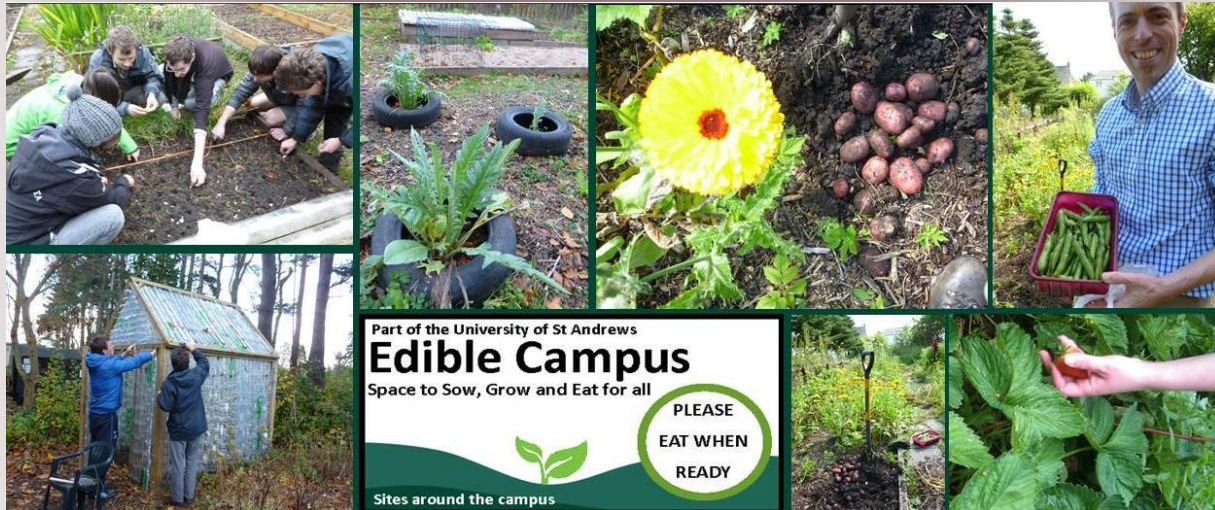# University through community?
Creating 'institutional culture'

Dr Rehema White

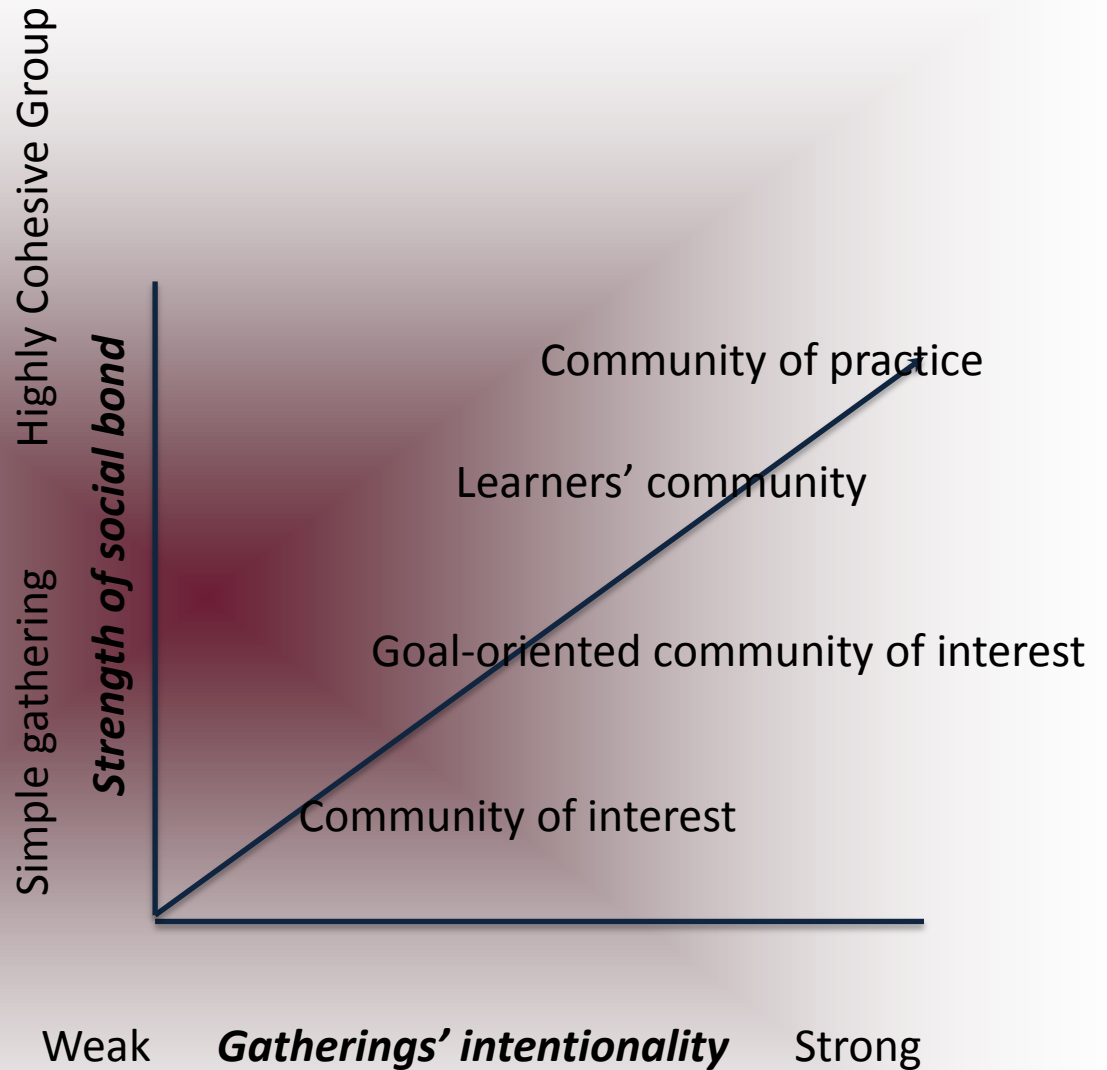Sustainable Development

University of St Andrews

Contents

- What is a community?
- Community and sustainability
- Stories of university sustainability
- A virtual circle
- Universities as both communities and organisations
- Institutional culture
- Towards a 'sustainable university'

What is a community to you?
Which is/are your community/ies?

What is a community?

- **Community of place** – (spatial community?) recognising the emotional attachment to place (NOT space) and social interactions within place (Manzo and Perkins 2006)

- **Community of practice** – learning situated in forms of social co-participation; a structure within which (social) learning occurs (Lave and Wenger 1991)

- **Community of interest -** "A community of interest is a gathering of people assembled around a topic of common interest. Its members take part in thecommunity to exchange information, to obtain answers to personal questions or problems, to improve their understanding of a subject, to share common passions or to play" (Henri and Pudelko 2003)

Fig. Different forms of virtual communities
according to their context of emergence. (Henri and Pudelko 2003)

Highly Cohesive Group

Strength of social bond

Simple gathering

Community of practice

Learners' community

Goal-oriented community of interest

Community of interest

Weak   **Gatherings' intentionality**   Strong

Sense of community

- **"Membership** - the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness.....

- **[I]nfluence**, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members....

- **[R]einforcement**: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group...

- **[S]hared emotional connection**, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences."

- (McMillan and Chavis 1986)

Community of value(s) – can be "a shared aspiration in the journey towards sustainability" (White and Harder 2013; Frazer 1999)

Communities and sustainability

- In global North, decline of community
- *But* recent revival of community as locus and focus of sustainability action
- Communities address local concerns within global context of environmental degradation and social injustice
- Overlap but not synonymous with discourses and practices of Transition, La Via Campesina, grassroots responses

Community as an aspiration of sustainability AND Community as a route to sustainability

Stories of university sustainability: University of Brighton

- Evolved from a polytechnic; applied research and vocational focus
- 21,000 students over 5 sites from urban to rural
- Prior to 2005 only a small Environmental Action Group
- Then consultation, inclusion, shift to Sustainability Policy Group leading to action
- Then incorporation of SD into academic work, multiple EAGs feeding into SDPG
- Then interacting circles of action
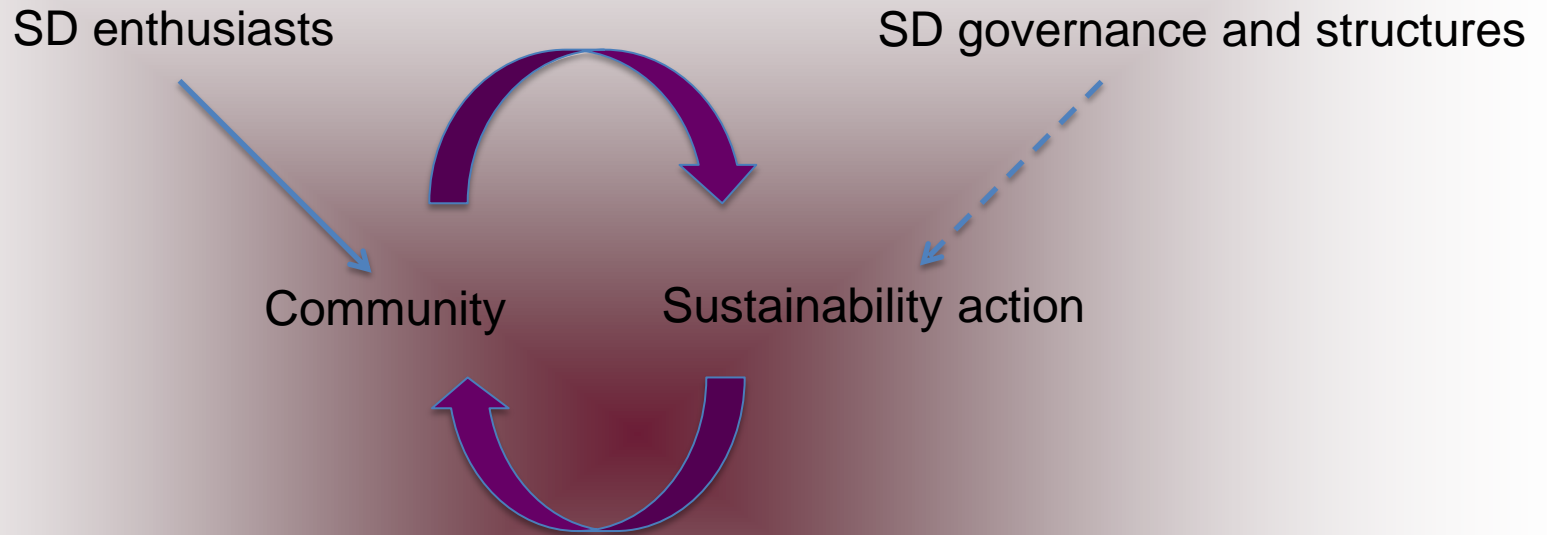- 3rd place People and Planet 2012

Stories of university sustainability: University of St Andrews

- A small and ancient institution (600 yrs); 7200 students in small coastal town
- 47% students in residences
- SD module then undergraduate Programme
- St Andrews Sustainability Institute (SASI)
- Estates
- Student and staff grassroots movement including Transition
- Integrated action and revitalised SD Working Group

University 'community'

SD enthusiasts

SD governance and structures

Community

Sustainability action

The virtuous cycle of sustainability action within a University

White and Harder (2013)

Universities as both communities *and* organisations

- Brighton – top down push facilitated action that promoted community of shared aspiration. Action created sense of identity and community.

- St Andrews – threads of academic scholarship, operations and student activism woven together. Existing community permitted collective action.

- Was community mobilisation grassroots bottom-up or senior management top-down?

- Can you create community?

Community mobilisation

- An interactive process involving community members in decision making; participatory and empowering
- THUS – unpredictable!
- Beware top down attempts to impose 'community'
- E.g. 'a denial of difference contributes to social group oppression' (Young 1990)
- Encourage voluntary engagement and critical reflection

Art of mentoring

Institutional culture

- Shift towards sustainability in an institution requires double loop learning, second order change and a change in framework; cultural change plus action (Boyce 2003)

- Differences between espoused theory and theory in use can cause friction (Albrecht et al 2007) so institutions must walk the talk

- Universities as more loosely coupled than businesses but less loosely coupled than communities?

- Universities with mandate in public arena

Universities as sustainable institutions

- Institutional culture required for radical re-focus towards sustainability (Boyce 2003)

- Does the notion and emergence of community of value enable adoption of institutional culture?

- Internal and wider community overlaps

Towards a 'sustainable university'

- *"The sustainable university educates its students to become transformational leaders of a sustainable society through its curriculum, its research, its willingness to serve as a test bed for innovation, its outreach and interactions with the greater community and through behaving sustainably in all of its practices, processes, and deliberations" (Rowland, cited in Sterling et al 2013)*

Towards a 'sustainable university'

- *"It is essentially **a transformative space**; where transformational practices are theorized, modelled and imagined. An open space which is not known by its 'ivory towers'; its rigid traditions, or its allegiance to power, but rather by its creativity, and energy for change; a 'hub' of social transformation and social learning for a more sustainable, just and equitable future. At the heart of such a university lies independence of thought, **critical debate** and social critique, but perhaps more importantly, such critical debate and social critique should feed imagination and re-imagination that is creative, productive, and intellectually rich and stimulating" (Lotz-Sisitka in Sterling et al 2013)*

Towards a 'sustainable university'

- *"A sustainable university is a university that contributes to the quality of life and the well-being of the planet through its education, research, management and community outreach. Doing so requires continuous critical scrutiny of its own assumptions, values and practices. Since 'quality of life' and 'well-being of the Planet' are contested and dynamic concepts a sustainable university has a fundamental role to play in recalibrating their meaning as the world changes and new knowledge and insights emerge". (Wal in Sterling et al 2013)*

Towards a 'sustainable university'

Attributes of the sustainable university

- Market driven model?
- The Green Academy
- Estates
- Regional – local and global
- Research
- Leadership
- The sustainable university
- Global context of higher education
- Wellbeing
- Community
- Pedagogy and curricula
- The student experience

What is a community to you?
Which is/are your community/ies?

Conclusions

- *'community' is a contested concept – can be community of place, practice, interest and/or value*
- *Community is both a route towards and aspiration of sustainability*
- *Universities can form loose communities of different kinds, specific to the institution*
- *Both sustainability enthusiasts and senior governance are needed to create a virtuous circle of sustainability action + sustainable community in a university*
- *Community of value is an important aspect of the institutional culture change required in the journey towards a 'sustainable university'*