



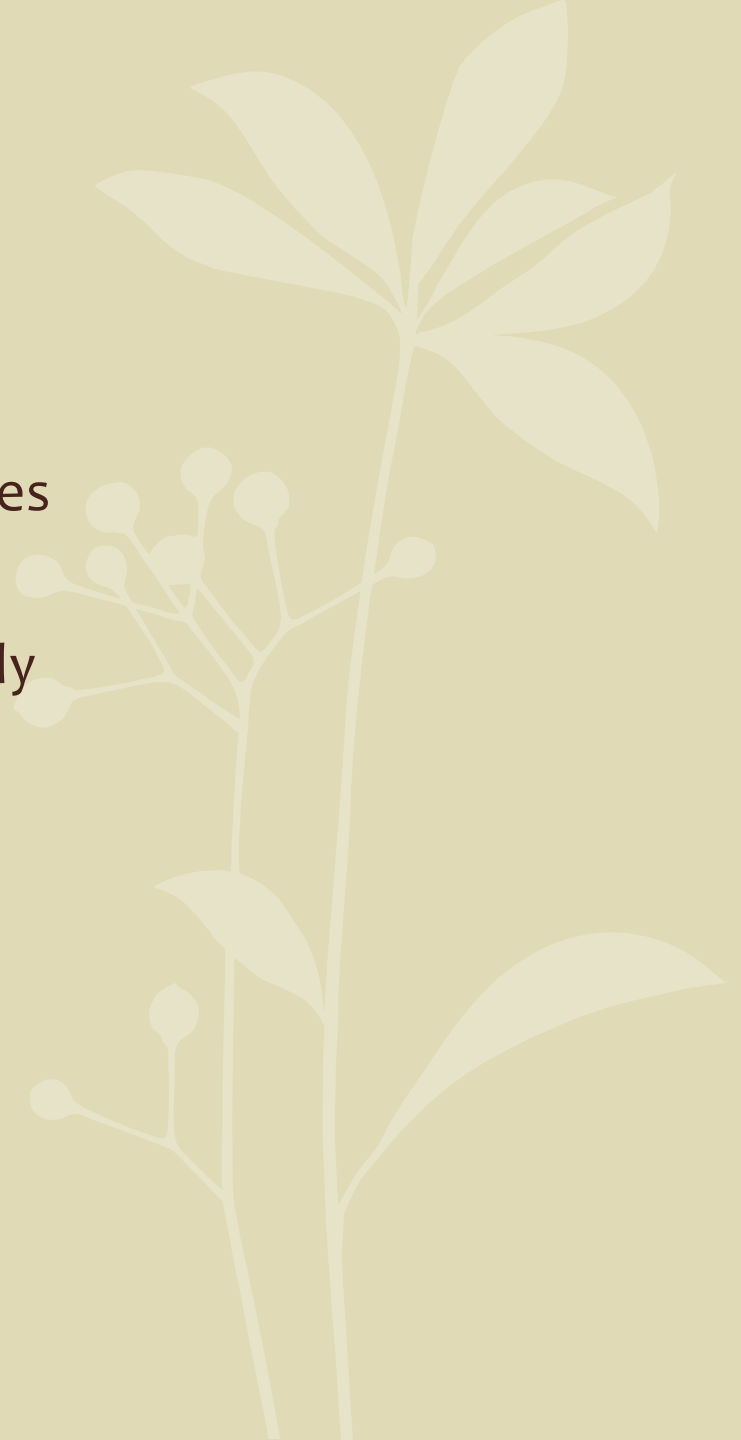
WHO AM I? THE ROLE(S) OF AN ACADEMIC AT A 'SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY'

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Who am I?

mother/partner/dau
ghter/friend/neighb
our/activist

project
manager/writer/tea
cher/administrator



Introduction

As academia changes, so must academic performance

(How) is it possible to reconcile our different roles?

How can academics influence the pursuit of sustainable development?

What if we reframed our roles as academics within the context of a ‘sustainable university’?



Contemporary HE context

- Globalisation
 - Pervasive managerialism
 - Commodification of education
 - Commercial goals for research
 - Audit driven research assessment
-
- “academics as self-governing subjects operating within a university governmental architecture that has been increasingly inflected in recent years by neoliberal designs to affect a performing, optimal individual in and for a performing institution” (Morrissey 2013)

BUT

Still some excellent examples of practice out there!



Contemporary academic roles



- Less place to be change agents for students and society (Doring 2002) and activists (Martin 2009)
- Higher workloads and stress (Houston et al 2006)
- Difficult to retain value based approaches to academia (Meyer and Evans 2005)
- Confusion over ‘basic’ and ‘applied’ forms of research
- Efficiency in teaching a priority; teaching for graduate skills?

‘Unsustainability is ‘not the work of ignorant people [but those] with BAs, BScs, LLBs, MBAs and PhDs’ (Orr, 1994: 7)

What is 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)*

What is a 'sustainable university'?



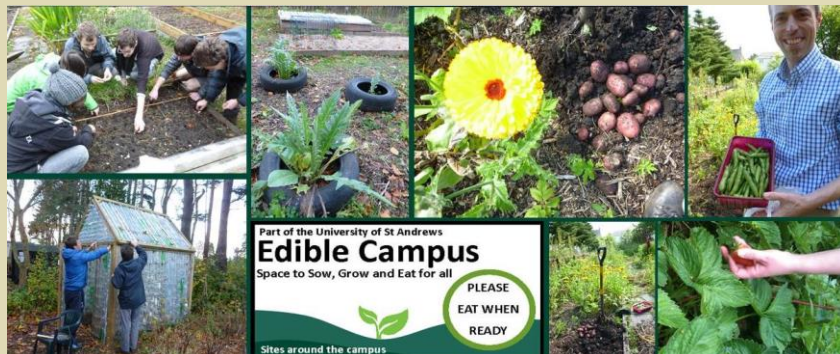
“A sustainable university is a university that contributes to the quality of life and the well-being of the planet through its education, research, management and community outreach. Doing so requires continuous critical scrutiny of its own assumptions, values and practices. Since 'quality of life' and '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)

What is a ‘sustainable university’?



“one that through its guiding ethos, outlook and aspirations, governance, research, curriculum, community links, campus management, monitoring and modus operandi seeks explicitly to explore, develop, contribute to, embody and manifest – critically and reflexively – the kinds of values, concepts and ideas, challenges and approaches that are emerging from the growing sustainability discourse” (Sterling 2013)

Reflection on lived experience: case study

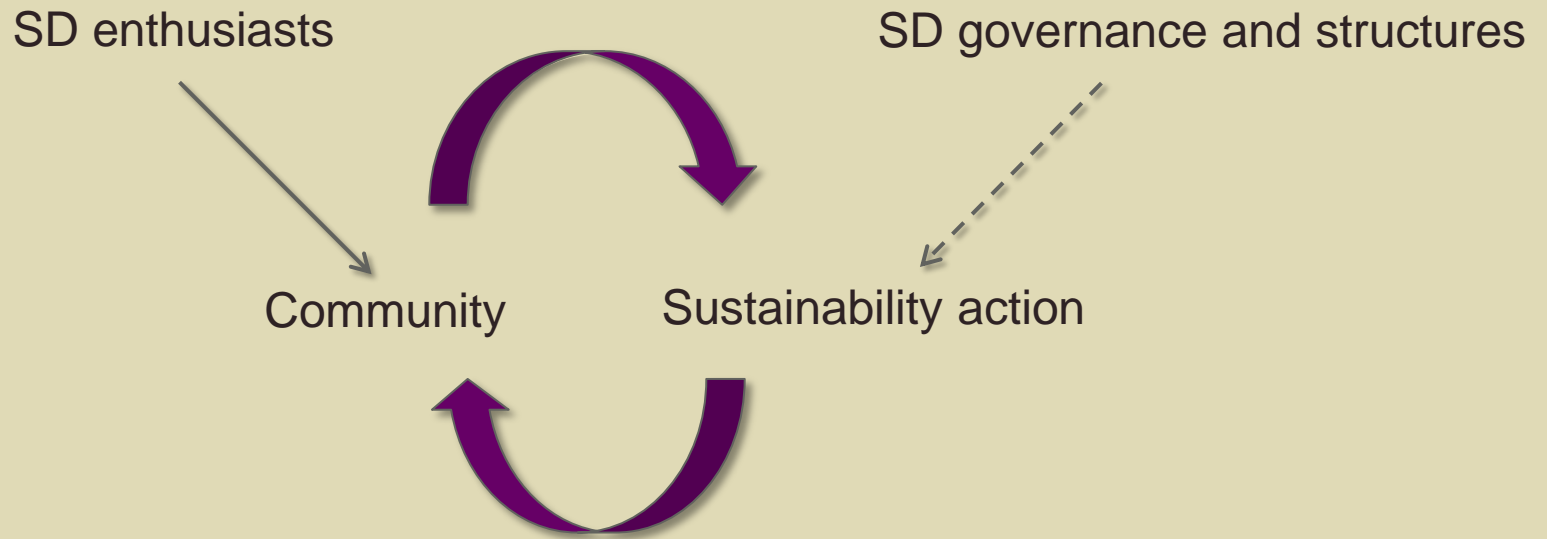


Formal/ informal
Top down/bottom up
Regulated/spontaneous
Frustrating /fun?
Conservative/creative?



Potential roles: Change agent reinstated?

1. Specialist knowledge and active community members
2. Facilitating transformative learning



The virtuous cycle of sustainability action within a University

White and Harder (2013)

Potential roles:
Values, relationality and self fulfilment?





Conclusions

Within a 'sustainable university', academics could:

- Reinststate their role as change agent through transformative teaching modes; interdisciplinary, participatory and reflexive research; activism (policy/community)
- Resolve some of the current paradoxical research expectations
- Enhance self fulfilment and wellbeing (and hence productivity!)
- Acknowledge their personal context and relationships
- Pursue collaborative and collective modes of scholarship

BUT

We need a paradigm shift in HE to overcome current contradictions and reconcile our roles with needs of people and planet