

Sustainable Justice in Wisconsin: A Transdisciplinary Approach for Incubating the Movement

Grace L. Coggio and Greta Gaard
University of Wisconsin - River Falls
UMACS Conference 2019, Sept. 28
Carleton College Rm 236, 2:00-2:50 pm

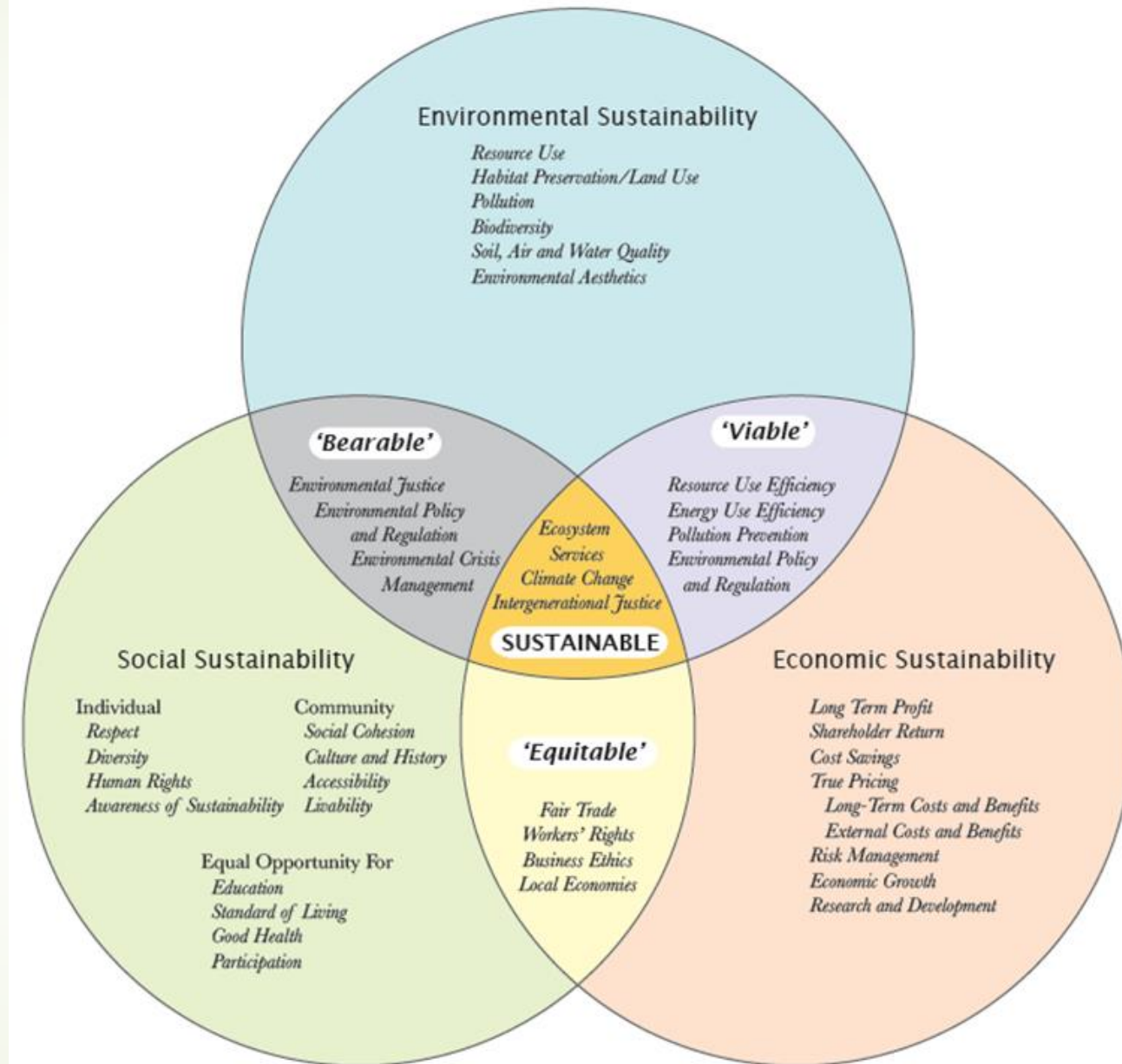
Outline



- UWRF story (2008-2019)
 - From Sustainability Studies to Sustainable Justice
 - Barriers to SUSJ implementation
- Program Achievements vs. Institutional Change
- Incubating the Movement
- Discussion & Questions

Origins: Sustainability @ UWRF

- Environmental Science professor, Kelly Cain & Sustainability Studies Minor @ UWRF (2008)
- AASHE years 2010-2018
- Sustainability-Across-The-Curriculum Trainings
- Sustainability-infused syllabi awarded stipends without review
- Growth of Sustainability Office, Director, Interns, Facilities Staff -- & Cuts (2012-13)



Julian Agyeman, Tufts AASHE Keynote 2010

*“AASHE Digest
2009, 380 pages,
over 1250 stories
and initiatives from
nearly 600
institutions, 24
chapters and the
word ‘justice’
appears 13
times...”*



Urban & Environmental Policy Planning, Tufts University
Introducing Just Sustainabilities (2013)
*Sustainable Communities & the Challenge of
Environmental Justice* (2005)

Agyeman's argument for Just Sustainability as the "middle way"*

Sustainability

- ▶ "Equity-deficit" environmentalism gave rise to environmental justice movement
- ▶ Sustainability movement largely white, educated, middle class
- ▶ "Green" agenda of environmental protection, biodiversity, ozone layer –updated as technoscience fixes for climate change
- ▶ Environmental sustainability
 - ▶ Good on *inter*-generational equity
 - ▶ Silent on *intra*-generational equity

Environmental Justice

- ▶ Environmental justice organization
 - ▶ Rooted in grassroots Civil Rights
 - ▶ Bottom-up organizing
 - ▶ Redefines environment as places where we live, work, play, pray
 - ▶ Largely low-income, people of color-driven
- ▶ "Brown" agenda of poverty alleviation, health and education, infrastructure development
- ▶ Just sustainability
 - ▶ Environmental quality & human equality are inseparable

*Julian Agyeman, "Toward a 'just' sustainability?" *Continuum* 22:6(2008), 751-756.

Toward Sustainable Justice (2015-18)

- 2014-15 – Budget cuts to environmental programs across UW system begins
- 2015 - new ¼-time EH Sustainability Faculty Coordinator launches 5-year assessment:
 - Gaard, G., Blades, J. and Wright, M. (2017), "Assessing sustainability curriculum: from transmissive to transformative approaches", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 1263-1278.
 - Research -> **Sustainable Justice Minor**
 - **5 criteria for inclusion:** Sustainability definition, sustainability-infused assignments, rubrics, resources,
 - **Learning Outcomes:** sustainability ethics, praxis, global citizenship
 - **Foundations and Capstone courses + SJ-infused electives.**
 - **HOUSING the MINOR—WHERE??**



Assessing Campus Climate for Sustainability: Two Cultures

- ▶ Environmental Science (CAFES)
- ▶ Business & Economics (CBE)
- ▶ Predominantly white, male, with disciplinary graduate studies only
- ▶ View of education as knowledge transmission.
- ▶ Positivist – based in empiricism.
 - ▶ Auguste Comte: much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other absolute laws, so does society
 - ▶ Rejects introspective & intuitive knowledge, theology & metaphysics as these cannot be quantified.
 - ▶ Scientific method: circular process of theory & observation.
- ▶ With a **transmissive** methodology, 'education for change' is instructive—associated with the transfer of information—and 'education in change' is imposed.
- ▶ Environmental Humanities (CAS)
- ▶ Education, Social Work, Health (CEPS)
- ▶ Diversity education – PhD minors/studies, race/gender/sexuality integral to curriculum
- ▶ Critical Theory - view of education as fostering critical thinking skills.
 - ▶ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
- ▶ Critical Pedagogy affirms
 - ▶ teaching as an inherently political act,
 - ▶ rejects the neutrality of knowledge, and
 - ▶ insists that issues of social justice and democracy itself are not distinct from acts of teaching & learning
- ▶ With a **transformative** methodology, 'education for change' is constructive—it engages the learner in constructing and owning meaning—and 'education in change' is participatory.

Student Groups: ECOS, SALSA





Sustainable Justice Minor

Sierra Club Ranks UWRF 66 out of 268 cool schools in 2018



UWRF in 2018



poet, writer, photographer, performance and multimedia artist



Program Achievements vs. Institutional Change

- **NEH Grant** – written for \$100,000 to support team-teaching & interdisciplinary program gave faculty an opportunity to dream big
- **Strategic Initiative** – awarded for \$10,380 to support SUSJ Capstone students for interdisciplinary research-based civic engagement
- **AASHE Gold Star Status Awarded in 2018**
- **Sierra Club ranks UWRF 66 out of 268 Cool Schools in 2018**



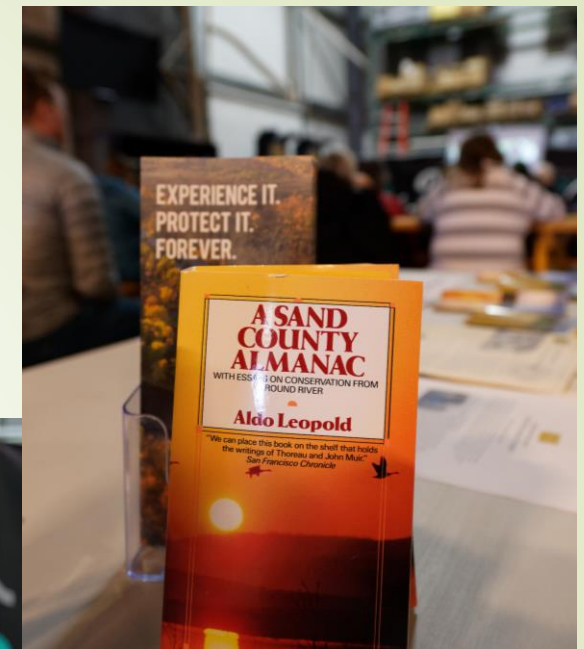
- **Known Threats** – internal and external opponents
 - **Internal:** disciplinary silos, environmental science disciplinary dominance and corporate funding prioritized over transdisciplinary approaches in the liberal arts and environmental humanities
 - **Internal/External Campus climate:** anonymous call to AASHE criticizing UWRF's STARS report data.
 - **State/National culture & political climate:** removal of environmental protections, increases in hate speech and discrediting non-dominant groups' experiences of oppression (women, youth, indigenous people, people of color, immigrants)

Institutional Changes in 2019 --

- **ECOS Student Group folds**
- **UW-System budget cuts to Sustainability create faculty exodus (2017-present)**
- **New Chief Administrators**
- **Sustainability Faculty Fellows Program and Coordinator Cuts** effective December 2019
 - **New admin. plan:**
 - **2 rotating faculty fellows in Diversity or Sustainability,**
 - **housed in a newly-created Center for Teaching & learning**

Incubating the Movement for the next wave

- **Sustainable Justice Minor** updated and institutionalized
- **SUSJ Foundations Course** **remains** as a Gen. Ed attracts enrollment
- **SUSJ Capstone course** revised into variable credit, with any SFF eligible to direct a student's capstone research
- **Strategic Initiative Repurposed:**
 - J-term all-college faculty workshop, **“Re-Igniting a Culture of Civic Engagement at UWRP”**





Questions?

- ▶ Grace.Coggio@UWRF.edu
 - ▶ Greta.Gaard@UWRF.edu
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