

Greenwashing in Education

HOW NEOLIBERALISM AND POLICY MOBILITY MAY UNDERMINE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.

Sustainability and neoliberalism are mobile concepts and processes that when twinned, undermine the way environmental sustainability is being developed and implemented in education policy and practice.

SUSTAINABILITY

In this context, any policy that takes up the natural environment in some capacity, including in relation to social, economic, culture, health, and other factors. While we are concerned with the various ways sustainability terminology is engaged, we have limited the scope to those cases which include some reference and consideration of environment.

NEOLIBERALISM

Political economic practices liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

SUSTAINABILITY IS A VEHICULAR IDEA.

It is a flexible and vague concept which can be absorbed and used in different contexts.



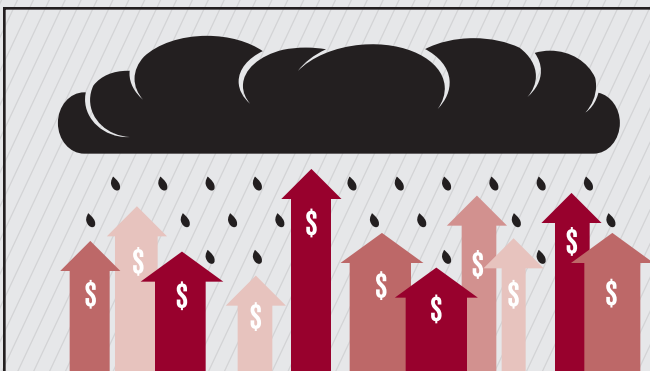
Mobility approaches in policy studies focus on the movement of **objects, people, and ideas** around the globe.



Policy is a product of its surroundings, influenced by ideas that are both situated and mobile, producing variations developed in response to different policy contexts and relationships.

Policy mobility is useful for understanding how 'sustainability' can become part of neoliberal processes.

NEOLIBERALIZATION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION POLICY:

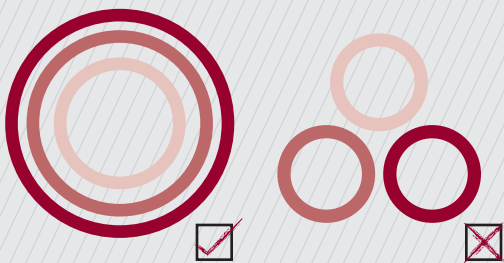


Institutional greenwashing: when sustainability policies and related high level initiatives such as signing of declarations, act as 'sustainability fixes' giving the appearance of taking steps towards protecting the environment while a higher prioritization remains given to the institution's economic considerations.

RESEARCH SUSTAINABILITY IN THE EDUCATION POLICY OF POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS:

THE THREE PILLARS DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY

□ ECONOMY □ SOCIETY □ NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



The three pillars is a sustainability concept used to describe the relationship between the 'natural environment,' 'society' and 'economy.' It is based on the understanding that without a natural environment human beings would not exist, and without a society to create it, there would be no economy.

The 'nested' hierarchy model (above left) is distinct from the segmented model where the pillars are seen as separate (above right), because it emphasizes the interrelationship between the three pillars.

SEPN completed a case study of terms used in sustainability policy. Our initial analysis indicated a shift in terminology usage and meaning, from "environment" to "sustainability."

The vagueness of a sustainability definition without explicit prioritization of the natural environment runs the risk of enabling sustainability as a vehicular idea that can be 'greenwashed,' as well as enabling sustainability to be 'fixed' in certain ways (i.e., giving priority to the economy pillar).

It is important to look at how sustainability is understood in education policies, and whether priorities of neoliberalization are embedded within how sustainability is conceptualized and practiced. Segmenting the three pillars can insulate the economy pillar from those of social and environmental sustainability, enabling a form of neoliberal sustainability.

RESEARCH. CONNECT. MOBILIZE.

Read the full paper at www.sepn.ca