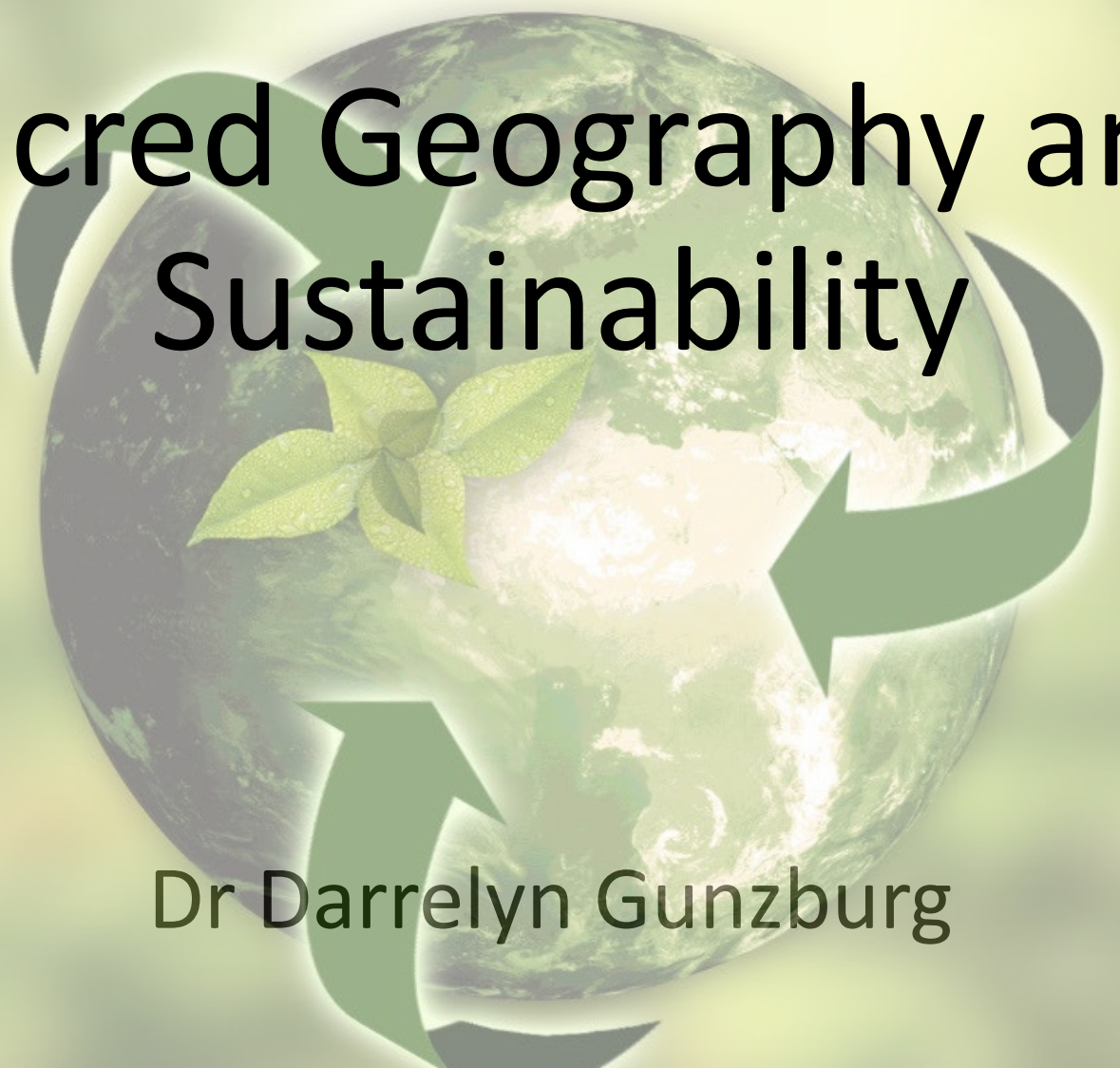




Sacred Geography and Sustainability

Dr Darrelyn Gunzburg



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Canolfan Sophia
The Sophia Centre

Aim:

- To present the history of the term and how it came to be used.
- To introduce Anna Tsing's alternate view of sustainability and the environment.
- To offer Deborah Bird Rose's experience of participation as sustainability of the landscape as a short case study of landscape ethics.





Although sustainability as a term was used in the 1960s, it became popular in contemporary culture in the 1980s when the **World Commission on Environment and Development** was established by the United Nations in 1983. The Commission's primary objective was to address impacts of economic development on the environment and to develop strategies for protecting the planet and future human populations.

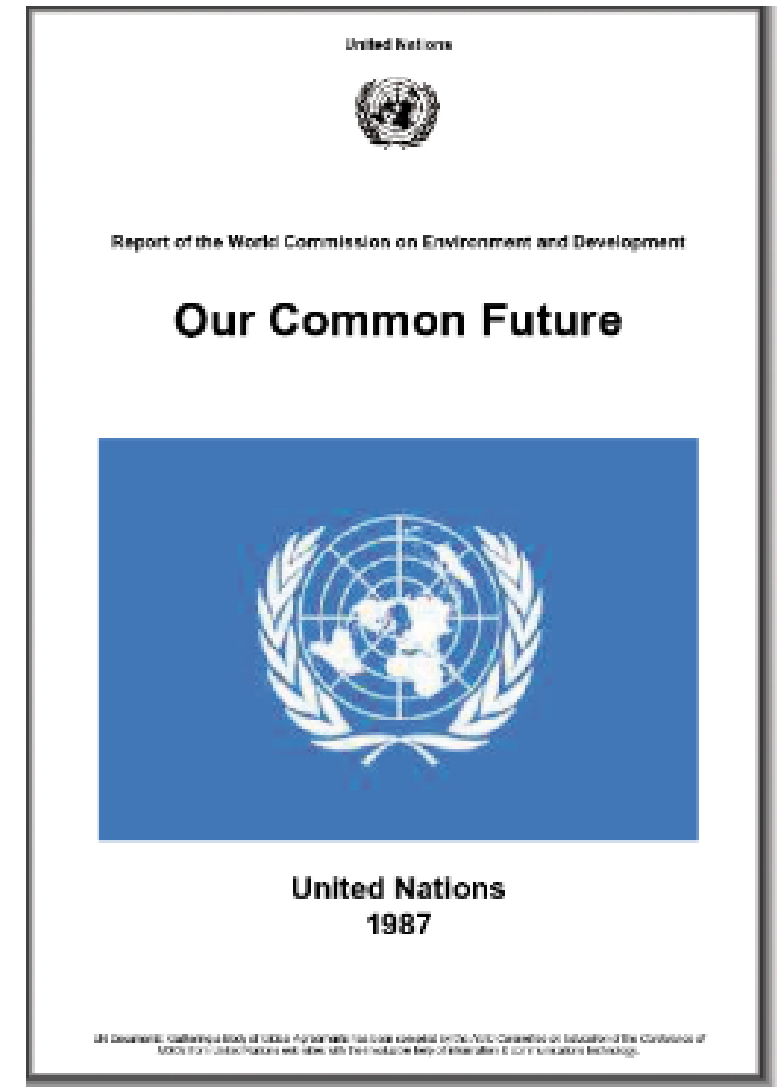


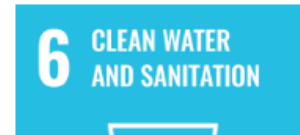
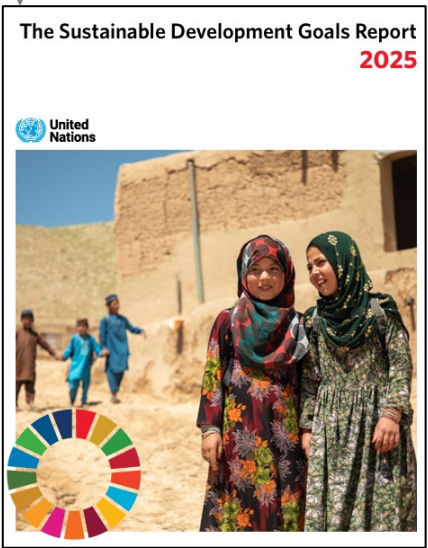
The Brundtland Report stated that critical global environmental problems were primarily the result of the enormous poverty of the South and the non-sustainable patterns of consumption and production in the North. It called for a strategy that united development and the environment – described by the now-common term ‘sustainable development’. Sustainable development is defined as follows:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

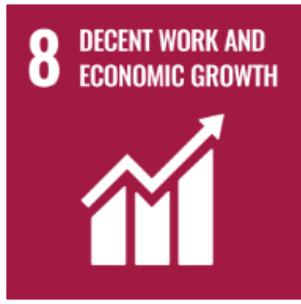
In 1989, the report was debated in the UN General Assembly, which decided to organize a UN Conference on Environment and Development.

Our common Future (Brundtland Report) emerged from that and can be found online at <https://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/home/media/publications/sustainable-development/brundtland-report.html>





Clean water and sanitation
– RIVERS AND SEAS
(Seminar 5: Living Landscapes)



Sustainable cities and communities
(Seminar 6: Sacred Cities)



Life below water/ Life on Land
(Seminar 7: Entanglement)



people and environments

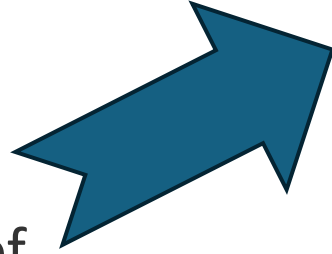
In most general terms, sustainability can be thought of as a set of values, outlooks and behaviours that meets the needs of people and environments alive now, without compromising or damaging the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

without compromising or damaging the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.





In most general terms, sustainability can be thought of as a set of values, outlooks and behaviours that meets the needs of **people and environments** alive now, **without compromising or damaging the ability of future generations** to meet their own needs.



Polyphonic assemblages

Polyphony: a musical term in which autonomous melodies intertwine, such as the madrigal and the fugue in Western music.

Assemblages: open-ended gatherings. Patterns of unintentional co-ordination.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, pp.22-24.



The recognition of the need for polyphonic assemblages, or liveable collaborations, Tsing argued, is the driving force for staying alive. Collaboration means working across difference which leads to transformation and transformation occurs through encounter. Without collaboration we all die. The important stuff for life on earth happens in those transformations.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2025.

Some strategies of approach to a landscape which will be covered more fully in Seminar 4 (Phenomenology and Landscapes) include:

Recognising that a landscape is alive with other than humans

How we listen to a landscape

How we walk through a landscape

Being at ease with strangeness

To know what we might lose makes it more precious

A short case study which is a living example of Levy-Bruhl's Participation (Seminar 4: Phenomenology and Landscapes) and Brown Sacred Geography



Deborah Bird Rose (1946-2018) was an Australian-based ethnographer of Aboriginal peoples and a leader in multidisciplinary ethnographic research.

‘In 1980 I travelled from the USA to Australia to find an Aboriginal settlement where people would allow me to learn about their way of life by living with them and participating in community life. The people who agreed to host my ethnographic research lived in Yarralin and Lingara, two small communities located in the open savannah woodlands of the Northern Territory, and within the watershed of the Wickham River.

The people I met at Yarralin were survivors in that very precise sense of being people whose forebears had been slaughtered. As a mode of resistance as well as a matter of survival, they had maintained their inner dignity and a vast domain of knowledge and remembrance, phrased often as Law. Fidelity to Law was and is the ground of resistance. There was much to resist.

Genocide and ecocide have been paired modes of devastation inflicted on Indigenous people and country in many parts of the world **and because people and country are so deeply intermeshed**, harm amplifies into wider ripples of degradation.’

Rose, Deborah Bird. *Shimmer: Flying Fox Exuberance in Worlds of Peril*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

A short case study which is a living example of Levy-Bruhl's Participation (Seminar 4: Phenomenology and Landscapes) – **Who speaks for the Land?**



Deborah Bird Rose (1946-2018) was an Australian-based ethnographer of Aboriginal peoples and a leader in multidisciplinary ethnographic research.

ORIGINS: Everything comes up out of the ground – language, people, emu, kangaroo, grass. That's Law.'

Law is central to Aboriginal culture. It concerns the life of the world: how things fit together and how they continue. One's country is a 'nourishing terrain' a place that **gives and receives** life.

The experience of travelling through storied country where the evidence of creation is all around and where one is home, offers an emplaced immediacy that connects past and present through country, Law, the actions of living beings and the actions of Dreaming ancestors...

We lived with and within the evidence.

Rose, Deborah Bird. *Shimmer: Flying Fox Exuberance in Worlds of Peril*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

A short case study which is a living example of Levy-Bruhl's Participation (Seminar 4: Phenomenology and Landscapes)



Deborah Bird Rose (1946-2018) was an Australian-based ethnographer of Aboriginal peoples and a leader in multidisciplinary ethnographic research.

Finally Rose makes the point that ‘the great seasonal forces are for the Yarralin people expressions of the power of ongoing creation; they are part of the **ontological-ecological terrain that works with patterns, communication, connectivities and the ongoing flows of life**. Wet season and dry season, the great life-shaping powers, wrestle back and forth: Rain and Sun, Sun and Rain. In the logic of both-and, they are both antagonistic and complementary.

Participation, understood as interaction and flows of mutual benefits, including care, brings the meaning of life into everyday action, articulating relevance between Dreaming creation and the day-to-day lives of many species, including but not dominated by, humans.

Creation grounds this ontological-ecological terrain and **participation** brings living beings into actions that ripple across daily life, continuing creation and at the same time renewing possibilities for all that may yet come.

Rose, Deborah Bird. *Shimmer: Flying Fox Exuberance in Worlds of Peril*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

Summary

- We have looked at the history of the term and how it came to be used and how it is considered today by world governments.
- Introduced Anna Tsing's alternate view of sustainability and the environment, one that sees it as the many working autonomously together through respect and care of human and other-than-human entities.
- Looked at Deborah Bird Rose's experience of participation in an ontological-ecological terrain that works with patterns, communication, connectivities and the ongoing flows of life as a short case study of landscape ethics.

