



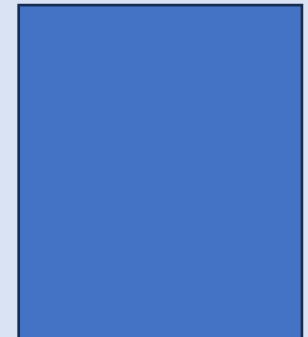
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Transforming Education, Transforming Lives



ECAY6006 The Politics of Activism

Theme 3: Ideology and Activism

Part 2: Ideological Challenges to the 'Mainstream' – Green Politics

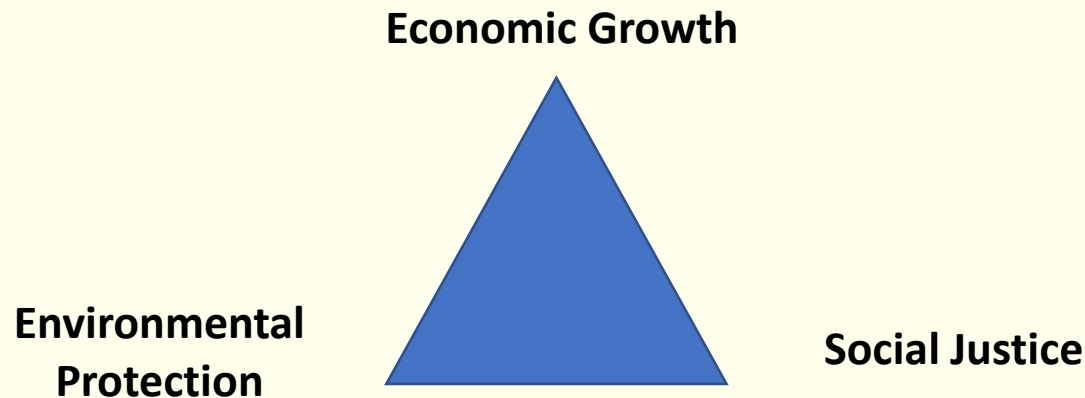
'Green' Politics

'Green' Politics

- Green or environmental ideologies are covered in more detail in Modules elsewhere
- However, 'green' politics have an important influence on activism in the 21st century
- Therefore, it is important to look at this issue here

Sustainable Development

- Sustainable development means different things to different people
- However, there is a model that is accepted by **most** governments and organisations



But where does the idea of these three 'pillars' come from?

Defining Sustainable Development

- The 'tripartite' model (economy, society, economy) was firmly established by the United Nations (UN) report *Our Common Future* which states that sustainable development;
- “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”
(Brundtland, 1987, Ch 1.3)
- The original report can be found here: [Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development](#)

Defining Sustainable Development

- The report established two key principles;
- Firstly, the concept of 'needs', in particular the **essential needs** of the world's poor, to which **overriding priority** should be given;
- Secondly, the idea of **limitations** imposed by the **state** on **technology and social organization** in order to support the environment's ability to meet present and future needs

(Brundtland, 1987)

Defining Sustainable Development

- The report goes on to state that;
- The goals of **economic** and social **development** must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries: developed or developing; market-oriented or centrally planned
- Interpretations taken by governments will vary but must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it

(Brundtland, 1987)

Defining Sustainable Development

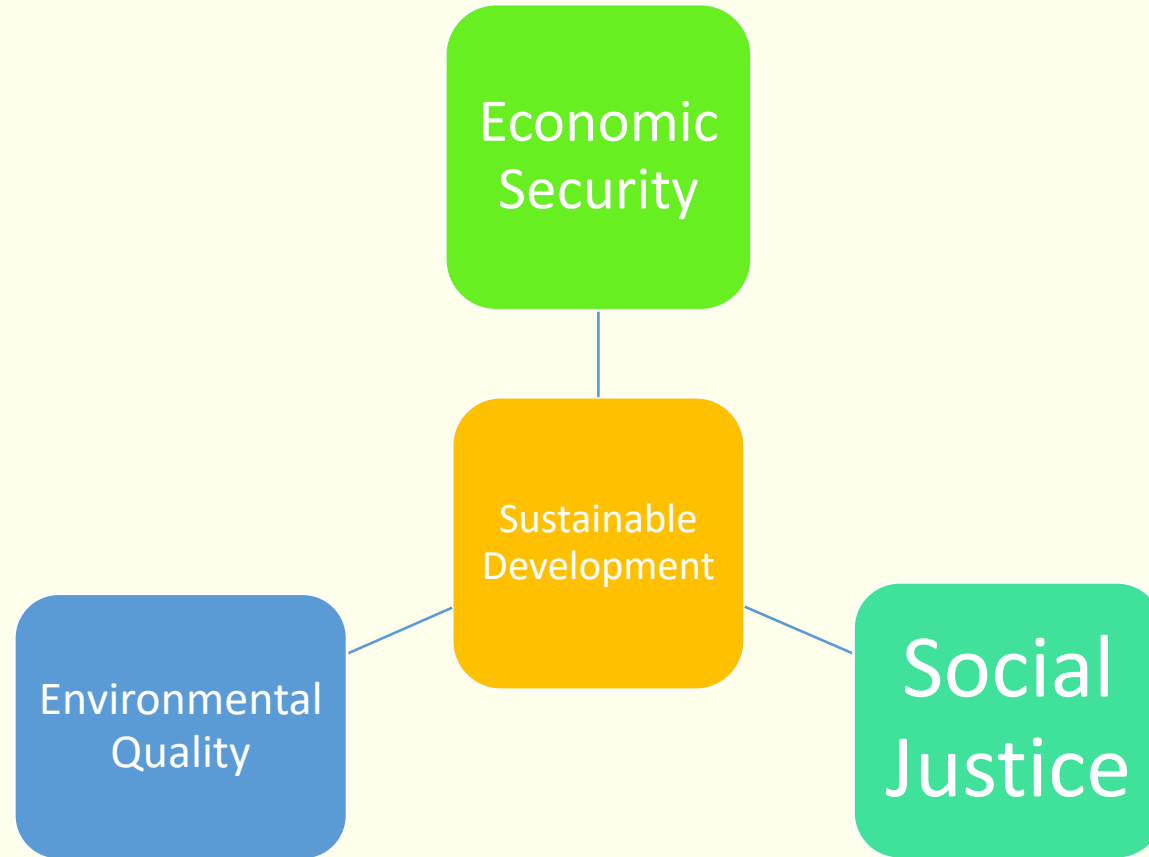
- The report;
- Places a duty on the **state** to hold environmental resources in trust for the benefit of the public
- Where there are threats of serious or reversible damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason [for] not acting to prevent environmental degradation
- All people currently alive should have an **equal right** to benefit from the use of resources...within and between countries
- Decisions should be made at the lowest appropriate level
- Costs of environmental damage should **be borne by those who cause it...**

(Brundtland, 1987)

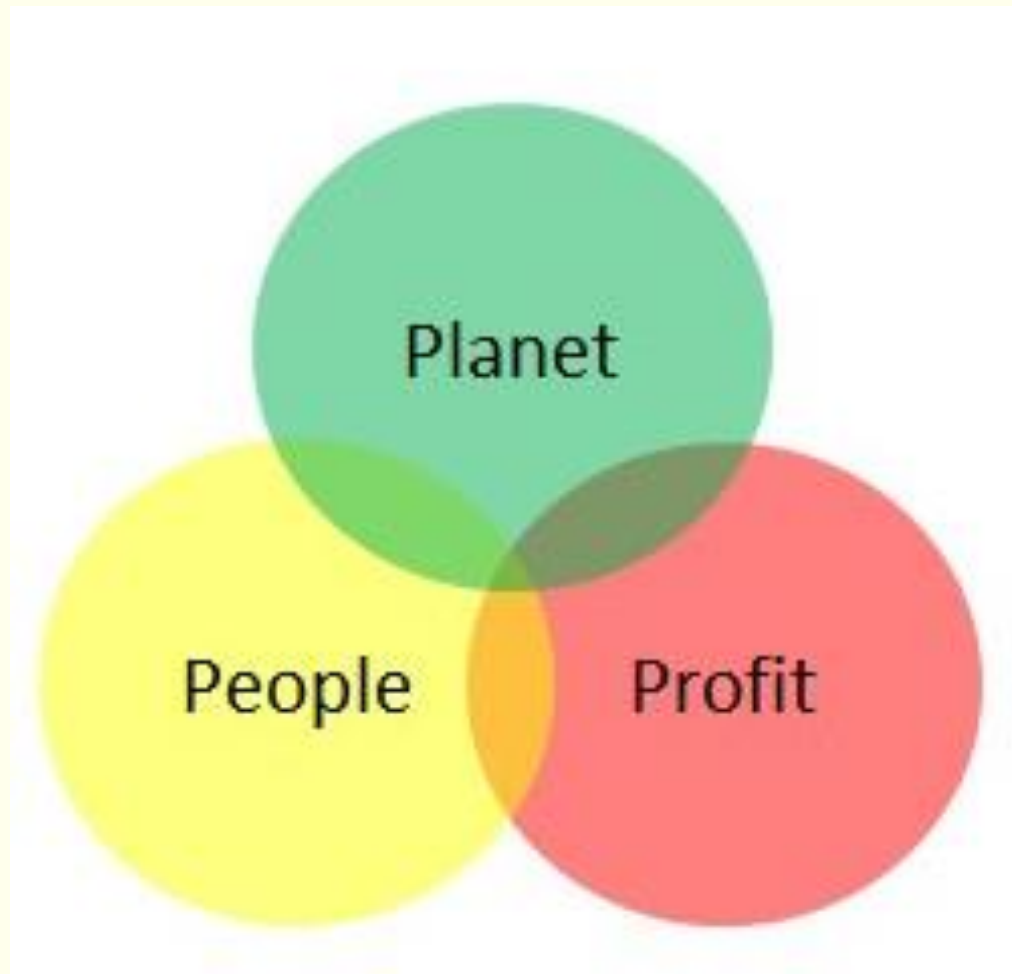
Variations of the Tripartite Model



Variations of the Tripartite Model



Variations of the Tripartite Model



Variations of the Tripartite Model

The Triple Bottom Line

- These three aspects; environment/planet, society/people and economy/profit have been labelled the Triple Bottom line by economists and business analysts such as John Elkington as far back as 1998
- They have argued that all three aspects need to be balanced in order for sustainable growth to be possible

Elkington (1998)

Sustainable Development Policy

- The UN has continued to lead the policy debate on this issue
- In 1992, member countries signed up to the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC)
- ‘The UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994. Today, it has near-**universal** membership.
- The 198 countries that have ratified the Convention are called **Parties to the Convention**.
- Preventing “dangerous” human interference with the climate system is the ultimate aim of the UNFCCC.

(UNFCCC, No Date a)

Sustainable Development Policy

- This has led to the **annual Conference of the Parties** to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This is known as **COP**.
- The UNFCCC states that these conferences are:
- ‘where the world comes together to agree on the actions to address the climate crisis, such as;
- limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius,
- helping vulnerable communities adapt to the effects of climate change, and;
- achieving net-zero emissions by 2050’.

(UNFCCC, No Date b)

Sustainable Development Policy

Are you aware of the COP conferences?

- The latest conference was COP 29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan from 11 to 22 November 2024

Guided Study Activity

Take a moment to research the media coverage of COP29.

If using your own device then please ensure that you are logged into Eduroam.

Feedback to the group.

Was the coverage positive or negative

Challenges to the UN Model

Environmental Inequality

- Much of the criticism is based on the belief that the COP conferences are not acting quickly enough to address **environmental inequality**
- Which has been defined as;
- ‘the unequal social distribution of environmental risks and hazards and access to environmental goods and services, and, is closely related to the concept of environmental justice’.

(Sustainable Development Research Network, 2004)

Discuss what you consider environmental inequalities to include?



Environmental Inequality

Measures of environmental inequalities include:

- Air pollution
- Industrial pollution
- Flooding
- Access to food and water
- Transport and public transport access
- Access to natural green spaces and biodiversity
- Access to employment
- Noise
- Housing
- Safety
- Racial equality issues

(Based on Pedersen, O., 2018)

Who says this is important?

“Effects of climate change on health will affect most populations in the next decades and put lives and wellbeing of billions of people at increased risk”

“Climate change effects on health will exacerbate inequities between rich and poor”

Who do you think made these statements?



Costello, Prof. A. *et al* (2009) '[Managing the health effects of climate change](#)' *The Lancet* Volume 373 (No. 9676, May 2009) p. 1693

Four key areas of environmental inequality

- Immediate locality or ‘front door’ issues such as litter, neighbourhood noise and the accessibility to and condition of open and green spaces.
- Wider service issues such as access to environmental services, local transport facilities, healthy food and fuel poverty.
- Planning, infrastructure and development issues such as air and water quality, environmental noise, road traffic accidents and flood risk.
- Multiple environmental deprivation, considering the ways in which environmental problems accumulate and have combined effects on an area and people’s health.

‘Weak’ or ‘Strong’ Sustainable Development

- Critics of the UN model argue that the approach is too ‘weak’, rather than being a ‘strong’ response

Weak focuses on;

- Prevention of catastrophe for human society
- Acceptance of science and modern technology
- Anthropocentric-Human centred
- Intergenerational distribution treated separately
- Lower environmental risk aversion

Strong focuses on;

- Promotion of society in harmony with supporting ecosystems
- Questions science & seeks alternative technology
- Ecocentric- Values nature over humanity
- Intergenerational distribution central to sustainable development
- High environmental risk aversion

‘Weak’ or ‘Strong’ Sustainable Development

Technocentric versus Ecocentric

- These terms were defined by Timothy O’Riordan in his 1989 chapter ‘The Challenge for Environmentalism’
- They are seen by O’Riordan and others as being in opposition to each other
- One focuses on technology and human needs and the other on ecology and the planet’s needs

Technocentric Viewpoints

Interventionists

- Have complete faith in human ingenuity, science, and the market to solve all problems and 'improve' the quality of the environment
- It is argued that this is the view of those who control industry and commerce
- Sees the natural world as a means to the end of human well-being (also known as androcentric/anthropocentric)
- Examples would be [GM crops](#) (i.e. change nature for the good of humankind), [hydroponics](#) or [flood barriers](#)

Technocentric Viewpoints

Accomodationists

- Largely follow this view but are more moderate and express a note of caution
- They believe some accommodations are needed to mitigate the impact of humans on the environment
- Believe that technology and institutions can adapt to deal with resource scarcity or environmental problems
- Solutions include [renewable energy](#), [electric vehicles](#) (EVs) or [bioplastics](#)

Criticisms of Technocentrism

- Academic critics of this approach, such as Biely & Chakori (2024, no page) argue that it still accepts the ‘current **growth driven** economic system’ (i.e. capitalism)
- They go on to state that ‘**infinite** economic expansion on a **finite** planet is, probably, impossible’ (Ibid.)
- Others go further, arguing ‘Capitalism can be described as a **linear** system that continuously generates waste in terms of social injustice, poverty, alienation, exploitation, and conflicts over resources
- as well as waste in terms of environmental pollution, biodiversity reduction, and disruption of biogeochemical flows and cycles’ (Calisto Friant *et al*, 2023, no page)

Criticisms of Technocentrism

- Accommodationists are accused of wishing for the 'status quo'
- i.e. when asked they want an **undisturbed environment**
- But also want a **house, car, luxury goods and overseas holidays**
- *An example of [cognitive dissonance](#)? What do you understand this phrase to mean?*
- The concept is central to discussion regarding sustainability, see for example [Designing Persuasive Systems For Sustainability – A Cognitive Dissonance Model](#) (Mustaquim, M., Nyström, T. ,2014)

Alternatives to the UN Model

Ecocentric Viewpoints

‘Environmentalism’

- ‘Environmentalist **noun** – a person who is concerned with or seeks to protect the environment, especially from pollution’ [OED]
- Often seen as concerned with conservationism and preservation (e.g. national parks)
- Can be seen as being technocratic (i.e. try to win arguments on the terms of governments and industry rather than being ‘radical’)
- An example might be the activities of the WWF (see Theme 1)
- For these reasons, environmentalism is often seen as a ‘weak’ form of response to sustainability

Ecocentric Viewpoints

Deep Ecologists / Deep Greens

- Phrase coined by Arne Naess in 1973 and expanded on in 1989
- Must focus on what is good for the planet rather than what is good for humankind
- Human society can only be understood from the viewpoint of ecology
- Sees the connections between every organism as being important
- Deep green ideology argues that humans must sacrifice much of modern living
- Promotes low impact housing and subsistence living (see [Tipi Valley](#) for example)

Ecocentric Viewpoints

Gaianists

- Based on the [Gaia hypothesis](#) of James Lovelock
- The planet is a huge inter-connected super-organism
- Creates a self-regulating system focused on maintaining life on earth
- Can see viruses such as Ebola as nature's way of 'fighting back'
- Can even be quasi-religious where the earth is seen as an object of worship

‘Political’ views of Sustainable Development

- Where technocentrists see humanity as the only, or main, priority and ecocentrists see ecology as the only, or main, priority other theories seek to bring the two together ideologically (i.e. based on a set of shared values)
- Three examples of these are;
 - Eco-feminist viewpoints
 - Eco-socialist viewpoints
 - Social Ecology

Eco-feminist Viewpoints

- Phrase coined by Francoise D'eaubonne in her 1974 essay *Le feminisme ou la mort (Feminism or Death)*
- A merging of ecological and feminist ideologies
- Argues for a positive re-evaluation of the connection between women and nature that has been 'forgotten' in Western society
- Stresses that social gender roles give women more of an affinity with nature

Eco-feminist Viewpoints

- Can see both women and nature as being repressed by patriarchy
- Argues that women living in developing nations tend to be managers of natural resources (firewood, water etc.)
- Often criticised for being 'essentialist' (i.e. assuming all women are the same and that all women are nurturing and caring)
- Different strands emphasise the ecological, the social and the female spiritual dimensions

Eco-socialist Viewpoints

- Interested in the social inequalities that exist between humans and how this is reflected in the wider environment
- Capitalism alienates us from our work, from nature, and from ourselves
- Redistribution of wealth and natural resources would improve both society and the environment
- Often criticised for being unrealistic in the same way that 'environmentalists' are
- Argues that environmental inequality can lead to mass migration



Geographer Online, 2015

Eco-socialist Viewpoints

Communalists

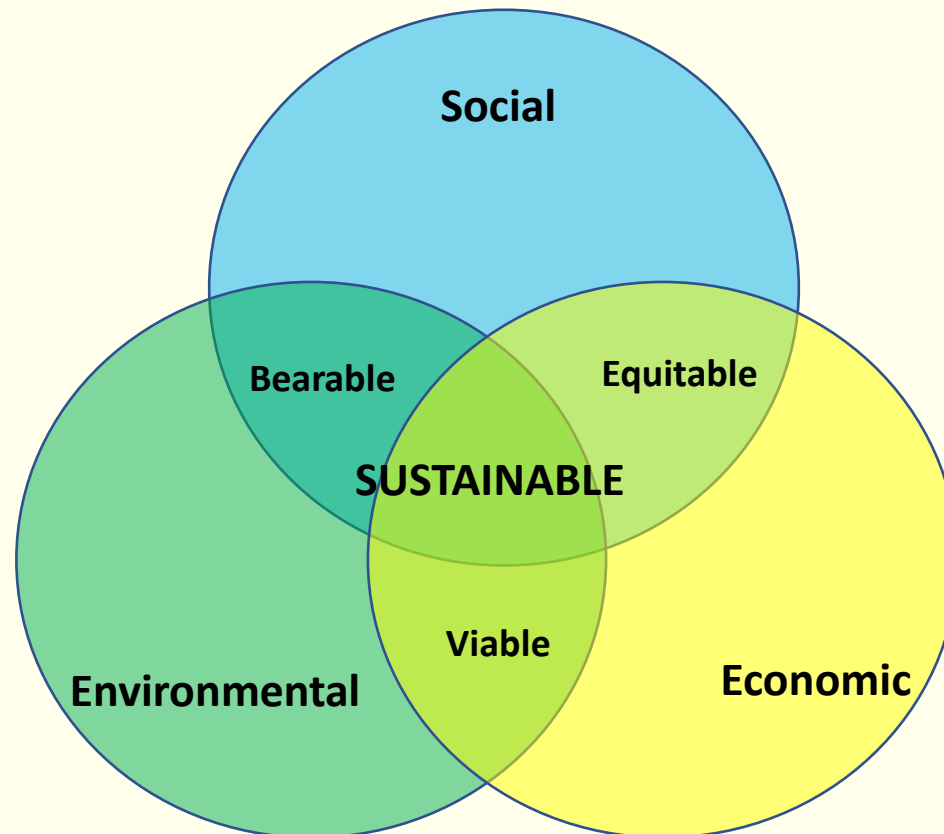
- Often seen as a more radical form of eco-socialism and developed from Social Ecology (see later)
- Focuses far more on local economies, self-sufficiency and sustainable lifestyles
- Local communities are best placed to decide what is best for the environment and therefore themselves
- More about producing less rather than redistributing what is produced
- Has common threads with Deep Green ideology

Eco-socialist Viewpoints

Social Ecology

- Created by the **anarchist** and **libertarian socialist** Murray Bookchin
- Sees environmental abuse as a direct result of the domination of groups of humans by other humans
- With the exception of natural disasters most major ecological disasters in the 20th and 21st centuries have been caused by ethnic, cultural, commercial or international conflict.
- Argues that if humans can live in harmony with each other they will also live in harmony with nature

Social Ecology



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