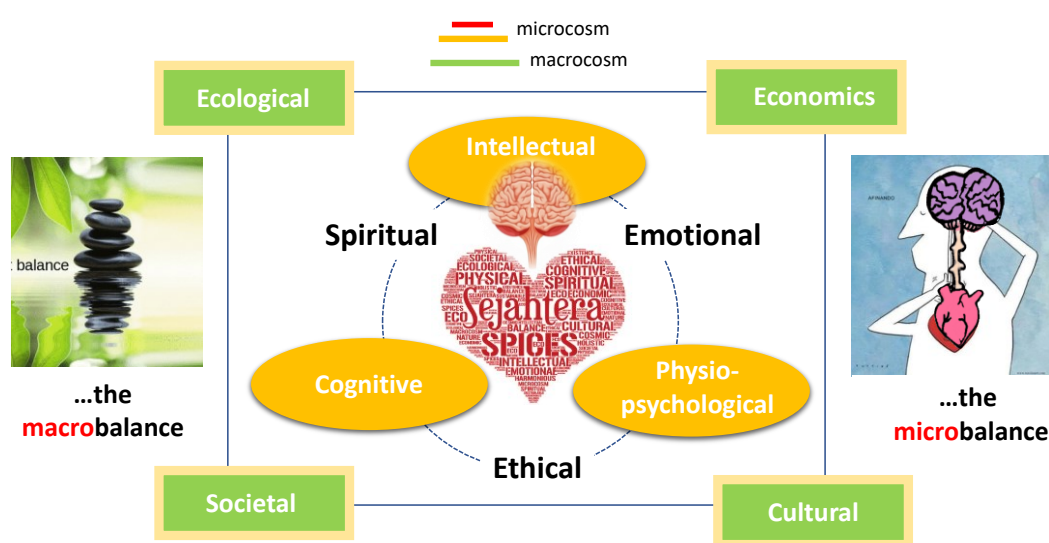

Fig. 1. The 10 elements (SPICES) of *Sejahtera* (21)

The 'SPICES' approach, which goes beyond the 5Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership) as linked to the 17 SDGs raises wider awareness and participation among the community about the pre-existing indigenous concept of sustainability in their culture allowing for better cultural connectedness to the idea and philosophy (albeit forgotten) since time immemorial. Integrating the concept through co-creation and co-learning with the community would give all parties a sense of ownership, even kinship, and make the changes easier to implement. In this sense, the integration of knowledge and ideas must be open to broadening the knowledge system by integrating relevant traditions or even indigenising the knowledge base as part of the process to decolonise of knowledge (24). It underscored that indigenous knowledge and wisdom have had their own uniqueness, strength, and relevance for the local community over the years, long before the Brundtland Report was commissioned.

It is human-centric in that it spans the macrocosmic-microcosmic nexus. It is macrocosmic because it relates humans to the external environment – nature and fellow beings, including other species. It is microcosmic because it embraces the 'self' and the inner (esoteric) dimensions, including spiritual consciousness. Taken together the status of *sejahtera* can be described as a balanced lifestyle as shown in Figure 1. Not only must each aspect be in balance in itself, but also each must be in balance with all the rest to achieve an overall state of well-being that is lasting (sustainable) over generations. The last point is pertinent because it implies that sustainability is not a new concept that emerged in the 1980s following the well-acknowledged Brundtland Report. Arguably, sustainability and integration, is an ancient concept in many indigenous traditions that has been overtaken and lost in the drive toward modern (unsustainable) development. Ultimately, development becomes purely a physical venture and no longer focuses on building 'collaborative relationships' between humans, the community, the environment, and the 'creator' to co-exist as an enduring lifestyle. In so doing, the fine state of balance is severely offset by a hefty price tag for future generations. In short, the embodiment of *sejahtera* goes beyond the conventional 5Ps.

7. CONCLUSION

In order to have the fullest impact on community, local and global, knowledge can no longer be fashioned into siloes of all sorts and styles. In so doing, becomes disconnected, and irrelevant in seeking better solutions for humanity and its shared heritage. In much of the Asia-Pacific region, this can still be traced in several communities – old and new, traditional and modern, central an peripheral (25). This is the reality that many have forgotten, if not totally lost, due to commodification of knowledge in the pursuit of material growth that dehumanises the human persons. Knowledge is predicated more for "livelihood" driven by the logic of economics, rather than for higher purpose of living driven by the vital forces of life based on humanitatian values, dignity and justice as its ultimate outcome through peaceful co-existence in a holistic, balanced and harmonious ways. The International Journal of Integration of Knowledge is an attempt to provide such a platform that cuts through all the artificial barriers of disciplines. It aims "to promote excellence by providing avenues for multidisciplinary [including transdisciplinarity] perspectives" in co-creating new and novel knowledges (sic) discourse to connect all the dots for the betterment of human lives and civilisation as advocated by the IIUM vision statement in conjunction with its 40th anniversary.

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