
Editorial

Delyse Springett

Programme for Business and Sustainable Development
Massey University
P.O. Box 11-222
Palmerston North, New Zealand
Fax: +64 6 350 5651
E-mail: D.V.Springett@massey.ac.nz

Biographical notes: Delyse Springett is the Director of the Programme for Business and Sustainable Development at Massey University, New Zealand, and runs her own consultancy, Business and Sustainable Development New Zealand. She has an interest in applying concepts from critical theory to the business discourse of sustainable development and in broadening the discourse on sustainable development in the business sector. In addition to being Editor of the *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, she is a member of the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Green Economics* (Inderscience) and *Sustainable Development* (Interscience).

The scope of the papers in this issue reflects the diversity and breadth of discourses on sustainable development, the discursive struggle that characterises the debate and some of the gaps in that debate. A main objective of the journal is to engage a wide range of writers and researchers from different disciplines and different perspectives who do not frequently occupy the same written space. Authors interested in institutional and policy issues and changing world views may occupy a different conceptual space from ones attempting to challenge the norms of educational or business systems; while everyone is challenged about appropriate and effective ways of assessing aspects of sustainable development.

Starting with institutional issues and an examination of the liberal versus the green democratic state, the issue moves on to matters of sustainability assessment, the improvement of human well being and the assessment of social sustainability. These discussions are followed by perspectives on the fundamental role of education for sustainability and the need for business to embrace sustainable development in its culture and operations.

In the lead article, Eckersley explores the environmental stewardship capabilities of the liberal democratic state and argues that discourses that are more compatible with liberalism and capitalism are less likely to deliver sustainability. She maintains that liberals understand sustainability as a constraint on autonomy rather than a condition of autonomy. The ideal typology of three environmental states that she develops – the eco-liberal state, the environmental welfare state and the green democratic state – embodies the three main discourses of sustainability that have emerged

post-Brundtland. These key discourses promote simple ecological modernisation, sustainable development and 'reflexive ecological modernisation'. The green democratic state is defended as the one more capable of promoting sustainability while maximising inclusive intra and intergenerational autonomy. Weaver and Rotman provide a conceptualisation of sustainability assessment as an integrative and active process at the science-policy-society interface. Integrated Sustainability Assessment (ISA) is defined as a cyclical, participatory process of scoping, envisioning, experimenting and learning through shared interpretation of sustainability for a specific context. Capable of posing questions about what is to be assessed, why it is to be assessed and how, ISA is described as strategic, sustainability-oriented, constructive and potentially transformative. It provides a tool to explore the opportunity-creation and problem-solving potential of framing contexts, with applications as broad and diverse as alternative institutions, technologies, spatial and temporal arrangements, price relations and associated policy regimes.

Eckersley's article sets these and the following papers in context, as he reflects on the challenge that sustainable development presents to the dominant world view that gives priority to economic growth and standard of living. Sustainable development aims to balance social, economic and environmental goals to create the overarching goal of a high, equitable and lasting quality of life, where an improved understanding of the social basis of human health and happiness allows different priorities to be measured against the common goal of improving human well being.

Assessing the application of a qualitative construct such as social sustainability to the different domains of the economy, society and the population presents problems. Omann and Spangenberg draw upon a German study comprising discourse-driven narratives and extensive modelling to demonstrate how the social sustainability of strategies for sustainable development can be evaluated. Employing a 'horizontal' Multi Criteria Analysis (MCA) they demonstrate that strategies exist which combine economic and environmental success with social sustainability and illustrate how policy impact can be assessed *ex ante* and subsequently monitored. They conclude that existing social sustainability criteria have sufficient in common to allow for robust assessment.

All of the foregoing issues reinforce the need for Education for Sustainability (EfS) if change is to take place that will make the future more equitable, inclusive and sustainable. In particular, this indicates the need for change in Institutions of Higher Education. Education for sustainability presents new challenges, not only for administrators and academics, but for the very nature of educational institutions and their curricula. In an article that serves as a prefatory paper for a forthcoming special issue on Education for Sustainability, Sterling and Thomas discuss the characteristics of EfS, its introduction to institutions of higher education and the related effects this may have on the institution. The paper underlines the need to engage academics from a wide range of disciplines in the debate. The authors focus on the anticipated learning outcomes for students in terms of knowledge, values and broad skills. This includes an exploration of the possibilities for developing student 'capabilities' associated with knowledge about sustainability issues. A set of capabilities is provided as a guide to the development of EfS in Institutions of Higher Education.

The implications of sustainable development are also profound for business. Halila and Hörte argue that the fundamental and comprehensive shifts in society that are called for in terms of product development, production, distribution and consumption call for more eco-innovation. They set out to investigate different types of eco-innovation that

currently exist and to develop a new classification system for eco-innovations. A study of winning entries in a Swedish Environmental Innovation Competition demonstrates that participating companies had achieved ample innovation in terms of 'product care' and minor or even major product improvements. However, very few of the 'eco-innovation' strategies presented for the awards fell into the categories of 'system innovation' or 'scientific breakthrough', indicating that companies are still not facing the broader challenges of sustainable development for the ways in which they conduct their business.

In fact, bringing about fundamental change to business of the kind considered in the earlier articles in this issue suggests a very long-term view, whereas sustainability is a concept that does not have time on its side. One place to start while major institutional change is wrought is within the existing business infrastructure. Searcy *et al.* present a model for the integration of sustainable development indicators into the existing business infrastructure of a major Canadian electric utility. The point is made that the indicators at the case company needed to be integrated with existing business infrastructure, that the integration had to occur at the appropriate organisational level and that the indicators must be capable of responding to the changing requirements of the organisation. The possible implications of the study for other organisations is reflected upon.

In his review of Sharon Beder's *Suining Themselves: How Corporations Drive the Global Agenda*, Welford commends the meticulous research and critical skills that Beder again brings to her writing. She exposes the political activity of corporate executives through their interconnected business networks, think tanks and public relations firms, bringing their clear agenda to bear on policymaking and politics.

M'Gonigle and Starke's 'Planet U: sustaining the world, reinventing the university', reviewed by John Fien, views 'the university' as an artefact of the past requiring dramatic innovation in today's world. Seen as a tool of the corporate world and a vehicle for job-training, the institution requires reinvention if it is to assume the important role it might play in the shift to global sustainability. The authors call for a new social movement to take a lead in transforming the current role of universities and propose a 'planetary university' that would be able to create diverse models of local and global innovation.

Our thanks go to all of the authors who submitted papers for this issue, and particularly to the authors represented here and the reviewers who generously made time to provide critical and constructive comments. All lead authors and the Editor look forward to readers' comments on the papers and the journal.