

Objectives

Students will look beyond single causal factors responsible for a lack of sustainability and understand the interplay of environmental, social, political, economic and demographic influences in creating the current situations locally and globally.

Students will begin to understand the links between individual actions and behaviours with societal or global outcomes. This can have both negative and positive outcomes at a local and a global scale.

Background

The origins of the concept that our individual actions at a local level are causing global changes in our environment and in human society can be traced back to Thomas Malthus. The modern – day harbinger of this concept is associated with research scientists affiliated with The Club of Rome and the classic book, written in 1972, called *The Limits to Growth*. Using computer modelling of historical trends in industrial and population growth, resource use, pollution and food production, this group predicted dire consequences for world society by early in the 21st century. Despite local crises, the collapse of the industrial system has not occurred. We will examine why this has been the case.

We will learn that another explanation for individual action leading to global challenges is reflected in the concept of the “Tragedy of the Commons”. A phrase coined by Garret Hardin in 1968, it allows us to better understand the difficulty of acting in a manner that will lead to better global outcomes.

More recently, the phrase “Think Globally, Act Locally” has been used to suggest that individual actions at a small scale, when viewed collectively, can make a difference in building a globally sustainable future. We will view several examples where local actions have been used to make a difference at a global scale.

Lecture

Complete the 3 parts below: watching the videos available online and reading the slides. Also read the readings (linked online) and use the additional resources as needed.

Part 1: Limits to Growth and Sustainability

(36 minutes) “Sustainability: Economic and Limits to Growth”, Dr. Karey Harrison, Australian Centre for Sustainable Catchments (ACSC), University of South Queensland. August 26th, 2010. <http://www.scivee.tv/node/21854> * Note: Low Volume

Slides (in pdf format)

Part 2: The Tragedy of the Commons

(1 minute, 15 seconds) Cartoon interpretation of the tragedy of the commons.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZFkUeleHPY>

(8 minutes, 27 seconds) Elinor Ostrom, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, speaking on "Sustainable Development and the Tragedy of the Commons", April 3, 2009

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByXM47Ri1Kc>

Part 3: Examples of "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally"

Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development adopted at the Earth Summit of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 stated in chapter 28 that local activities are necessary for solving issues raised in the agenda, and as to the participation and cooperation of the local public sector, it urged local public organizations to draft a "Local Agenda 21" for the local area through discussions with local residents by 1996 and to implement the plan as well as to conduct follow-up monitoring. Based on this, local basis action plans for the sustainable development in the local areas were drafted and implemented by participating countries around the world.

(9 minutes, 45 seconds) Total Sanitation Approach in Bangladesh

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZObVlirCzQ>

A successful condominal sewerage program successfully implemented by WSP in Bolivia is now being promoted in Dakar by the local WSP office there. Community-led Total Sanitation approach (CLTS), initiated and scaled up in Bangladesh, was shared with India and has now been adopted by the government in over 426 districts. This innovative approach is now being explored in other countries, including Indonesia, where field trials of two large-scale projects have been so successful in accelerating coverage to the poor and leveraging community investment that subsidy-free CLTS have been adopted as the main rural sanitation approach in all 54 project districts. This ability to "think globally, but act locally" lies at the heart of WSP's approach to sanitation and hygiene promotion.

(7 minutes, 31 seconds) Local food producers and sustainable agriculture in Northwest Arkansas

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t16LCmkQZEI>

(3:31 minutes) Shayne Thomson advertisement for Earth Hour Earth Hour

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xpme14KtEvY>

Readings

Review of "Limits to Growth" and "Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update"

<http://www.sublimeoblivion.com/2010/02/16/review-ltg/>

Hardin, Garrett. 1998. "Extensions of "The Tragedy of the Commons" Science, New Series, Vol. 280, No. 5364 (May 1, 1998), pp. 682-683.

<http://ww2.coastal.edu/jjhutche/BIO484/pdfs/Hardin%201998%20Science%20extensions%20of%20the%20tragedy%20of%20the%20commons.pdf>

Warshall, Peter. "A Whole Earth View of the Environmental Movement" March 2001.
<http://www.geearth.uncc.edu/people/iheard/3215Readings/AWholeEarthView.pdf>

Other Resources

Article on adaptation by multinational companies to adapt to local cultures, especially in the developing world. <http://www.research-live.com/features/think-globally-act-locally/2000614.article>

Brown, Lester, Gary Gardner, and Brian Halwell. "Beyond Malthus: Sixteen Dimensions of the Population Problem". Worldwatch Paper 143 September 1998. Worldwatch Institute
<http://www.worldwatch.org/system/files/EWP143.pdf>

Discussion Questions

1. So far we have been able to delay the collapse of global society as predicted in "The Limits to Growth". What are the factors that have allowed this to take place? Do you think the strategies that have allowed this to occur will still be available to us in the future? Why or why not?
2. How might we overcome the 'Tragedy of the Commons'?
3. Find and present an example of 'thinking globally and acting locally' that has been practiced in your country or region.

Evaluation

Students will write a three-page reflection paper on the discussion questions.

Vocabulary

- Limits to Growth
- Tragedy of the Commons
- Think Globally, Act Locally

Faculty contact(s) for Questions or Clarification

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