

SOCIAL/HUMAN DYNAMICS



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Herein, sustainability is defined as a quest for meaningful coexistence within and among human systems, and between human and ecological systems. Sustainability is a complex and multifaceted problem; it involves an intricate web of connectedness amongst psychosocial and ecological issues. This research seeks to demonstrate how psychodynamic theory can be extended from social to human nature relations. The early object relations theory is presented to argue that escalating social and ecological degradation represent an inherent human capacity for destructiveness, and sustainability an innate human capacity for reparation. Parallels are suggested between the destructiveness that has been one of the hallmarks of industrialisation, and the mental functioning of the infant during early infancy. Parallels are also highlighted between reparative acts observed in later

infancy and sustainability initiatives to argue that sustainability potentially represents a quest for maturity. Social defense theory and intersubjectivity are then used to explore the regressive and developmental aspects of sustainability, respectively. Specifically, social defense theory is employed to make sense of the nature of anxiety and defense within sustainability projects. Intersubjectivity in particular, notions of mutuality, reciprocity and receptivity are presented as useful concepts for thinking about sophisticated ways of being and being with others including inanimate others. A key finding of the research was that without a facilitative process, and confronted by paradoxical phenomena, the participants were unable to negotiate and sustain meaningful collaborative relationships. To cope with anxiety they resorted to a range of individual and collective defenses. While improvements in the relational dynamics could be observed over time, these fell short of the kind of mature relatedness that sustainability requires. Herein is a narrative about a consortium case study that was unable to sustain itself as it strove to promote sustainability.

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