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Social Sustainability

A Multilevel Approach to Social Inclusion

Edited by
Veronica Dujon, Jesse Dillard, and
Eileen M. Brennan

ROUTLEDGE

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK LONDON

First published 2013
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Social sustainability : a multilevel approach to social inclusion / edited by Veronica Dujon, Jesse Dillard, Eileen M. Brennan.
p. cm. — (Routledge advances in sociology ; 101)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Social capital (Sociology) 2. Sustainable development—Social aspects. I. Dujon, Veronica, 1963– II. Dillard, Jesse F. III. Brennan, Eileen M. (Eileen Muench), 1943–
HM708.S664 2013
302—dc23
2012044238

ISBN13: 978-0-415-62392-6 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-75188-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by IBT Global.

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE Certified Sourcing www.sfiprogram.org SFI-01234
SFI label applies to the text stock

Printed and bound in the United States of America
by IBT Global.

Social Sustainability

How can we raise the standard of living of the world's poor and maintain high levels of social health and well-being in the developed world, while simultaneously reducing the environmental damage wrought by human activity? The social dimension of sustainability is becoming recognized as a necessary if not sufficient condition for attaining economic and environmental sustainability. The requisite dialogue requires inclusion at multi-levels. This collection of works is an ambitious and multi-disciplinary effort to indemnify and articulate the design, implementation, and implications of inclusion. Included are theoretical and empirical pieces that examine the related issues at the local, national and international levels. Contributors are grounded in Sociology, Economics, Business Administration, Public Administration, Public Health, Psychology, Anthropology, Social Work, Education, and Natural Resource Management.

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To Ismael Antonio and Alejandra Sofia

To Hayden and Casey

To James Raymond, Mary Ann, and Dustin

With our profound hope that you will one day live in a world that is more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

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Acknowledgments

For the past seven years, faculty, students, and community leaders have gathered at Portland State University to exchange ideas through the Social Sustainability Colloquium Series. In the first years of the series we struggled to define the social dimension of sustainability, which we addressed through a variety of lenses and disciplines in *Understanding the Social Dimension of Sustainability*. Our next round of discussions in the Social Sustainability Colloquia led us to examine our approaches to the improvement of social processes and institutions, resulting in our production of the current volume. We wish to express our gratitude to Marion Sharp, the coordinator of the Social Sustainability Colloquium, who has been dedicated to creating an environment that is both nurturing and challenging for scholars, practitioners, and community members, and to members of the Center for Professional Integrity and Accountability who have provided some of the liveliest exchanges in the series.

In the fall of 2009, through funding from the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, the Center for Sustainable Processes and Practices provided support for current and emergent endeavors at Portland State University and in the community related to social sustainability and its integration with the other sustainability domains. As a consequence Portland State created the Social Sustainability Network, which carried the work of the colloquium forward, and acted as a forum in which scholars and practitioners could share, learn, and collaborate. Network members have received additional support from the Institute for Sustainable Solutions that has enabled us to plan collaborative research efforts, conduct research on health equity efforts in Portland, travel to international conferences to present our scholarship, and produce this volume that addresses social sustainability efforts at local, regional, national, and international levels. We are grateful for the consistent support for social sustainability scholarship we have received from Portland State leaders: Provost Roy Koch, Vice President for Research and Strategic Partnerships Jonathan Fink, and Director of Portland State's Institute for Sustainable Solutions, Jennifer Allen.

We also wish to acknowledge the scholarly efforts of the authors of each of the chapters, who presented their work at the colloquium, received

peer reviews, and produced works that shaped the themes of this volume. Some of the authors received external funding that supported the production of their chapters. Eileen Brennan, Anna Malsch, Julie Rosenzweig, and Lisa Stewart received funding from the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health through NIDRR Grant H133B990025, or from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures through NIDRR Grant H133B090019. Production of the chapter on mentoring and social sustainability by Kevin Jones, Thomas Keller, and John Ossowski, was supported by the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research at Portland State University. The Center for Professional Integrity and Accountability at Portland State provided support for the chapter on social business enterprise written by Jesse Dillard, Mellie Pullman, Josh Bernard, and Aaron Scarborough. The Canadian Government through the Understanding Canada/Canadian Studies Institute funded the fieldwork for the chapter on the oil sands in northern Alberta, Canada written by Veronica Dujon. Research discussed in the chapter by Jeremy Spoon was funded by a Graduate Research Fellowship at the National Science Foundation and the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) and would not have been possible without the help of the Khumbu Sherpa community and Nuwuvi Nations. The Portland State University Department of Geography, through the efforts of David Banis and his students, and the resources of the Geographic Information System Laboratory, produced specialized maps for two of the chapters.

We are particularly grateful to Laurie Powers, Director of the Regional Research Institute for Human Services, and Associate Dean for Research of the School of Social Work at Portland State for generous support for the preparation of the manuscript. Connie Loesch of the RRI insured that the final manuscript was delivered to Routledge in consistent style and good order. Dana Peters produced a careful and complete book index. Finally, we thank our editors and reviewers at Routledge for their assistance in making this a better, more readable book.

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1 Introduction to Social Sustainability
A Multilevel Approach to Social Inclusion

Jesse Dillard, Veronica Dujon, and Eileen M. Brennan

There is growing interest among both practitioners and academics in the social aspects of sustainability and examining its conceptual applications at various levels and in various contexts. While it is often said that sustainability comprises three elements—environmental, economic, and social—the social dimension seems most nebulous and generally less well focused (Cuthill, 2010; Dillard, Dujon, & King, 2009; Kunz, 2006; Littig & Griessler, 2005; Manzi, Lucas, Lloyd Jones, & Allen, 2010). However, social sustainability is central as we struggle to improve the human condition within the context of regenerative and renewable natural systems (Boström, 2012; McKenzie, 2004).

The continuing world financial crisis highlights the close interrelationship between the social and environmental aspects of sustainability. The social world of global market capitalism and the physical world are inextricably intertwined. The social, especially as manifested in "the market," has taken precedence over the physical. We find ourselves struggling to meet basic human needs in some contexts even as we stimulate excessive and unsustainable consumption in others. These economic pressures, while providing an opportunity to rein in unsustainable consumption and debt, are placing an even greater burden on the natural and social systems as environmental enhancements and safeguards are postponed or abandoned in the name of economic expediency (Tienhaara, 2010). How do we transform our thinking, our conceptualizations concerning poverty and environmental degradation, for example?

Additionally, the financial crisis that shook the world economy at the end of the last decade illustrates the connections between social inclusion and environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Leichenko, O'Brien, and Solecki (2010) show that exposure to climate change combined with the financial crisis has greatly increased the social vulnerability of at-risk populations. Discriminatory policies and practices directed at racial and ethnic groups imposed substantial disadvantages in the terms and conditions under which they could access economic resources, and thus power to exert influence over their well-being (Soska, Teixeira, Legault, Crawford, & Hardoby, 2011). Further, Dymski (2010) argues that in the United States

the confluence of changes in banking practices in financial markets coupled with racially biased processing procedures not only facilitated the subprime lending crisis, but also highlighted the social inequities that culminated in an acceleration of the gap between the wealthy and members of certain racial and ethnic groups.

Initially, sustainability related primarily to natural systems. Currently, there is an increasing propensity to integrate social concerns into the pursuit of sustainability (Barron & Gauntlett, 2002; Benner & Pastor, 2012; Carpenter & Turró, 2008; Cuthill, 2010; Dempsey, Bramley, Power, & Brown, 2011; Harris &Goodwin, 2001; Holden, 2012, Magis, 2010). The collaborative efforts of faculty, students, and community experts now have begun to focus on understanding the social dimension of sustainability, providing insights through a variety of perspectives (Dillard, et al., 2009). Here we extend the understanding of the social aspects of sustainability by exploring the relevance and applicability of *social inclusion*. We argue that social inclusion will result in more socially sustainable processes, yielding collectively higher levels of societal well-being.

Previously, we developed a working definition of the social aspect of sustainability to include both the processes that generate social health and well-being now and in the future and the social institutions that facilitate environmental and economic sustainability now and in the future (Dillard et al., 2009). Here, we continue to work within the context of this general conceptualization and emphasize the processes and outcomes associated with social inclusion. Social inclusion represents the opportunity, and resources necessary, to participate in economic, social, and cultural activities that are considered the social norms as individuals, communities, and/or societies respond to environmental, economic, and social change (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2004). All affected should have effective and affective input into those things that impact them, which entails the ability to comprehend and effectively respond within the extant and anticipated constellations of social and economic power.

As we observe the social sustainability initiatives, programs, and policies undertaken by such diverse groups as governments, non-governmental organizations, and businesses, the lack of inclusive and informed participation at multiple levels retards the effectiveness of the efforts. Alternative voices are marginalized or overlooked in the quest for "sustainability" (a fulfilling present and a renewable and regenerative future). In contrast, Sen (1999, 2009) argues that the purpose of development initiatives should be to provide opportunities for people to develop capabilities to recognize and do the things that they value. Community engagement represents the foundation upon which the success of these development efforts is built, by providing a forum for community members to recognize and articulate the opportunities that they value and will work to attain (Ling, Hanna, & Dale, 2009). Increasingly, sustainable development is associated with, and seen as dependent upon, equity and community engagement (Borrini-Feyerabend,

Kothari, & Oviedo, 2004; Cuthill, 2010; Magis & Shinn, 2009; United Nations, 2007.) In addition, for environmental sustainability strategies to be effectively implemented, community inclusion is a prerequisite. The processes and institutions that facilitate sustainability reflect the understanding of those who design and implement them. The less inclusivity in the design and implementation of these institutions and the associated processes, the less likely they are to achieve their anticipated objectives, and the more potential they have to contribute to environmental injustice (Bullard, Johnson, & Torres, 2005).

In line with the growing interest in social sustainability in general, there has been a substantial increase in research, teaching, and practitioner engagement related to social sustainability issues and mechanisms. One important aspect of social sustainability is the manner in which governments, organizations, and citizens address and discharge duties of accountability to a range of stakeholders regarding the social and environmental impact of development efforts. The recognition and expansion of civil, governmental, and managerial interest in social sustainability has been reflected in a growing number of undergraduate and postgraduate business and management courses, which now include elements of social sustainability in their curriculum, even though the area may not be identified as such. Disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, public administration, education, social work, and business are acknowledging the interrelatedness of the social with the environmental, and the traditional environmental disciplines such as engineering, applied sciences, and agriculture are recognizing the implications of the social in relation to the environment. The international growth of practitioner and teaching interest in social sustainability is also mirrored in a substantial rise in academic scholarship recognizing and integrating social sustainability into conceptual frameworks and practice research (Boström, 2012; Manzi et al., 2010; Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003; Sharma & Ruud, 2003). Several universities have research centers with a focus on the social dimension of sustainability, for example, the Australian Center for Sustainable Business and Development at the University of Southern Queensland, the Research Center for Sustainability Studies of the University of Bremen, Germany, and the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at Portland State University, United States.

Our objective in this volume is to continue to delineate the social aspect of sustainability and to address key issues associated with multilevel perspectives and inclusion as primary tenets for understanding, expanding, and achieving social sustainability. Our conceptualization of the social aspect of sustainability as both the processes that generate social health and well-being now and in the future and those social institutions that facilitate environmental and economic sustainability now and for the future provides the general context for our multilevel analysis of inclusion. Within this context, we explore the meaning and application of the social

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