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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS COLLECTIVE SURGE

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Abstract

The paper argues that the recent, sudden popularity of the use of the concept of sustainable development in the sciences has the characteristics of a collective surge or fad. The first part of the paper examines the characteristics of fads and proposes a conceptual framework for collective behavior that incorporates fads or collective surges. The second part shows the applicability of this proposed collective behavior framework to understand the surge of sustainable development.

key words: collective behavior, fads, sustainable development
**Sustainable Development as Collective Surge**

The goal of this paper is to examine a fad in the sciences surrounding the use of the concept of sustainable development. The first section clarifies what is meant by fad and how they can be understood as a form of collective behavior. The resulting multidimensional analytical framework for collective behavior is then used to examine sustainable development as a collective surge.

**Preliminaries**

Science advances by abandoning common language words and expressions and substituting them for scientific concepts created to capture complexities and interrelationships in the empirical world that are discovered in the course of research and theorizing. As is generally true of other fields in the social sciences, in the specialty area of collective behavior the link of concepts to common words create chronic problems. This problem is particularly true of fads. The word fad has many significations. Google, an internet search engine, showed 241000 sites with the word “fad” in January 2001!\(^1\)

The prevailing confusion surrounding the word fad makes it necessary to examine the appropriate definitions and dynamics in the specialty area of collective behavior that would help in gaining a social science understanding of fads. Fortunately, this work has been rendered easier by the efforts of a number of scholars from whom I

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\(^1\) Even a quick review of a small segments of these sites show that fads variously refer to the adoption of behaviors, the popularity of objects, social practices, technical procedures, music styles, fashions, the representation of artistic styles, ways of living, the institutionalization of mechanisms of social control, careless or not well thought out activities, etc. There are museums dedicated to “bad” fads (http://www.badfads.com/pages/collectibles.html) and a corporation that markets fads (the Wham-O Mfg. Co. of San Gabriel, Calif). The word is ubiquitous, appearing in diverse institutional settings, from the military to business, economy, the arts, medicine
borrow freely, arranging their ideas to fit my own needs to conceptualize the specialty area of collective behavior.

**Statics.** During the last decades six major conceptual dimensions of collective behavior have been identified that need to be brought together to create an appropriate static framework to conceptualize the forms and contents of the field of collective behavior. These dimensions are:

1. The basic units of social organization that are found in instances of collective behavior. Partly derived from the work of R. E. Park (Park and Burgess, 1924), H. Blumer (for a review of his work see Lyman and Vidich, 1988), E. L. Quarantelli (for a review of his work see Dynes and Tierney, 1994), R. Turner and L. Killian (1987), John Lofland (1996), Clark McPhail (for a review of his work see Miller, 2000), and N. R. Johnson (1987), to mention only a few of the scholars that have analyzed the units typically found in instances of collective behavior, it can be assumed that there are six master units that may be present in any empirical case of collective behavior: gatherings, mass, publics, small groups, associational networks, and social movement organizations.

2. The cultural-organizational features of instances of collective behavior. As aptly discussed by Gary Marx (Marx and McAdam, 1994), these socio-cultural features should be understood as a continuum of emergence-conventionalization/institutionalization of relevant cultural elements such as norms, power arrangements, division of labor, and social relationships in instances of collective behavior.

3. The prevailing emotions in instances of collective behavior. As argued by N. Smelser (1962) and more recently by John Lofland and health, to mention a few. Worse still, the social science understanding of the
(1985), three prevailing emotions are usually present in instances of collective behavior. They are fear, hostility, and joy.

4. The prevailing locus of interaction/relationship in instances of collective behavior. This dimension, explored by E. Goffman and David Snow among others in the dramaturgical school (for a review of this literature see Brown and Goldin, 1973), identifies occasions for interaction in gatherings as revolving primarily either around behaviors, ideas, or objects.

5. The space-time boundaries of instances of collective behavior. This dimension, most prominently explored by McPhail (see Miller 2000), includes in its spatial meaning a continuum from the micro space to local, regional, national and international arenas. Temporally, it is also a continuum from the fleeting instance of collective behavior of less than one hour or a few hours to those that occur over a period of weeks, months and even years.

6. The social boundaries of instances of collective behavior. This dimension refers to the prevailing social location of instances of collective behavior and incorporates the current-day master categories of age, race/ethnicity, class/occupation, gender/sex, and ethnocentrism/nationalism.

**Dynamics.** These six dimensions form a classificatory framework or paradigm. As ideal type, they form a six dimensional space composed of different regions in which different forms of collective behavior can be placed. These six dimensions help us summarize most of if not all of the existing research and theorizing in the specialty area of collective behavior. When considered together, they remind us of the great variability of forms and contents in empirical instances of phenomenon is rudimentary (see Miller, 2000).
collective behavior and of their fluid, changeable nature. The dimensions help us identify the prototypical cases of collective behavior while also reminding us of the difficult problem of identification at the margins, and of the embeddedness of instances of collective behavior in institutionalized arrangements in society and culture.

This proposed framework can incorporate all existing literature in the specialty. For example, it can accommodate moral panics of the type Goode and Ben Yehuda (1994) discuss, such as satanic scares (a collective behavior form suffused by fear and hostility, concerned with a behavior, satanism, enacted by all six units of social organizations, regional and national in scope, bounded by class, lasting for months if not years). It can also accommodate financial panics and panics in crowded places such as theaters (the later involving crowds, fear, emergent cultural and social relational elements, behavior centered, localized in time and space; the former involving mass behavior, conventionalized, object centered--money, national and international, limited both by time and class boundaries). Similarly, the Red Scare of the 1950s, involved ethnocentrism/nationalism, was nationwide, lasted for years, was dominated by hostility and fear, with both emergent and conventionalized cultural and relational elements, in which all units of social organization participated. Other examples abound.

Importantly, the proposed scheme incorporates the concept of gathering central to Clark McPhail's writings, reserving the use of the term crowd to gatherings that exhibit cultural and social emergence as outlined by Gary Marx (see point 2 above). It also recognizes that most people participate in collective behavior activities in small groups. Moreover, social movement organizations are also recognized in the
scheme as one of the basic units of social organization that may act in instances of collective behavior, which may help re-integrate the study of social movements and collective behavior while preserving their distinct features. Moreover, Gary Marx’s summary of the argument of socio-cultural emergence incorporates conceptions of emergent norms and emergent social relationships popular among many collective behaviorists (Turner and Killian, 1987; Weller and Quarantelli, 1973).

If widely adopted, the conceptual space formed by the six dimensions outlined above can help us accumulate consistently gathered information about the forms of collective behavior, and it will help us move away from the common sense meaning of words at the basis of social science concepts. In turn, this cumulative knowledge base would eventually facilitate the understanding of collective behavior forms as genres, as they are understood in the methodology advocated by W. Griswold (1994) to study cultural objects. It would then be possible to think of instances of collective behavior as cultural objects belonging to specific collective behavior genres that are amenable to historical-cultural documentation and comparative analysis.

In the remainder of this paper I use this conceptual framework to understand the fad—which I would prefer to refer to from now on as the collective surge, following Lofland and Johnson (1990)—of sustainable development. My intent is to show the superiority of the framework to a common sense view of fads, a generally accepted collective behavior form (Miller, 2000).

To get ahead of the narrative, in what follows I use these six dimensions to show that the use of the concept of sustainable development in the late 1980s and 1990s involved many if not all of the basic units of social organization that are found in instances of collective behavior; the use by scientists of established concepts in a
new undefined way, a form of cultural emergence; a prevailing locus of interaction revolving around a professional ideology; the prevalence of the emotions of fear and hope of deliverance from it; and an international arena of discourse occurring over a period of years and also bounded by class-professional identities.

**Fads.** Concepts in the social sciences are open to misinterpretation, and this is particularly true of "fad", which is commonly understood in a pejorative sense as something superficial, odd, inconsequential, and frivolous (see Miller, 2000). This is the case despite empirical evidence showing the falsehood of these common assumptions regarding the oddness, inconsequentiality, novelty and a-historicity of fads (Aguirre, Quarantelli, Mendoza, 1988). Indeed, the collective surge associated with the use of the concept of sustainable development by networks and publics of scientists cannot be understood using the common sense view of fads, while the proposed re-conceptualization of fads as surges allows us to do so and to appreciate their historicity and their importance.

**Sustainable Development**

**Historical Antecedents.** The scientific practice of sustainability antedates the recent collective surge centered on the idea of sustainable development documented below. Dixon and Fallon (1989; see also Toman, 1992; Firor and Jacobsen, 1993; Schwab, 1996) remind us that the original use of the sustainability term occurred among scientists studying the proper strategies to insure the use over time of specific natural resources such as fish, water, trees, and soil. In this original sense the use of sustainable development by scientists always referred to biological and chemical, relatively finite, closed systems in an environment, quite different from an increasingly popular and ambiguous use of the term during the surge
period that is largely or wholly devoid of environmental concerns.

The older, more established practice of sustainable development has many dimensions partly related to this collective surge of interest to us, among the most beneficial of which is its nurturing of an abiding concern for the environment (a notable example is the attempt by Wackernagel and Rees (1996) to create a methodology for measuring the total ecological impact of human activities). It serves as a symbolic rallying point, helping raise questions that otherwise may go unexamined. Vaillancourt (1995) argues persuasively that sustainable development is a multifunctional concept, serving as an ideology of environmentalism, a symbol of conflict, a criterion used in the evaluation of development projects and programs, and a theoretical concept.

Importantly, as a collective surge sustainable development represents a semantic expansion in which the same concept obtains widely different meanings and usages at different time periods, from its earliest narrow understanding tied to the continuity of relatively finite physical and biological systems, to a less precise, less well defined sustainability concept which is made part of the environmentalism prevalent in the Brundtland Report (see below), to the rhetorical use of the term during the recent surge.

Time and Class Boundaries. A rough measurement of the popularity of this collective surge is the relative frequency with which the concept of sustainable development has been used in various disciplines. Figure 1 shows the distribution of articles, books, and other manuscripts in various disciplines using the term "sustainable
development².

Figure 1 about here

The most likely event triggering rapid growth in all of the lines shown in the figure was the publication in 1987 by Oxford University Press of the report Our Common Future authored by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission). The commission came up with the famous redefinition of development as meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The Brundtland Report put great emphasis on achieving equity among nations and peoples (Firor and Jacobsen describes the report; Hoff lists other important publications and events impacting the environmental movement) and continued a line of arguments presented during the "limits to growth debate" in the Club of Rome in 1972.

As previously argued and shown in Figure 1, the use in agriculture-related writings of the term "sustainable development" antedates its use in the social and planning areas. There were 10 publications in the CAB Abstract agriculture series as early as 1985. By way of contrast, four years later (1989) there were only 7 articles in the Hazard Center series. Conforming to what is known about the longitudinal patterns of surges, the number of articles in the agriculture series increases rapidly and reaches its apex in 1995 with

² These lines represent the annual frequency of these materials catalogued in: The library of the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center of the University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado, arguably the most complete collection of disaster-related materials in the world; Wilson Web, Social Science, an electronic bibliographical reference in the social sciences; Sociological Abstracts, an electronic reference in sociology; EconLit (Social Science), an electronic bibliographical reference in economics; Compendex, an electronic bibliographical reference in engineering that archives urban planning material; CAB Abstracts, an electronic bibliographical reference in agriculture.
441 publications. Afterwards, and reproducing the classic signature of surges, there is a brief asymptote and a steep descent in this series. With one exception, the lines for all other disciplines show this signature. The use of the concept in agriculture antedates the collective surge, which can be properly located in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The Hazard Center series also shows tremendous growth during the 1990s, reaching 32 in 1998, the latest year for which there is information. Probably it has not reached its asymptote yet, however, for an influential recent national report, Disasters by Design (Mileti, 1999) advocates its use to restructure U.S. policies and practices of disaster mitigation. In other fields in the social sciences the most active moments of the collective surge seem to have passed. The Sociological Abstracts series reached its apogee in 1998 with 125 publications and soon thereafter entered its phase of rapid decline, with 35 publications in 1999. Similarly, in economics there was an annual average of 1.5 publications archived in EconLit during the 1960-1985 period. The average increased to 7 during 1985-1990 and to 59 for 1991-94. The number of publications continued to increase to 85 in 1995, reaching its apex in 1996 with 133 publications. Afterwards we observe a rapid decline, with a low number of 48 publications during 1999. Likewise, the frequency of publications in Compendex using the concepts of "sustainable development and urban planning" also shows rapid growth in the early 1990s, reaching an asymptote of 55 in 1998 and a decline to 20 publications a year later. Somewhat similar patterns are observed from the Wilson Web general social science series available since 1986. In it the frequency of publications increase rapidly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, reaching 118 publications in 1997, and then declines to 82 a year later.
In sum, during the late 1980s and 1990s a sudden, dramatic increase followed by a decline in the frequency of articles on the topic of sustainable development occurred. This variation was not associated with major scientific reformulations or breakthroughs in theory or methods but coincides with an important political event, the publication of the Brundtland Report. It is a collective surge in the use of the concept among various networks and publics of scientists throughout the world. As in other surges, the surge of sustainable development had historical precursors, was not completely novel, gained acceptance after its adoption and sponsorship by a prestigious group, the Brundtland Commission. We next show its distinct substantive emphases and its lasting effects.

**Acting Social Organizational Units.** The adaptability of the concept of sustainable development makes it an umbrella concept, a flag around which different constituencies can rally. It is a very useful symbol like liberty or democracy around which a number of interpretations are possible. Contemporary explanations of sustainability are, literally, translations for the benefit of professional publics, to make sense for them of the murky concept and alert them to the benefits that may accrue from its use through relating the concept to well-established professional perspectives. The translations serve to stake professional claims, representing transformations of meaning to suit the professionals’ views of how the world operates. A definition by a prominent engineer is symptomatic: "sustainable development is an effort to use technology to help clean up the mess it helped make, and engineers will be central players in its success or failure" ((Predergast, 1993, 39). The author adds that a sustainable "system is one that is either in equilibrium, operating at a steady state, or a system that changes at a rate considered
acceptable" (40). We are told that sustainability has to do with decreasing waste and recycling of materials. These are tasks requiring "sustainable management practices, and engineers will take the lead as the managers of sustainability" (Wright, 1996, 114). Elsewhere (Illman, 1993, 35) we are also told that "chemical engineers can have a greater impact on achieving sustainable development than any other profession," for sustainability requires "an approach that imitates natural or biological processes and seeks new levels of the resource efficiencies of production."

Similarly, an article written for meteorologists with no substantive treatment of sustainability states that "the Kyoto Protocol (is) a milestone on the approach to sustainability." It never defined the term (Editor, 1998a). For Fox (1993, 1202), sustainability means in part the development of a clean environment and atmosphere which in turn implies "fostering technical exchanges, providing environmental education, and enhancing transference of technologies worldwide," all activities well known to his atmospheric science professional audience. In a similar vein we now have a call for a sustainable U.S. health policy, or the alignment of "the pursuit of human well being with the pursuit of ecological well being" (Jameton and Pierce, 1997, 138-139) as well as a new type of sustainable non-neoclassical information science (Spink, 1997).

There are also many attempts by economists to make sense of sustainable development but in fact very little agreement among them. Illustrative is Goodland's (1995) tripartite system consisting of "weak sustainability", "strong sustainability" and "absurdly strong sustainability", said to be functions of specific combinations of four types of capital--human-made, natural, human capital, and social. A women's advocate (Dem, 1993) employed by Oxfam equates the success of
sustainable development with the solution to many pressing problems faced by women in the developing world, such as access to resources and training. The National Science and Technology Council (1996), part of the executive branch of the U.S. federal government, declares sustainable development good for trade, since in its view it melds environmental protection and economic growth. It is said to be a “win win” opportunity, for it will increase exports of U.S. manufactured technological systems that will be needed to bring about a sustainable world. Others define sustainability as resilience.

The use of the concept in its newer rhetorical sense may be long lived because of the ongoing process of institutionalization and the attendant economic, cultural, and social arrangements. This process of institutionalization is quite advanced and multidimensional, ranging from the establishment of professional journals to bureaucracies, training programs and international treaties. Thus, since 1993 the World Bank organizes an annual Conference on Environmentally Sustainable Development. In the United Nations there is a Commission on Sustainable Development (Desay, 1995). There is also an Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (World Bank, 1995, 48). In the U.S. there was the attempt to create a National Institute for the Environment with a Directorate of Environmental Sustainability that would evaluate "strategies for the sustainable use of nonrenewable resources" (Editor, 1994). Its proponents acknowledged that there was no consensus on what sustainable development meant and that the science of sustainable development was weak. They cautioned that the carrying out of sustainable development required long term "disciplinary, multi-and interdisciplinary study." Nevertheless, they promised success if funding was obtained from the U.S. Congress.

The institutionalization of the idea of sustainable development
before and after the time period of its surge phase is a process that can be observed in many other empirical examples of surges and is another indication of the inaccuracy of a view of surges as ahistorical and inconsequential phenomenon.

The two most prominent units of social organization acting in this surge are professional networks and publics. As a surge, sustainable development occurs among scientists and academicians. The scientific community is prone to collective surges. This is in large part because science values creativeness and experimentation and is open to new ideas and reinterpretations. There are also instrumental reasons. Typically, a series of events takes place, or a theoretical or methodological breakthrough is announced in a discipline. Followers develop around the original figures and contributors. A "we" versus "they" ideology ensues so that "we" are on the side of advancement and sophistication while elaborate discredit of "they" takes place. Gradually, the journals in a discipline come under the influence of the movement. From the original contribution that gave grounds to the new enthusiasm tests of hypotheses and elaborations of original theoretical arguments surge forth, sustaining the career advancement of their authors and creating a momentum of legitimation (see Lofland, 1993; Aguirre, 1994 and literature cited therein for descriptions of the surge of resource mobilization in the sociological specialty area of social movements and collective behavior).

Ecology and urban planning are two professional disciplines very centrally involved with the surge (Toman, 1992). Their participation in it is part of more general claims-making activities supporting disciplinary credentials and credibility. The links to central motifs in the urban planning literature, such as building safer communities, is pervasive. As is generally true in other fields, in this literature
no widely accepted, explicit definition of community sustainability exists. However, in its most commonly used and broadest, albeit idiosyncratic and puzzling sense, sustainability means the continuity of the community, its ability to persevere and operate over time (Editor, 1998b).

An example of an unusually explicit and lengthy definition follows: "a sustainable community is one that uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations. It seeks improved public health and a better quality of life for all its residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation and promoting efficiency, and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy" (Geis, 1996, 6; for another definition see (White and Whitney, 1992, 9). The author adds that a sustainable community has "goals that are rooted in respect for both the natural environment and human nature and that call for the use of technology in an appropriate way to serve both of these resources" (7). Key terms in this and other definitions are left unspecified: What human nature? What constitutes the right use of technology? How can we know the needs of future generations?

More common in urban studies is an approach to sustainability by example (Beatley, 1996; 1998; see also Berke and Kartez (1995). Beatley never gives a definition but instead writes that Jordan Commons, South Florida, is a sustainable community, for its homes are "substantially stronger and better able to withstand the forces of hurricanes, reduce energy consumption, water use, and general environmental impacts (while creating) more livable, humane places." (27). Here we see disaster mitigation and other discrete disciplinary goals such as energy consumption subsumed by sustainability. The problem is that identification by example is always risky in science.
Rozdilsky (1996) claims that after its relocation Valmeyer, Illinois is a sustainable community. Beatley very sensibly doubts it, pointing out the high financial cost of the relocation to the federal government (about $22,000 per resident), that flooding was a rare event in the old town, that the new town consumed undeveloped farm and forest lands and threatened the habitat of the endangered Indiana bat and native American burial grounds, and that other nearby towns could have housed permanently the close to 600 evacuees.

Similarly, others (Geis and Kutzmark, 1995) propose that Boulder, Colorado and Austin, Texas are examples of sustainable community development. Yet the argument would not convince many in the blue collar Mexican American community of Denver, who are systematically excluded from residing in Boulder by land use patterns established by its elitist moneyed power brokers. Or for that matter, that the statement would mean much to most daily users of I-35 in Austin, an overused and dangerous highway, or that it would satisfy the emphasis on local economic autonomy made in most writings about sustainable development.

Despite these problems, the concept of sustainable development has lasting consequences, for it has been very useful in advancing the professional agenda of urban planners as they attempt to shape the urban environment (Jenks, Burton, William, 1995). It provides ideological justification for the adoption of an influential package of urban planning measures regarding land use regulation, building codes and standards, financial incentives, capital facilities, and property acquisition (Berke and Conroy, 2000) that presumably reflect state of the art knowledge in the discipline. Moreover, a considerable number of cities in the U.S. (i.e., Chapel Hill and Orange County, in N.C., Seattle, Santa Monica, Jacksonville, Fl.) New Zealand, and Europe
(i.e., City of Utrecht, Holland) (Beatley, 2000) use the ideas associated with sustainable development to justify the adoption of these urban development directives as well as the monitoring of local quality of life issues such as social inequality and place-based economic activities. In the words of an influential critic, "the sustainable development paradigm offers guidance for land use and urban development policy making by U.S. and European planners who had been rudderless during the past 3 or 4 decades; it is seen as a major breakthrough for guiding citizen based planning initiatives."

Revealingly, Berke and Conroy (2000) show that, at least for U.S. cities, the presence of elaborate endorsements—"overarching frameworks" in their words—of sustainable development in the urban development plans they surveyed did not predict the extent to which the plans' policies promoted "sustainable development principles." Plans that did not use sustainability as an overarching framework were as likely to include what these authors considered were sound urban development policies as plans that used it, yet another indication, it may be added, of the important, albeit rhetorical nature of sustainable development in urban planning.

As in other surges, in the surge of sustainable development the original enthusiasm eventually brings about opposition and questioning of assumptions, which may explain why all surges have unstable asymptotes. This is true in urban studies. Recent writings have started to reexamine the assumptions of the sustainability paradigm. Leach et al. (1997) argue that sustainability as used by urban planners, among other users, is based on the wrong analysis of community. It largely ignores the operation of community power inequalities and the actions of community institutions. They emphasize instead the social heterogeneity in communities, the determinants of
community decision-making, control and allocation of community resources, and the manipulation of community institutions for the advancement of the agenda of specific interest groups. They conceptualize the environmental change impacting the community and its use of natural resources as the outcome of negotiation among community members who often have very different goals and perspectives on problems and solutions.

While not many, there are other examples in the recent literature on community development supporting this conflict view of community dynamics. Childers and Phillips (1998), in their study of community reconstruction in Alkadelphia, Arkansas, show that the flag of sustainable development was adopted by city leaders as a means to acquire resources from the federal government to carry out projects that they had wanted prior to the tornado; thus, as part of the reconstruction county judges were able to build a new courthouse they had wanted since the 1950s. Moreover, sustainability was a way of dovetailing local interests to national priorities, allowing some Alkadelphians to use their personal relations with President W. Clinton to advance their view of the future of the community. Childers and Phillips also point out that the concept of sustainability was unknown by the locals prior to the disaster. Rather, they first learned about it during a presentation to the local reconstruction commission by officials from the U.S. Department of Energy. Despite the often-repeated claim that social equity is central to sustainability, the problem of the poor and of minority people (Hispanics, Blacks), who made up a large segment of the tornado victims in Alkadelphia, was never considered or resolved during the planning and implementation of community reconstruction (10). Instead, "...the upgrade policies increase(d) the cost of rebuilding, and many families (could not)
afford the cost...there (was) a mass exodus of people moving to nearby communities or to the country." (9).

Passerini (1999), in her analysis of community development and decision making by mayors in the Czech Republic, showed that the mayors did not know what sustainability was but thought it prudent to humor the outsiders explaining it to them to keep the "doors open to potential funding...since you never know when some of the outside people pushing esoteric ideas will offer you something that you could actually use." Local communities "frequently (did not) follow through with the (sustainability) plans and (were) privately indifferent or hostile to sustainability ideas brought by outside claims-makers" (60). Try as outsiders might, "their efforts to enroll and excite locals rarely succeeded. The idea of creating a totally new kind of community is a great story, but seems to be more fiction than fact."

Cocklin and Blunden (1998), in their analysis of community conflict over water use in New Zealand, showed how sustainable management, defined as part of the national resource management legislation, occasioned a great deal of social conflict between local Maori people and farmers (51). They look at how sustainability works in practice and in so doing remind me of H. Blumer's conception of social problems as collective behavior: "interest groups and individuals stridently petition(ed) to establish interpretations that (were) consistent with their own objectives and purpose. The campaigns (were) waged in a wide range of fora (e.g., the media, public input to policy documents, petition to government, etc.)" (66).

Recent scholarship thus shows that politics and power conflict in communities continue unabated and contradicts the absence of concerns for politics and power in the collective surge of sustainable development in urban studies. Such absence comes paired with an
overemphasis on culture and dovetails with the relatively recent resurgence of the culture concept in the social and planning sciences.

**Fear, Hope, and Cultural Emergence.** N. Smelser’s concept of the wish fulfillment generalized belief helps us describe the surge of sustainable development. Bounded in time for a few years during the late 1980s and 1990s, scientists were mobilized to sponsor sustainable development on the basis of a generalized belief that included both fear and hope. The fear is the belief in a great threat. The hope is the great promise of deliverance from the threat, what came to be associated with sustainable development. The threat has been studied extensively, namely environmental collapse and global destruction. Using Douglas and Wildavsky's (1982) categorization of risks, the risks for which sustainable development represents a solution are risks for which there is no exact knowledge and consensus as to the nature of the problems. It is an unspecified risk, an instance of collective dread (Lofland, 1985).

Sustainable development as hope in this Smelserian sense has never been studied. The collective surge it represents is an instance of collective behavior representing an answer to this unspecified threat. It is part of the genre of environmental deliverances, a mixture of modernist and postmodernist concerns that fit well into late modernism’s concern with the environment (Passerini, 1999). It is an echo, however faint, of eco-religion (Giner and Tabara, 1999).

There is a sense of urgency associated with the threat represented by the absence of sustainability, as reflected in the statement that “...the question concerning sustainability is how to move from where we are now, locked in an unsustainable paradigm, toward a sustainable condition of human existence” (Oelschlaeger, 1997) and by the title and tone of an influential article, “Sustaining Life on the
Earth" (Kates, 1994). Mr. A. W. Clausen, then president of the World Bank, more than a decade earlier had written about "Sustainable Development: The Global Imperative" (Office of Environmental Affairs, 1983).

What to do to bring about a resolution of the threat is a concern of many authors. Goodland and Daly (1992, I, II) tell us that consumer preferences must be made to change in the direction of "environmentally benign activities, while simultaneously reducing throughput per unit of final product, including services" (37). They also mention the need to curb fertility (population stability) and stop the increase of (and hopefully reduce) greenhouse gases, acidification, toxicity in soil and water, soil degradation, depletion of aquifers, species extinction. The task is daunting: in "order to translate the theory of sustainable development into practice we need to identify and measure the (relevant) ecological, cultural, economic, social demographic, historical and regional factors" (Kadokodi, 1992). Again, how to bring about these things is not made clear. Instead what we have is the packaging of important elements of the environmentalist agenda under the umbrella of the surge of sustainable development. Still unclear is if the use of sustainable environmental assessment criteria in projects funded by the World Bank had any measurable impact in any of these dimensions. This is apparently not the case at least for Latin America (Economic Commission, 1991; Gudynas, 1990; Diaz, 1995), Asia, and Africa.

Reminiscent of the contemporary popularity of return-to-nature schemes in post modernist thinking, a longing for a mythical past is also a part of the surge. A model of sustainable agriculture, for example, has many characteristics of turn of the century agriculture, with smaller farms, less money and less sophisticated technology,
energy self reliance, diverse crops, heavy use of non chemical fertilizers, emphasis on community and family (Kenney and Alexander, 1994/1995). It represents a desire for a return to the past and the values of traditional forms of social life without explanation or discussion of its structural and cultural impediments. Other writers sponsor similar views. Witness for example, Firor and Jacobsen (1993): it is "conceivable...that self sufficiency and barter would serve the Third World poor better than improvements in cash income..." (719).

A religious ontology is at the basis of the scientific epistemology of the surge of sustainable development. This quasi-religious dimension, however, is unacknowledged by most authors. Instead, the concept of sustainable development is used rhetorically, quickly abandoned for other, well known and firmly established disciplinary concepts and goals such as the proper management of resources, the attainment of environmental objectives (May et al., 1997), and the reduction of vulnerability to prevent or mitigate disasters (Editor, 1996).

The normative, at times sacred, religious nature of this discourse comes through very clearly in Kadekodi's (1992) contribution: "...how far has God given property to us to enjoy? As much as anyone can make use of it to any advantage of life before it spoils...Whatever is beyond this is more than his share, and belong to others" (74). Another writer sponsoring this religious approach states that the very success (of the ideology of environmental protection) "has been co-opted..." (Kothari, 1990, 27). He adds that sustainable development is in part "...a cosmic view of life as sacred...the shift to sustainable development is primarily an ethical shift..." (34-35), or a matter of "values and politics" (Firor and Jacobsen, 720); "...the vision of sustainability is at once a moral statement about how we should be
living on the planet, and a description of the social and physical characteristics of the world as it should be." (Beatley, 1998, 233).

One of the most expansive expressions of the promise of deliverance is a list of "principles of sustainable development" (de la Court, 1992). These principles are: 1. The principle of cultural and social integrity of development, or that development must be locally produced; 2. The ecological principle, that development must encourage diversity and "sustainable forms of resource use," 3. The solidarity principle, that development must provide the material bases for life for all, promote equity and "avoid unequal exchange," 4. The emancipation principle, that development must encourage local empowerment and "participation of the underprivileged and marginalized," 5. The nonviolence principle, that development must be peaceful, "both in the direct and in the structural sense," and 6. The error friendliness principle, or that failures of development projects must not have the effect of "losing the integrity of the immediate ecosystem and resource base." Some of these principles (for similar lists see Nix, 1993; Lawrence, 1997; Berke and Kartez (1995) apply similar principles to "sustainable land use policy") appear mutually contradictory, such as the emphasis on participation (four) and nonviolence (five). They do not tell us how to obtain the goals they specify or what it would mean if we did. Things like how to achieve international or intergenerational equity are left unspecified.

Indeed, the cultural emergence among scientists this surge embodies is nowhere clearer than in the pairing of their enthusiastic endorsement of sustainable development with the absence of consensus among them and other authors as to what is meant by sustainable development (see for example Gudynas, 1990; IDNDR, 1999; Brown et al., 1987; Dixon and Fallon, 1989; Geis and Kutzmark, 1995; Mileti et al,
nor is there consensus about a working definition of the concept. By and large, its use is murky at best, often time not at all defined even implicitly by most users, and used in different ways by different writers. Mix's (1993, 2) worries are unusually frank: "(A) is an academic I have problems with the term "ecologically sustainable development" because it combines redundancy with an oxymoron." Nevertheless, he describes three conditions for sustainability: social equity, economic viability, and ecological soundness. Indeed, for most writers consulted the faith on sustainability is unshaken. For example, Lawrence writes (1997, 26) that "full closure on the sustainability concept may be neither possible nor practical... (still) the very act of questioning what is and is not sustainable is worthwhile." Or in the words of Schwab (1996, 2), "like the invocation of the word freedom, the concept of sustainability can be powerfully inspiring."

Conclusion

This paper has shown that a multidimensional conceptual framework in the sociology specialty area of collective behavior helps us describe the collective surge of sustainable development during the late 1980s and 1990s. The surge is relatively short-lived, coterminous with the use of different meanings and practices of sustainable development. The paper shows that the surge cannot be understood as a superficial, odd, inconsequential or frivolous event. Rather, it had important, lasting consequences in a number of areas, from economic and social development to professions. It was linked to mainstream cultural concerns and contemporary ideologies of environmentalism. It helped shaped our urban landscape and world in many fundamental ways only dimly understood at present. As in other surges, the surge of sustainable development does not materialize out of the blue. Rather,
it has a preexisting career or history. It does not exist outside the institutions and practices of the society, marginalized from them, but instead is an intrinsic part of such institutions and practices. It is the end result of a mix of emergent and institutionalized effects; established systems of occupational prestige and stratification are one of its key preconditions even as the surge transforms them and the customary criteria of professional practice.

Many questions remain unanswered. The study of the surge of sustainable development shows the importance of studying the complex mixture of factors affecting what communities of scientists accept as scientific knowledge. To the extent that it is possible to generalize from it, it seems to indicate that a type of change in science is neither caused by the occurrence of a theoretical and/or methodological breakthrough or the emergence of a new, clearly enunciated disciplinary paradigm, but rather, is a messy, illogical, conflict-ridden, rhetorical process of proselytizing among scientists.

The surge of sustainable development illustrates the need to study the operation of professional ideologies--understood as systems of ideas in the service of domination and established power (Thompson, 1990)--in the bringing about of change in professions. For the conceptual package known as sustainable development acted as an alarm sensitizing various groups to professional turf monitoring and expansion. It sensitized them to new funding opportunities. It redirected their collective efforts. It helped them repackage their disciplinary emphases, as they recombined the sets of responsibilities commonly associated with their knowledge domain in interaction with other professions and publics.

More studies need to be done of the actual workings of the discourse of sustainable development in local arenas where policy
setting is conducted. As documented earlier (see Berke and Conroy, 2000), there are very few studies analyzing the politics of sustainable development at this level. What are the advantages that the discourse creates for its supporters? In what settings and preconditions do such advantages materialize?

As implied by these questions derived from the study of the surge of sustainable development, the reconceptualization of collective behavior proposed in this paper may have the effect of moving the study of collective behavior to the mainstream of sociological research and theorizing. For years now, such study has languished, the victim of yet another surge in the social sciences (Lofland, 1993; Aguirre, 1994). The result of this crumbling has been that the scientific study of surges as a distinct form of collective behavior has received very little attention from sociologists and other social scientists. Collective action, originally offered as a distinct advancement that would render obsolete the study of collective behavior, in fact limited research unduly to the analysis of more or less direct and explicit, well organized political processes so that a host of other matters, such as the study of issueless riots, celebrations, panics, mass delusions, crowd formation and leadership, rumors, collective tastes and fashion, religious revivals and other instances of collective effervescence, to name just a few, has gone largely underground if not disappeared completely in some cases. With it what is increasingly gone is sociology's ability to understand social change.

References


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