University of British Columbia

Geography 446: Social Sustainability

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SUBJECT: Defining Social Sustainability in a University Context; Recommended
Goals for improvement of UBC Inspirations and Aspirations

PURPOSE

This report's primary objective is to define the concept of "social sustainability" in a university context, specifically that of UBC, and to recommend goals that will improve upon UBC's current social sustainability goals outlined in UBC's sustainability document, *Inspirations and Aspirations*. This report also recommends a new vision statement for the sustainability office that better incorporates the "social" element.

This report will also describe the unique parameters that are considered when applying social sustainability to a university context. The latter of this report summarizes the methodology used in selecting the criteria that were included in the recommended definition and goals outlined above, followed by a breakdown-analysis of each goal with reference to two matrices (Appendix A: Social Sustainability Goals; Appendix B: Matching UBC Inspirations and Aspirations to AASHE STARS and CSAP) that were constructed for the purpose of aiding this report's objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Definition of Social Sustainability

The wholly inclusive interaction of individual and community capacity to produce and/or maintain a culture of equality and wellbeing that utilizes social resources in a responsible and ethical way, without compromising future generations.

Vision Statement

To become a socially cohesive campus where students, faculty and the public utilize their diverse knowledge and assets in solidarity to promote and incorporate sustainable principles into the fabric of humanity.

Goals (Clusters)

I   Social Cohesion and Diversity

To strengthen community involvement while respecting diversity and minimizing social marginalization.

II   Equity and Resources

To create a culture of equality that empowers students, faculty and staff through unbiased representation and equal access to campus and community resources.

III   Responsibility to Demonstrate Ethical and Sustainable Behavior

To realize fully the implications of UBC's influence on future generations, and to become a global leader in the promotion and education of sustainable practices at all scales.

IV   Stability and Wellbeing

To provide an environment that nurtures both physical and mental wellbeing and protects the right to a work/life balance in a safe and connected community.

THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

A university, as a relatively self-contained community, has the opportunity to think deliberately about the direct implementation of socially sustainable policies. As one of Canada's top universities UBC has the opportunity to become a leader in the field of Sustainability and set an example to other post secondary institutions as to how social sustainability might look in a campus environment. In doing so, UBC must work to include the stakeholders involved in every level of campus operations. This group includes students, faculty, staff, sponsors and residents of all ages. In this sense, the UBC environment is inherently different from that of other institutions. The stakeholders involved in corporate decision making tend to include figures such as shareholders, employees and consumers. Sustainable action undertaken in a campus setting will also involve consensus building with the community residents. UBC is situated in a unique position that incorporates all of these stakeholders. As a result, the type of environment we choose to create and maintain must be conducive to learning, researching and teaching as well as maintaining a high quality working environment for all members of staff and providing safe and healthy places for all residents to live. Certain sustainability goals may be considered universal among all types of institutions such as health, safety, equality, inclusion and awareness, to name a few. However, institutions with an overarching influence, such as UBC, should advocate the criticality of education in their social sustainability framework. For institutions such as UBC it is essential that we establish a maintainable level of equality and inclusion across a diverse range of races, ages, sexes and abilities while taking responsibility to maintain a healthy and safe environment which fosters a culture of education and a high standard of living for all students, staff and faculty across the campus.

METHODOLOGY

Selecting the criteria for inclusion in both the definition and goals for Social Sustainability was both a quantitative and qualitative task. Appendix A is a matrix of the social goals of various educational institutions, corporations, governments, communities and events that exemplify a range of scales of focus. The quantitative process involved extracting commonalities among the goal-sets and clustering them into groups of common objectives. This process helped to inform the authors about which goals were most common among the entries and which words were most commonly used in the descriptions. All the data was valuable in this effort, as some goal-sets were found to be either redundant within themselves, or displayed gaps that other goal-sets filled in.

A qualitative process guided the remainder of the selection, since selecting the recommended goals' criteria based solely on commonalities would be shortsighted, as their appeared to be obvious gaps in the goal-sets and room for improvement in many cases. The process of "filling in the gaps" or improving upon existing common goals included a process of article, report and website reviews. This was coupled with a comparison shown in Appendix B: A matrix comparing UBC's current goals directly with the STARS (Sustainability Tracking and Reporting System) and CSAP (Campus Sustainability Assessment Project) indicators. Both the review and the comparison of

Appendices A and B allowed for a wider understanding of the key terms and issues that needed to be addressed in this report's definition and recommended goals.

ANALYSIS OF GOALS AND INDICATORS

I   Social Cohesion and Diversity
To strengthen community involvement while respecting diversity and minimizing social marginalization.

Social Cohesion and Diversity are extremely important components of social sustainability. The elements that compose the cluster entitled "social cohesion" were gathered from various sources. Citizen engagement and community connections (Official Community Plan 2005) implied a significant emphasis on the way a community should function as one unified entity engaged in activities which foster solidarity between its members. Solidarity and unity are not to be mistaken for homogeneity within the community, diversity is central to the effective implementation of social cohesion. Through the celebration of diversity society may be characterized by mutual respect for differences (Swedish Government 2003) and encourage an environment conducive to cultural sharing and awareness. A diverse population also affords the opportunity to recognize the assets each individual can contribute to community development (Official Community Plan 2005). In examining the issues of social cohesion and diversity, some sample institutions included concerns about inner city commitments (Vancouver 2010) while these commitments are essential in the sustainable development of an organization like VANOC, UBC has fewer formal ties to the inner city community and therefore it is not of immediate relevance to our sustainability goals. Social cohesion and diversity as a cluster is highly applicable to UBC on an academic as well as an individual level. Aboriginal involvement, as was mentioned in three out of the twelve samples, speaks to both social cohesion and diversity. As a University with a vast variety of ethnicities, including aboriginals, UBC has the opportunity and resources to create a community where inclusion and diversity are celebrated.

II   Equality and Resources
To create a culture of equality that empowers students, faculty and staff through unbiased representation and equal access to campus and community resources.

The concept of equality is a keystone to the structure of social sustainability. In order to create and maintain a functioning cohesive community of over 60,000 campus goers, it is crucial that it be based on equal treatment and access to campus resources. When communities are equally balanced they become resilient to change, and enjoy a broader available knowledge base from which to solve challenges (Social Aspects of Sustainability 2009). Data from Appendix A shows equality as an important element of social sustainability, where some goal-sets refer directly to equality and others refer to "social inclusion" (Social Sustainability Framework 2007) and "shared opportunity" (Official Community Plan 2005). The term "representation" was used in the description of this goal as a catch-all phrase that groups these common terms together. It seems

necessary to describe this goal as an *empowering process* for members of the UBC community since an equality in the availability of such a vast supply of knowledge resources would (and does) increase individual and group capacity to make sustainable choices and transform them into actions. It is also important to understand representation as including gender equality. The Swedish Government, which is listed in Appendix A, focuses four of their 8 strategies of social inclusion specifically on gender equality and rights (Swedish Government 2003). Equal pay and employee rights are present in four of the 12 goal-sets in Appendix A (Syncrude 2007; U of T 2008; Vancouver 2010; Swedish Government 2003) thus making this an important cluster. UBC's current goal-set focuses on enhancing the work environment (UBC 2007), which is a phrase that is difficult to understand and is far too broad to direct a specific strategy. The recommended goal redirects the understanding of equality and resources so that future strategies can include specific targets such as wages and employee rights.

III	Responsibility to Demonstrate Ethical and Sustainable Behavior
	To realize fully the implications of UBC's influence on future generations, and to become a global leader in the promotion and education of sustainable practices

A cluster emerged that centers on the idea that institutions have a responsibility to demonstrate ethical and sustainable behavior. Common themes within the sample institutions included community consultation, education (Syncrude 2007), promotion of sustainability (U of C 2009) and managing community impact (Alcan 2006). For these themes to become more than abstract ideas a leader must assume responsibility and take action. Influencing and educating is a job that shapes and moulds the minds of emerging leaders. For this reason the authors believe that a responsibility to act ethically is an essential component of building a community in which people can trust one another and where accountability and transparency are paramount qualities. As with all forms of sustainability the future is a major motivation. By taking responsibility to make socially sustainable decisions within a framework of cultural understanding and promotion of global and civic engagement, future generations will be burdened less by the decisions being made now. However, responsibility is an all-encompassing term; UBC is not expected to take responsibility for things beyond their sphere of influence. For this reason, goals that proposed descent standards of living and economic security (U of C 2009) cannot be pursued for all individuals. UBC 's responsibility to demonstrate ethical and sustainable behavior within its means is important not only for the future of UBC but also at a larger scale, as UBC strives to become a model educational community.

IV	Stability and Wellbeing

> To provide an environment that nurtures both physical and mental wellbeing and protects the right to a work/life balance in a safe and connected community.

Analysis of the data sets in Appendix A and Appendix B showed that social stability and wellbeing (safety and health) were the most common clusters in the data set. Nine of the twelve goal-sets listed in Appendix A referred to health, safety, security, or wellbeing at least once, some up to three times in one goal-set (Appendix A). Appendix B shows far less of an importance given to these issues, where the STARS indicators have no mention at all, and the CSAP indicators mention safety once (Appendix B). From the data set in Appendix A, it was concluded that both wellbeing and stability should be included as a separate cluster. The choice of the term wellbeing as opposed to "health" or "safety" seemed appropriate for UBC since it encompasses both these terms and allows for targets that can include work/life balance as well as activities that support a lifestyle of learning and adventure (Official Community Plan 2005). The authors felt it important to include "stability" as a key term in this goal. Stability in a university context refers wholly to the metal and physical health of the community while integrating the concept of *maintaining a state*, which is paramount to sustainable practice (Korten 1998; Clugston and Calder 1999). Stability also imparts a more positive approach to campus security and trust than terms such as "security" and "crime-prevention" which are specific but too narrow for sustainable targets. Finally, the analysis presented a problem that exists in both the STARS and CSAP lists of indicators. It would seem that if a very high percentage (our data set showed 75% inclusion) of institutions, corporations, governments and communities include safety, wellbeing and security within their goal-sets, it should follow that the indicator lists include some way to measure their presence in sustainable practices.

CONCLUSION

This report has assessed various existing social sustainability clusters (goals) through data sets that include government, education, corporate and community bodies, and through indicator lists designed to measure the level of sustainability present in these bodies. The result is a recommendation for a definition for social sustainability that is inclusive of the terms and concepts that the authors deem most important to a university context. Also included in the recommendations is four new social sustainability clusters for UBC to include in their sustainability goal-set that are perceived, through quantitative and qualitative analysis, to be more inclusive and direct than the previous *Inspirations and Aspirations* clusters. It is also recommended that UBC reform their vision statement to include more leadership and responsibility for the support and growth of sustainability.