

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-73243-7 - Governing Sustainability  
Edited by W. Neil Adger and Andrew Jordan  
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## *Governing Sustainability*

The crisis of unsustainability is, above all else, a crisis of governance. The transition to a more sustainable world will inevitably require radical changes in the actions of all governments, and it will call for significant changes to the lifestyles of individuals everywhere. Bringing together some of the world's most highly regarded experts on governance and sustainable development, this book examines these necessary processes and consequences across a range of sectors, regions, and other important areas of concern. It reveals that the governance of sustainable development is politically contested, and that it will continue to test existing governance systems to their absolute limits. As both a state-of-the-art review of current thinking and an assessment of existing policy practices, it will be of great interest to all those who are preparing themselves – or their organisations – for the sustainability transition.

W. NEIL ADGER is Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of East Anglia.

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# Governing Sustainability

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W. NEIL ADGER AND  
ANDREW JORDAN



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521518758](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521518758)

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First published 2009

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Governing sustainability / edited by W. Neil Adger and Andrew Jordan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-51875-8 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-73243-7 (pbk.)

1. Environmental policy. 2. Sustainable development.

I. Adger, W. Neil. II. Jordan, Andrew, 1968– III. Title.

GE170.G686 2009

333.7–dc22 2008049117

ISBN 978-0-521-51875-8 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-73243-7 paperback

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*To Tim O’Riordan – a constant source of inspiration,  
guidance and bonhomie over the years.*

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*Abbreviations*

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
ALARA	As Low As Reasonably Achievable
ALARP	As Low As Reasonably Practicable
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy ('mad cow disease')
CAN	Climate Action Network
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England
CSERGE	Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
ECFESD	European Consultative Forum on the Environment and Sustainable Development
EMA	Emissions Marketing Association
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GM	Genetically Modified/Genetic Modification
GNP	Gross National Product
IETA	International Emissions Trading Association
IHDP	International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change
IIASA	International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISTS	Initiative on Science and Technology for Sustainability

JI	Joint Implementation
MA	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (UK)
MCM	Multi-Criteria Mapping
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MP	Member of Parliament (UK)
MTBE	Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (a fuel additive)
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBEL	Plastic Bag Environmental Levy
PCB	Polychlorinated Biphenyls
RAINS	Regional Air Pollution INformation and Simulation
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
SERI	Sustainable Europe Research Institute
TRIMS	Trade-Related Investment Measures
TRIPS	Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights
TWAS	The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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## Foreword

Very few people in mainstream politics today have begun to understand the nature of the impending sustainability crunch. They still see sustainability as an environmental issue, requiring measured and (hopefully) timely regulatory or market responses to keep the show on the road.

Only a handful of people, including the redoubtable and inspirational Tim O’Riordan, have resolutely kept on pointing out to them that sustainability is *of course* about the physical and biological systems on which we humans still utterly depend, is *of course* about the economic and social policies nations must deploy (however inadequately) to sustain those systems, but, first and foremost, it is about *governance*: who decides what on behalf of whom to secure which objectives over what period of time?

As Neil Adger and Andrew Jordan point out in their excellent overview, ‘there is no mystery about sustainability’. One way or another, the human species will end up living sustainably on planet Earth: the laws of nature and the laws of thermodynamics always have and eventually always will take precedence over our ephemeral and hugely arrogant ambitions to live outside those laws. Anyone can live as an outlaw for a while, as an individual, but at the species level, it is not smart and it’s definitely not sustainable.

That much is certain. How we embed that realisation in our political and economic systems, and how quickly we can achieve that, is an altogether less certain question. Mainstream political parties are having massive, currently intractable, problems trying to adapt the business-as-usual model of progress that would appear, in the minds of most people, to have served us so well over the last sixty years. Green parties around the world have little difficulty breaking free of those business-as-usual mindsets, but still find it extraordinarily difficult to bring more than a small percentage of people with them.

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*Foreword*

Hardly surprising, therefore, that there is a growing school of thought that the real innovation and dynamism in governance systems for a sustainable world lies anywhere other than in conventional political parties.

This collection offers some hugely stimulating insights into that particular conundrum – and, in the process, unashamedly puts the emphasis where it now needs to be: we now know, more or less, what we need to do to secure a sustainable world, but how the hell are we going to do it?

JONATHON PORRITT CBE

Founder Director of Forum for the Future, Chairman of the  
UK Sustainable Development Commission and author of  
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## *Preface*

The environment is in crisis. The climate is changing, rivers and lakes are polluted, fisheries are overexploited, and there is no corner of the world where human impact is not apparent. At the same time, millions of the world's poor continue to live in abject poverty, while the richer nations of the world are confronting an epidemic of chronic obesity. These crises of human development are very much of our own making. It is the relationship between humans and their environment and, ultimately, the relationship between us all that is at the root of the sustainability problematique endlessly discussed at, but not resolved by, meetings of the world's governments in Stockholm, Rio and Johannesburg in 1972, 1992 and 2002, respectively. Consequently, it is this relationship that has to be a full part of any solutions to the almighty mess that we as a human race now face.

This book starts from the belief that the crisis of unsustainability is, first and foremost, a crisis of *governance*. Governance, however, is a multidimensional and highly contested term within academia. If we zoom out and explore what is or is not being done actually to *govern* societies in ways that facilitate rather than undermine sustainability, it is abundantly clear that the governance of sustainable development is likely to be a hugely complicated and politically contested undertaking.

It is precisely for these reasons that we decided to bring together some of the world's foremost experts on governance and sustainable development and ask them to debate the future direction and governance of human society. This conference took place in Norwich in June 2005 as part of a series of events to mark the 'retirement' of Tim O'Riordan from the internationally renowned School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia, UK. We believed the subject matter demanded an interdisciplinary approach, so we invited contributors from a diverse range of disciplines ranging from political science, economics and geography, through to development

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studies, sociology, philosophy and environmental science. When we suggested that they should subsequently re-craft their papers into a series of interlinked book chapters on the theme of governance and sustainable development, they enthusiastically agreed.

We would like to thank all our contributors for their patience and dedication; all of them revised their contributions several times to implement our editorial guidance. We would particularly like to thank Matthew Paterson, Jacquelin Burgess and Judy Clark, who joined the writing team after the conference. Without the hard work of all the authors, this book would have never seen the light of day. Together, they show that in spite of the definitional and terminological confusion surrounding the term governance, what is needed to govern for sustainability is, as Jonathon Porritt argues in his Foreword, surprisingly clear; what we as a human race lack is the political and, ultimately, the *societal* will to establish the necessary governance mechanisms and procedures.

We would also like to thank the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding the underlying research through the Programme on Environmental Decision (2001–7) at UEA and through funding for the conference as part of Social Sciences Week in 2005. Emily Sheldon and Dawn Turnbull provided excellent logistical support prior to and throughout the conference. Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank Tim O’Riordan for concluding the conference and this book in his own uniquely incisive way. Tim’s thinking – developed and refined over the last four decades – permeates every single chapter of this book. We hope that the conference and this book provide a sufficiently fitting tribute to the enormous contribution that he has made to our collective understanding of the governance of sustainability.

NEIL ADGER

ANDREW JORDAN

*Norwich, March 2008*