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The Planner's Triangle Revisited: Sustainability and the Evolution of a Planning Ideal That Can't Stand Still

Scott D. Campbell 

Scott D. Campbell (sdcamp@umich.edu) is an associate professor of urban planning in the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

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Twenty years ago, the idea of sustainable development was already in currency but still youthful: Bill Rees (W. Rees, 1989), Patsy Healey (Healey & Shaw, 1993), Tim Beatley (Beatley & Brower, 1993), Michael Breheny (1992), Sim van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe (1991), Bent Flyvbjerg (1993), and others were exploring the links between sustainability and urbanization. Authors cited the prominent Brundtland Report (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) as a default definition. They emphasized intergenerational equity and bemoaned society's troublesome tendency to shift environmental costs to a discounted future. Some focused on steady-state economics and maintaining a steady level of natural capital (Daly & Cobb, 1989; W. E. Rees, 1990). Sustainability was an exciting, novel idea among (what in retrospect seems like) a small circle of writers. The concept beguiled with an imagined horizon of environmentally friendly urban development. It evoked a new era that pushed past the

contemporary jobs-versus-the-environment battles and economic–ecologic zero sum games. Sustainable development heralded a win–win. More promise than practice, these were the innocent early days in the life cycle of an idea, before jaundiced weariness or overuse could set in.

I did not intentionally set out to join this fledgling sustainability debate, but instead backed into the theme indirectly and idiosyncratically. Having begun my university studies in environmental earth sciences, and later shifting to economic development planning in graduate school, I remained unsettled with planning's schizophrenic split between growth and conservation. Should we chase smokestacks or hug trees? I understood that this was a simplistic and at times false dichotomy, but it was a workable place to start. Vaguely aware of “sustainability,” I initially viewed it as one strategy among many (including environmental economics, regional resource planning, bioregionalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, etc.) to address these economic–ecologic conflicts. In the early 1990s, sustainability had not yet become an all-inclusive paradigm.

Faculty sometimes use the classroom to belabor intellectual riddles, so as a new assistant professor of planning at Rutgers I created a course called “Economic and Ecologic Conflicts” that I first taught in early 1992. We examined both conceptual and practical conflicts, emphasizing case studies: water and timber resources, open space preservation, conservation biology, tropical ecology, and coastal zone management. The students were great: inquisitive

and eager to explore hybrids of economic, ecologic, and social approaches. We examined the links between spatial patterns and ecology (early writings on the compact city), ecotopias, and greenbelts as a way to reconcile town and country (as a proxy for reconciling urban economics and wilderness preservation). Trained as a regionalist, I highlighted regional planning as a potential bridge between economic and environmental interests (Campbell, 1992b). I advised the students that if the economic–ecologic dichotomy eventually seemed false, then great: You may have found a desperately needed synthesis. I did not initially employ sustainability as the organizing principle for the course, although the term frequently appeared in our readings, and I viewed sustainable development as a welcome updating of old economic development models that no longer worked well in isolation.

Attending a labor studies conference but daydreaming about the jobs-versus-the-environment dichotomy, the lively discussions about capital–labor conflicts reminded me that there was no singular, homogenous “economic” interest. One cannot speak about economic priorities without confronting the uneven distribution of wealth, access to resources, and benefits of rapid urbanization. Doodling on the conference program, I transformed my one-dimensional economic-versus-ecologic axis into a triangle with equity at the top (see Figure 1).

I considered adding other values: Esthetics? Efficiency? Ethics? (and mused about the prevalence of “E” words). But the graphic simplicity of the diagram—three broad planning goals forming a simple triangle—appealed to me. So I stuck with the triangle (a shape with a long and elegant religious and secular history). The triangle’s structural integrity suited my perception of sustainability as both tensile and resilient.

If the triangle’s vertices represented three fundamental planning goals, then the triangle’s sides represented the ensuing conflicts between these three goals. Labeling the first two was straightforward: the *resource conflict* lay between economic development and environmental protection, and the *property conflict* between economic development and equity and social justice.¹ Labeling the third side of the triangle—the conflict between social justice and environmental protection—was more elusive, especially since progressive planners liked to see these two priorities going hand-in-hand rather than in opposition. Looking for examples led me to case studies in the developing world where efforts to industrialize and rise out of poverty often led to rapid resource depletion and environmental calamity. I accordingly named this the *development conflict*.² This third conflict also resonated with growing accusations of environmental racism (and the push to have traditional



Figure 1. The “planner’s triangle,” representing the three fundamental priorities of planning (green cities, growing cities, just cities), the three associated conflicts (over resources, property, and development), the three broad social and political institutions to manage these conflicts (the social welfare state, environmental economics and regulation, and environmental justice) and their corresponding “motto” (in italics) to achieve collaboration across the conflict. Planners define themselves, implicitly, by where they stand in the triangle. One can conceptually locate the elusive ideal of sustainable development at the center, but in practice the movement toward sustainability will be an ongoing, cumulative process of resolving conflicts, without an end state of equilibrium. Updated and expanded from Campbell (1992a, 1996).

The historical emergence of institutions to manage these three conflicts:

1. *Property Conflict: The modern social welfare state* (e.g., the 1880s in Germany; the beginning of the 20th century in the United Kingdom; the 1930s in the United States)
2. *Resource Conflict: Environmental regulation and resource management* (early 20th century resource/forest conservation and late 20th century environmental regulations)
3. *Development Conflict: No strong, systemic set of regulations or institutions to enforce environmental justice* (yet).

suburban environmentalists collaborate with urban civil rights activists: Sierra Club + NAACP = environmental justice). I sensed that the development conflict was the most complex, and in the long run the most important for sustainability.

Locating sustainability at the center of the planner’s triangle was the all-too-appealing next step. This placement had diverse interpretations: One could see it as the triangle’s equilibrium, transcending the surrounding conflicts as if in the calm eye of the storm. I preferred to instead see the center as the apex of the three conflicts: a position explicitly acknowledging that the path toward sustainability was through

encountering these tensions. But from the beginning, I also viewed the center as elusive (or even illusory): If the triangle itself was an abstraction, so too was the sustainable center.

I presented my initial ideas at the fall 1992 Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) conference in Columbus (OH), including a rather primitive graphic of the planner's triangle (Campbell, 1992a). You never know what tentative ideas will find traction with an audience, but I noticed that several attendees sketched the triangle in their notebooks. Encouraged, I revised the paper, ran it by several Rutgers colleagues, and sent it to *JAPA*. Rereading the comments on the initial draft is humbling and a reminder for authors of the initial deficiencies of even (or especially) widely read articles. The anonymous *JAPA* reviews (from 1993) were often skeptical but also pointed me in constructive directions. The reviewers worried that I had set up a strawman situation, that the conclusion seemed obvious, and that the solutions were somewhat trendy. They asked what was inside the triangle, suggested that it neglected "decisionmaking issues" (i.e., politics), and warned to not give it "misplaced concreteness." "In the end, the real problem is that it is not clear that the author has said anything." They saw an inconsistent view of the triangle's center: "Sometimes the author says that it is impossible/naive for planners to be at the center of the triangle, but that other times that is where they should be..." As one reviewer kindly suggested: "I suspect that the germ of the paper is the planner as reconciler of differences, and the author should develop that." After several rounds of edits, *JAPA* published a greatly improved final version (Campbell, 1996).

The simplicity of the triangle made it both banal but also accessible. Subsequent users could easily understand and adapt it, modify the labels of the vertices or sides, even add new dimensions. The diagram used concepts people already knew, but brought them together. It was flexible enough to read into it what you wanted. Some readers focused on the conflicts, others on the priorities or on the sustainable center. Although sustainability was already in lively discussion, its shape and coordinates were often vague, elusive, ethereal. The triangle gave sustainability a tangible (albeit abstract) location, and put it at the center, as if within our reach, rather than at the distant edge or far in the future.

The triangle offered a way to disassemble sustainability so one could analyze and critique it. Holistic concepts are appealing, but hard to work with analytically. Ironically, one needs to initially break them apart, to make them unholistic. Premature synthesis shuts down needed debate and reconciliation. The triangle's three planning priorities reflected planning's still-unreconciled values,

inherited from disparate disciplinary roots: design, landscape architecture, conservation ecology, regional resource management, civil engineering, economic development, public health and sanitation, housing reform, civil rights, feminism, and organized labor.

The triangle did not give any clear planning answers, but it helped clarify why sustainability was complex and involved stakeholders and conflict resolution. By embedding sustainability in a triad of conflicts, it provided a simple framework to identify the barriers to a more sustainable future. These conflicts were not accidental or incidental, but rather intrinsic to the dynamics of capitalist urban development in a modern state. The triangle offered, perhaps deceptively, the sense that all these conflicts could be identified and named. One runs the risk of assuming that to name and diagram a problem is the same as deeply knowing and solving a problem. The triangle suggested paradoxically that sustainable cities were both discernible and difficult: It both illustrated why getting to sustainability was not simple and offered the elusive confidence that we could map the path toward sustainability.

The triangle also formally acknowledged the social and economic dimensions of sustainability (and thus the urban beyond the natural environment), a commonplace view today but not in the early 1990s. It put social justice and environmental protection on the same plane of planning interests. It also reminded us that sustainability (a system's ability to reproduce itself over time) is not a new process. Rather than asking, "Should we be sustainable?" we instead must ask, "What should we sustain?" The push toward sustainability was thus a demand that society realign its privileged emphasis on sustaining economic growth and give more weight to both environmental protection and social justice. Hence the article's title: "Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities." Can we plan all three simultaneously?

In the end, the triangle (like most schematic diagrams) is just a heuristic, an aspirational vision, that perhaps overstates sustainability's position as a calm, clean equilibrium of social, economic, and environmental interests when the outside world of urban political ecology is dynamic, volatile, messy, and far from in equilibrium. One cannot readily "test" a diagram's validity: Its primary value is to sharpen and change the way we think (and thus design, plan, and implement). We can draw triangles, concentric nested circles, networks, or three-dimensional figures, but the perfect diagram will not "solve" the puzzle of sustainability like a Rubik's cube. Unsustainable development is best understood as a problem of wicked complexity (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Zellner & Campbell, 2015). Conceptual diagrams remain inert when they just present yet another arrangement of variables in a static pattern (and only

appear animated to the creator). Conceptual diagrams *do* change thinking (and eventually practice) when they assert a rival explanation that demonstratively makes the old view seem suddenly inadequate. They provoke us to abandon familiar ways of viewing problems and inspire us to think in unexpectedly productive ways. They need to be intuitive enough to connect ideas that were once unrelated, or compelling enough to displace deep-rooted assumptions.

Rereading the article 20 years later, I recollect the influences of that era: debates on the social construction of nature (with my then-neighbor Neil Smith), the political nature of planning in a world of conflicting interests (with my influential colleagues Susan Fainstein, Ann Markusen, Bob Lake, and others), critical social geography (the writings of David Harvey), and the wisdom in challenging imprecise planning ideas (inherited from advisor Mike Teitz). A year-long seminar at Rutgers' Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Cultures exposed me to ideas of translation and multiculturalism (and the writings of visitors Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Stuart Hall, and Arjun Appadurai). The buzz of 1990s postmodernist thinking and "radical thirding" (Lefebvre, Soja, etc.)—and the distain of dichotomies (seen as a legacy of modernism)—perhaps pushed me beyond the economic–ecologic dualism to look for triads.

I was also reacting to the guileless, antiurban impulses of some early sustainability writings that both attracted and troubled me. I was skeptical of doe-eyed, back-to-nature ecotopianism: Too many political economy readings and years studying in Cold War West Berlin had weaned me from those impulses. But I still retained a progressive optimism that we could better reconcile these social–economic–ecologic tensions and build better cities. I aimed for the middle ground between naive belief and abject cynicism. (I still do today.) I thus focused on the triangle's conflicts rather than the soft sustainable center (as a reaction against mushy, holistic thinking). Nevertheless, I wanted to retain a pathway through the conflicts toward sustainability, and not bury sustainability in a morass of contradictions.

I was also motivated by unease with ecotopian visions of returning to some idyllic, preindustrial past. To lament the historic loss of a pastoral landscape was an understandable impulse. But I did not see this as a viable path forward. There was no innate sustainable development to be discovered in nature or rediscovered in our past. We have never before reconciled the coexistence of 6 billion people and global ecosystems. The preindustrial sustainability of low-population subsistence in an era of scarcity is not a model for a late-industrial era of megacities and (uneven) overconsumption. Here the social construction of nature view was influential (Cronon, 1984, 1995). Sustainability

is not something lost (by industrialization) to be recovered, but instead something to be invented anew, for the future. Poetically, the German Enlightenment writer Friedrich Schiller (1965) recognized in 1793, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, this human habit of rewriting our past to give legitimacy to our future, as if coming full circle:

He thus artificially retraces his childhood in his maturity, forms for himself a state of Nature in idea, which is not indeed given him by experience but is the necessary result of his rationality, borrows in this ideal state an ultimate aim which he never knew in his actual state of Nature, and a choice of which he was capable, and proceeds now exactly as though he were starting afresh (p. 28).

Reassessing the Triangle

I wrote the article to confront what I saw as a tension between several core motivations for urban planning, and I drew the planner's triangle to map these contradictory impulses. The paper was conceptual and speculative, and open to many questions then and now.

Is the triangle accurate? By labeling each vertex as a core planning priority, I invariably omitted several other crucial priorities (design esthetics, public health, etc.). Since my goal was to examine the potential contradictions within sustainable development, focusing on the "3 Es" still seems an appropriate abstraction. The diagram works better as a model than as a map of planning's heterodox history. The triangle is also conceptually simple (with three priorities and three conflicts) compared with a square (four priorities, six conflicts), a pentagon (five priorities, ten conflicts), and so on.

The triangle's three priorities are abstractions. With planning's current preoccupation with stakeholder analysis, should one make the triangle's politics more concrete by relabeling the vertices as stakeholders? This is a tempting revision, although the resulting geometry would be far more complex than a triangle given the large number of stakeholders (e.g., laborers, farmers, factory owners, consumers, environmental groups, etc.) unless one could convincingly collapse stakeholders into three distinct clusters.

Alternatively, as cities expand the use of sustainability measures, could one modify the triangle to explicitly include the measured variables: a diagrammatic dashboard of a city's sustainable health?

The original triangle was equilateral. This symmetry perhaps unintentionally implied an equivalence of the three planning goals (economic, environmental, equity) and three conflicts (resource, property, development). Economic interests usually displace environmental concerns, which

in turn repeatedly trump social justice goals (Campbell, 2013). Although I would not suggest redrawing it as a scalene triangle (each side of different lengths), I might add a footnote: "Triangle not drawn to scale!" Others have also noted the limitations of viewing the 3 Es as too literally interchangeable (see Mazmanian and Blanco's [2014, p. 4] discussion of nested dependency). My 1996 article under-theorized social justice and equity, treating it too much as a simple black box.

Foregrounding the Development Conflict

The development conflict (between social justice and environmental protection) remains the most elusive of the three conflicts, but also the most important for planners to confront head on. How do we simultaneously protect the natural environment and reduce poverty and human injustice? This is not a new conversation: We have long talked about the vulnerability of poor communities, often forced to live in the most precarious of locations with minimal formal infrastructure or services, exposed to environmental hazards and climate change. As Olpadwala and Goldsmith (1992) argue in an influential essay, the poor have long faced crises of sustainability. The frequent role of the poor in resource extraction work puts them on the front lines of battles for sustainability (Evans, 2002), but they also often derive their livelihood from these unsustainable practices, so it's a complicated relationship of two kinds of exploitation (of labor, of nature), creating entrenched barriers to sustainability. If planners do not actively confront this predicament, we cannot undo a central dynamic that undermines both human dignity and environmental livability.

We need to build political coalitions and institutions to directly tackle the development conflict. Each of the three conflicts on the planner's triangle (Figure 1) has a different history of governance, and the development conflict is the most poorly managed. If we retrace how modern society created institutions to manage these conflicts, we can then identify the barriers to integrating environmental and social justice priorities under one formal framework.

The emergence of these institutions follows a rough historical progression. First, the modern social welfare state arose (e.g., the 1880s in Germany, the beginning of the 20th century in the United Kingdom, the 1930s in the United States) in part to address the property conflict: tensions between the interests of economic development (e.g., industrial capital) and social justice (labor unions, housing advocates, etc.) in an era of rapid urban industrialization. Although recent upheavals in markets, labor

inputs, production processes, and global trade networks (in this so-called neoliberal era) have unsettled traditional institutions of this arrangement (e.g., declining trade union membership, support for public housing, poverty assistance programs, etc.), the broader institutions to manage these property conflicts are well established (both at the national and local levels).

Second, elaborate institutions of environmental regulation and resource management emerged to address the resource conflict. These institutions arose somewhat later than the social welfare state, with early 20th century resource and forest conservation and late 20th century environmental regulations (e.g., the 1970s environmental movement and the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]). Like the social welfare state, these arrangements are both insufficient and also challenged by political opposition. Nevertheless, they are richly embedded in the institutions of the modern state and in the practices of planning.

By contrast, there is arguably no corresponding set of established, robust institutions to manage the development conflict, either internationally or domestically. Environmental justice (EJ) may be a rich area of scholarship and community organizing (such as community benefits agreements), but it remains otherwise underdeveloped and not adequately embedded in institutional practices and regulation (despite the existence, for example, of a modest-sized EPA program on EJ). This lack of a clearly defined legal/institutional mechanism to resolve EJ conflicts (and to identify interest groups or stakeholders with legal standing) highlights the challenges faced by EJ. Although neither ideal nor uncontested, the mediations and management of property conflicts and resource conflicts are far better established and incorporated into governments and markets. As a result, the development conflict is the least understood and regulated of the three types of conflict. Our challenge is to formalize and institutionalize these regulatory frameworks in the not-too-distant future.

The State of Sustainable Planning 20 Years Later

Twenty years later, should we be surprised that planners still talk about sustainability? It remains a core tenet for urban planners despite the commonplace criticisms that the idea is nebulous, imprecise, corrupted, or difficult to implement. Skeptics might argue that this persistence belies the field's slow pace of theoretical advancement and its weakness for soft, aspirational concepts. But this endurance also reflects the power and adaptability of the concept: Sustainability is a resilient, sustainable idea.

Paradoxically, if the idea of sustainability were instead easy and unambiguous, it would not be so powerful; we would simply have implemented sustainability practices and moved on to the next task. The complex challenges of defining, measuring, negotiating, and practicing sustainability should not discourage us, but should rather be a signal that sustainability, even if not the big prize at the end of the rainbow, is an asymptotic aspiration that has catalyzed much innovation and collaboration in planning. Planners now seem more tolerant of the concept being both powerful and contradictory: Sustainability is simultaneously a useful organizing principle for community planning and a troublesome concept to be challenged, modified, and updated.

Sustainable planning has matured over these 20 years. Planning programs that once offered a single, standalone course now infuse sustainability across the curriculum. Sustainability is also far more institutionalized in planning practice: Cities have created sustainability offices, sustainable plans (both within municipal general plans and as standalone documents), and measures of sustainability. Planning research increasingly evaluates whether sustainability plans make a difference (an early effort was Berke & Manta Conroy, 2000). Planners reasonably continue to promote land use reform as a crucial path to sustainability, although the profession's deference to the compact city ideal triggers debates between modelers, data analysts, and new urbanist advocates, as seen in the recent kerfuffle over Echenique, Hargreaves, Mitchell, and Namdeo's (2012) challenge to this core tenet of urban sustainability.

We are smarter and more sophisticated about the links between environmental dynamics and social justice. (The social justice corner of the planner's triangle is far better developed than before.) Today's students are wiser and more informed about sustainability, and more readily see the links between environmental planning, economic development, social movements, and racial inequality. Faculty who once struggled to fill a syllabus with a semester's worth of sustainability readings now face a torrent of possible citations. One inevitably misses many valuable new articles and ideas (and I have regrettably done so here as well). Many readers will likely observe that they—or others—have already published ideas that I have only tentatively speculated on here. This may be a sign of my limited reading (my apologies), but also a healthy indication that sustainability research is prolific, decentralized, and unintentionally duplicative.

The field has also raised the bar on what counts as worthy, original scholarship on sustainability. In the early days, it was sufficient to just speculatively get the idea out there, and explore what it meant to shift from 1970s

environmental planning to 1990s sustainable development. Once one could simply assert that sustainability was the "answer." Now it is just a starting point, a way to orient a project or paper: a shorthand to put work in context. It is no longer sufficient to just define sustainability, or to do a categorization of the literature or issues. We expect case studies, theoretical explorations, and professional recommendations to be innovative and push the sustainability discussion forward.

An early attraction was sustainability's inclusive mix of planning ideas. This scope has continued to enlarge. This expansion also explains why one hears claims such as "sustainability is not complete without social justice," since that statement is increasingly akin to "planning is not complete without social justice." (This remains a conundrum in the sustainability field: How to expand the idea of sustainability without diluting the original focus on the natural environment, including the loss of habitat and species, the overexploitation of nonrenewable resources, and the heavy ecological footprint of human settlements.) One should view this eagerness to embrace sustainability not just as a trendy "me too," but also as an encouraging sign that so many authors and planners identify their work with sustainability and want to be part of a larger discussion. Planning efforts too often are incremental, lonely, and frustratingly piecemeal, so to work under the banner of sustainability promotes solidarity: It is a statement that one planner's work is part of a larger, cumulative movement toward a sustainable future. I am therefore generally tolerant about what belongs under the big "sustainability tent." Although it is important to rigorously test the outcomes and consequences of sustainability efforts (and debunk false claims), I worry less about the ideology underneath the claims. Loyalty and purity tests—is something truly sustainable?—too often lead to infighting and exclusion.

That said, planning could further sharpen its thinking and evaluation of sustainability efforts. Many sustainability texts employ four prevailing analytical tacks: 1) belaboring sustainability's definition (while bemoaning the lack of conceptual consensus); 2) loosely employing the sustainability label when the research is more accurately about environmental protection; 3) developing and evaluating sustainability measures (important work, but sidesteps the need for tactics and strategies and often measures environmental quality, not urban sustainability); and 4) normatively declaring sustainability's merits and imperative (whereby aspirations or ecotopian design visions often overshadow scientific and social analysis). These projects, undertaken with analytical rigor and good intentions, are frequently productive and instructive. But they habitually circumnavigate the central provocation of sustainability,

which is how cities can simultaneously sustain their dynamic local economy (financial capital), workforce (human capital), democratic communities (social capital), and environmental systems (natural capital). At its core, to sustain a system is to create the capacity to generate new capital in the future. Planning's research challenge is to directly examine how alternative urban systems (the compact city, the megacity, bus rapid transit, urban farming, etc.) either support or undermine the relative investment in these four forms of capital, and the ways that a focus on one form of capital investment either supports or undermines the other three forms of capital.

Not Stood Still

So the sustainability concept has endured in planning in large part because it has not stood still. Had the idea remained static, inflexible, and doctrinaire, it probably would not have been assimilated into planning scholarship and professional practice. True, this flexibility can also lead to chameleon-like opportunism, with the term "sustainability" too readily attached to plans, policies, development projects, and scholarly research titles without a substantive commitment to environmental transformation (see, for example, Gunder, 2006). But this flexibility has also been productive, creating a broad base of support and interest, allowing multiple parties with divergent priorities all to engage and embrace sustainability as their own. Sustainability is reflexive, iteratively pulled by other ideas and social forces. That's a (mostly) good thing.

Gro Brundtland (2004) has called this a "constructive ambiguity," akin to diplomats' use of an intentionally ambiguous term to achieve an initial common ground and to avoid a premature breakdown in negotiations over specifics. (Skeptics might instead call this a "deceptive ambiguity.") The term sustainability has attracted a wide array of otherwise adversarial parties who would likely not have come to a public meeting, hearing, or design event had the term "environmental" or "conservation" been used. Sustainability has retained this big-tent organizing function, and this may explain why most planners continue to use the term (and I think that we, as a field, have gotten better at differentiating between substantive and vapid uses of the term). In this nonlinear, often muddled churn of competing sustainability discourses, good ideas and practices emerge that push planning forward.

Sustainability also endures because it taps into planning's core ideas, values, and practices: compact cities, new urbanism, greenbelts, walkable urbanism, transit-oriented development, reclaiming the central city. Sustainability

becomes a central narrative and organizing logic for these wide-ranging planning efforts. (Perhaps sustainability has been too inclusive an omnibus carrying all these various and sundry planning strategies, and suffers from the ensuing unwieldiness and imprecision.) Sustainability provides a larger legitimacy of purpose (and rationalization) for these efforts as serving the long-term public interest. The idea of sustainability is also sympathetic to prevalent beliefs among planners: that resource politics are often myopic and should take a multigenerational view; that development impacts (both good and bad) are interactive and cumulative; that much of environmental harm arises from externalities (necessitating "true-cost pricing"); that valuable public spaces ("commons" in both the city and the wild) are worthy of collective protection; and that solutions should be both interdisciplinary and place based.

The planning profession may well claim, with credible evidence, that it has engaged in sustainability (by other names) long before the term arose (going back a century to the work of Patrick Geddes, Ebenezer Howard, and forward through Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, Kevin Lynch, Ian McHarg, and others), and that the current emphasis on "sustainability planning" is simply old wine in new bottles (e.g., T. Banerjee, 2014). This is partly true. But beyond the droll observation that old wine in new bottles is often deliciously complex, sustainability has given these older planning ideas new currency and has placed issues of reconciling environmental, economic, and social conflicts at the center of the profession's mandate, something that older versions of environmental planning were not able to achieve (Wheeler, 2014). A strength and longevity of the sustainability idea has been the ability to combine new, exciting ideas and techniques of urbanism and ecological sciences with older planning traditions.

Planners also continue to engage sustainability even after the initial novelty waned because the idea opens strategic avenues for interdisciplinary collaboration, such as with architecture (Moore, 2010) and public health (Corburn, 2009). Sustainability is creating a common language and set of practices (including measures, methods, and goals) between the relatively small field of planning and the larger world of civil engineering, environmental policy, and other allied fields, although the long-running chasm between technical and political approaches to sustainability remains a barrier to full collaboration. Planning's engagement with sustainability enriches the field with an infusion of outside ideas, and also helps planning better export its work to other fields (though, as in the past, planning tends to import more than export). Sustainability also provides an expanded set of professional and scholarly tasks that planning, as a still relatively small and underfunded field,

uses to bolster its claims of legitimacy and relevance to university leaders, city officials, and funding agencies. Planning is not unique here; other fields have also expanded their domains to include sustainability as one of their core tasks. Although each field may claim part of sustainability as uniquely its own and assert its own discipline-specific comparative advantage in addressing sustainability, no one field has been able to fully capture the idea. That is part of sustainability's power as an idea and set of challenges: It has created a commons for research and professional exploration, beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines.

So sustainable planning has indeed evolved and matured, and the discussion has largely gone mainstream (even if practice has not always caught up) to the point where its dutiful mention elicits more yawns than raised eyebrows. The term is part of the *lingua franca* of the field, permeating planning curricula, scholarly writings, and local plans. Rather than remaining partitioned in one specialization within planning (e.g., environmental planning), the ideas and practices of sustainability increasingly find their way into the other planning specializations (transportation, economic development, housing, international development, etc.). There are fewer quibbles than before about—and more tolerance of—sustainability's multiple definitions and its fuzzy, unbounded breadth.

An enduring fear is that the sustainability agenda will be hijacked, watered down, or reduced to deceptive “greenwashing,” with regressive policies camouflaged as progressive environmentalism. Or that sustainability will not escape its anthropocentric economic logic (with a sugary coating of ecological promises). Or that sustainability efforts will neglect or even reinforce class inequality (Marcuse, 1998). Or that sustainability will represent a new rhetoric of legitimation for western science, technological progress, and transnational capital (S. B. Banerjee, 2003). But these are common fears of any transformative movement: that opposition will dilute reforms and calcify the status quo or, worse, corrupt the movement altogether. These dangers are real (and not always just paranoia), but are neither unique to sustainability nor a compelling reason to condemn sustainability efforts. Are not all transformative ideologies both redemptive and corruptible?

Planners invariably run the risk of overselling sustainability as a unifying paradigm for planning's widespread, unruly branches. During a previous era of ambitious disciplinary expansion, Aaron Wildavsky (1973) quipped, “If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing” (p. 127). These days, one is tempted to smugly substitute “sustainability” for “planning” in that 1970s quotation. But I observe that many planners are well aware of this trap of overgeneralization and astutely strive to continuously

refine, redefine, and customize the idea of sustainability for local contexts and audiences. Sustainability does create solidarity of environmentalists and a network of shared ideas, but the idea does not export without translation and local adaptation. Planners have amassed many stories of how the term sustainability does not always travel easily across different communities and their particular local political cultures, be it Appalachia, the Rust Belt, or the ranch lands of the American West. Envision Utah effectively translated sustainability's 3 Es of economy, environment, and equity into prosperity, scenic beauty, and neighborliness to better speak to the regional culture of Salt Lake City (Envision Utah, 2003). To make sustainability usefully tangible, it must be rooted in the specifics and everyday practices of planning and designing the built environment (Talen, 2012).

The most nimble of planners are thus able to successfully navigate the tension between the universality and the militant particularism of the sustainability idea. Straddling this global/local tension is a constant disciplinary challenge, but also is an area where planning has much experience. Global climate change has only made this tension more urgent. Planners are now acutely aware that their local efforts to reduce building energy use, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), impervious surfaces, and heat island effects are a small but cumulatively essential part of a larger global effort.

→ Climate change has made local sustainability not only more urgent, but also more focused: It is the game changer that has forced planning (and other disciplines) to rework the long-term goals of sustainability. (Other than a single mention of greenhouse gases, I neglected climate change in my 1996 article; I underestimated the scale and speed of climate disruptions.) If we once focused on the shift from 1970s environmentalism to 1990s environmental sustainability, we must now shift from 1990s sustainability to today's adaptation, mitigation, and resilience in an era of vulnerability to sea level rise, drought, rising temperatures, and increasingly violent storms. Global climate change will remap the social and spatial distribution of risk and reward of urban development, and our planning maps need to keep apace.

Treating Unsustainable Urbanization as a Chronic, Manageable Disease

The very constitutive idea of sustainability may itself be evolving. If “sustainability” once suggested achieving a balance through placing an urban-ecological system in equilibrium (i.e., a steady-state condition of resource and

land uses), we may eventually grow more comfortable with the idea that sustainability is dynamic, unpredictable—even unstable—and plagued with internal contradictions. Sustainability contains contradictions not just because of the planner's triangle, but also because the very idea of sustainability itself (a sustained period of anything) is arguably contrary to the modern capitalist condition of unceasing growth, upheaval, and disruption. There is a core paradox within sustainability: It offers the promise of balance and collaboration (between economic, ecologic, and social interests), but it is the tensions, contradictions, and imbalances between these interests that fuel human development. In our era of creative destruction, the best we can achieve may be some kind of hybrid between the sustained and the transitory. (The current fascination with resilience has encouraged the sustainability discussion to further acknowledge that the world is volatile and full of threats, change, and disequilibrium, even if the resilience literature itself sometimes reveals a stalwart belief in equilibrium and a resistance to drastic transformations.) Rather than seeking an elusive balance as a prerequisite for sustainability in a volatile world of climate change, we might instead pursue a viable compromise between sustainable and unsustainable practices. We will likely not know, in the long run of history, whether human life is intrinsically unsustainable. The best civilization can achieve might be to carve out a habitat niche that supports life until it does not, and then scramble to adapt.

The goal of sustainable development therefore is to minimize the damage of human practices, although one can never live “in harmony” with nature. There will always be conflict, tension, and degradation. One cannot “cure” unsustainability as if an acute, external infection. But one can treat it as a chronic, increasingly manageable disease (Campbell, 2015). It once threatened to kill us, and eventually, optimistically, we will be able to enjoy life without a significant reduction in our collective life expectancy. This view shifts the discussion away from curing, perfection, solving. Instead, sustainable practices are about mitigation, improvement, adaptation, buying time, keeping the worst damages at bay. This view acknowledges an unspoken undercurrent of tragedy to our sustainability discussions, a melancholic misfortune that we do not usually concede in our technocratic and pragmatic rush to fix things. That we have screwed things up, and subsequently struggle to at least partially mitigate the damage, evokes a sense of loss made more acute by the trepidation over climate change.

We may therefore need to let go of the idea of balance (between social, environmental, and economic priorities) as the core principle for sustainability, and instead speak of a kind of truce, a working contradiction, a stalemate, a tem-

porary armistice. This manageable tension better matches the internal contradictions of planning itself. Despite planning's frequent self-portrayal as a modest yet heroic profession on the side of the underdog (whether nature or neighbor), these contradictions repeatedly pull the field in conflicting directions. It is not institutional schizophrenia, but rather a systemic outcome of planning's embedded role in the complex network of public service, political economy, and the built environment that steers the profession through the contradictions of urbanization, social justice, and sustainability. The tension between growth and conservation persists: Our profession works to both aggressively expand the boundaries of the metropolitan region and erect bulwarks to conserve the natural and historic landscapes. We both submissively serve the economic mandates of the elite urban growth machine and advocate for the impoverished and disenfranchised urban dwellers.

Finally, the sustainability narrative remains vibrant and vital within planning because it has evolved in the past two decades through its very engagement with social justice (Campbell, 2013), grounded in the ongoing practice of planning and designing both a greener and more equitable built environment (Agyeman, 2005; Chapple, 2015). It is this productive collision of the environmental and community activist movements—and the ongoing efforts to recombine and reconcile these two traditions with their divergent histories, values, and communities—that has fueled the thoughtful advancement of sustainability planning. The sustainability movement will continue to be powerful as long as it creates a commons where planners, their allies, and their adversaries can debate the hard questions, negotiate compromises in the distribution of natural and human wealth, and creatively explore alternative urban futures.


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Notes

1. Richard Foglesong's (1986) excellent writing on the “property contradiction” was influential here.
2. Thanks to Susan Fainstein for helping name this conflict.

ORCID

Scott D. Campbell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6195-2855>

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