

## The Mediation of Sustainability: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Social Movements and Public Discourse



### Call for Chapters

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This CFC emerges from recent conferences held by the MDC in 2019, in Jakarta and the UK. In 2015 the United Nations set out an audacious plan - under UN Resolution 70/1 - to promote health, life, equality, and the environment. In order to achieve this ambition, it created seventeen separate development goals, to be met over a fifteen-year period.

The Sustainable Development Goals include: ending Poverty and Hunger; promoting Health and Well-being; providing Quality Education; the pursuit of Gender and Racial Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation; Affordable and Clean Energy; Decent Work and Economic Growth; Developing Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Responsible Consumption and Production; creating Sustainable Cities; protecting Life Below Water and on Land; and the pursuit of Peace and Justice through forming Strong Institutions.

In response to the UN's SDG programme, this edited volume explores the way in which Sustainability narratives are disseminated in public discourse. The project examines how the UN SDGs are envisaged, articulated and then enacted by state and non-state actors, and how the outcomes are communicated to audiences throughout the world. The volume welcomes contributions that investigate unique or novel responses to the UN's ambitions by NGOs, charitable organisations, and by grass roots campaigners, and seeks to document the substantial work being done by numerous public agencies.

Besides analysing the worldwide production and dissemination of sustainability narratives, the book also asks to what extent the UN goals are truly supported by governments and the corporate sector. The appearance of local initiatives (in which indigenous populations are making a real difference) seems to be overshadowed by multinationals which claim that they are rectifying the damage their goods have done. Do 'headline' claims made by the corporate sector gain more credible media coverage than the work of activists? How are newsworthy initiatives like the reduction of single-use plastics, pertinent to someone who has limited access to clean food or running water?

The concern is that while Western countries condemn the developing world's treatment of the environment, many such territories have entered trade agreements to receive the exported waste of the 'advanced' nations. The UK for example, shipped 68,000 tonnes of non-recyclable refuse to Indonesia in 2019, most of which found its way into the ocean. This is plastic waste that affluent counties are unable to deal with themselves: gathered by third-party companies (which are subcontracted by city councils) it is sent to recycling centres across the UK. Waste is then sorted into recyclable and non-recyclable bails and is sold by the metric tonne for processing abroad. However, many unscrupulous companies mix recyclable and non-recyclable goods for profit, knowing the developing nations to which it is sold lack the infrastructure to dispose of this material safely.

The disreputable treatment of the world's fragile ecology therefore typifies the paradox of sustainability. The SDG agenda is decidedly colonial in word and deed, dictating to the developing world both how and where its efforts must be guided, and allowing multinationals to exploit DAC territories and use them as a dumping ground. Evidence of this situation can be found in the shipbreaking yards of India, the plastic mountains of Indonesia, and the toxic trade in electronic waste that now permeates South-East Asia. As such, further criticisms of the SDG programme posit the venture as a marketing vehicle for big industry, in which clean-up campaigns are perceived as greenwashing. Additional arguments call for stricter trade regulations, and academic contributions reject the initiative as a form of meta-governance.

In one sense, however, the SDG programme can be represented as a form of 'empowerment', as sovereign (developing or assisted) nations can also determine their own terms of engagement with the edicts being offered by the UN. In recent months (and following China's decision to stop processing foreign waste), Malaysia and Indonesia have followed suit, refusing to accept contaminated shipments from the West. There are further stories where local initiatives have been a resounding success, but these are rarely covered by Western media - even in cases where Western audiences would learn from stories that are a success. For example, one ground-breaking project in Jakarta pays for recyclable waste in gold. This encourages local communities to remove plastic bottles and other such goods from the street to exchange them for something of value. But because this has little news value in the West, these events are generally not covered by mainstream media. In this respect, coverage of the Sustainability initiatives is profoundly flawed, as a result of institutional politics, news selection, bias, house styles, and other contributing factors to the framing of news discourse.

In association with the Media Discourse Centre at De Montfort University, this edited volume contributes to the international conference series entitled '*The Global Promotion and Mediation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals*'. The volume seeks submissions from a variety of disciplines including public policy, media studies, social movement theory, governance, and the environment. The collection of individual works aims to document success stories, captures core issues, and identifies new areas of interest or activity regarding the United Nation's Sustainable Development programme. As part of the Protest, Media and Culture series for Rowman and Littlefield International, contributors should consider responses aligning to the following areas:

- Media and the Discourse of 'Sustainability'
- The UN Goals: Narratives and Narrativisation
- Cover-ups and 'Greenwashing'
- 'Business Leaders' and Capitalist Intervention
- Sustainability and Post-conflict Communication
- Race, Ethnicity and theories of the Postcolonial
- Social Movements and the Global Coordination of Protest
- Global Governance and State Power
- Investigative Journalism and the UN Goals
- The use of Race, Class and Gender Identities in Publicising the UN Goals
- 'Post-truth', PR and Publicity
- Documentary Film in the Service of Dissent
- Photography and Images of the Subaltern
- Critiques of Corporate/State power
- Comparative histories of UN initiatives
- Coverage of successful local initiatives
- Emerging areas of interest or activity
- Interventions – by state, non-state, corporate actors and activists

**Proposal for Chapters**

Please send an abstract of the proposed piece at 300 words, and a brief bio of 150 - words to [ben.harbisher@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:ben.harbisher@dmu.ac.uk) – no later than Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. Feedback will be provided shortly thereafter, with draft submissions due late December 2020 for editing.

The anticipated publication of the book will be March 2021.

Upon acceptance of your CfC response please also consider IP factors such as copyright in advance of completing a form from the publishers to secure publication rights for your work and any images provided therein.