



Review Article

Sustainable development or developmental sustainability: Two cases of indigenous knowledge and practices for sustainable sourcing for wood-based design-solutions

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable wood-based design solutions necessarily presuppose economically, socially, and environmentally reliable sources of wood use for any future designs. However, increasingly unsustainable effects from climate extremity are now prompting the search for alternative forms of use that avoid or forestall those effects. To that end, this paper reviews the notion of sustainability and qualitatively explores two cases of contemporary-indigenous forest use illustrative of better sustainable wood-sourcing use practices. Results from the case analyses yield recommendations for (1) an explicitly holistic and long-term, even generational, scale of planning, (2) human-nonhuman collaborations rooted in an integration of the life patterns of all involved actors, and (3) a change of attitude or stance that integrates sustainability values and practices across the full extent of any wood-based solutions supply- or value-chains.

1. Introduction

Sustainable wood-based design-solutions necessarily presuppose economically, socially, and environmentally reliable sources of wood for any of its future designs. However, no consensus yet exists around the meaning of sustainability in theory and especially not in practice. A general paraphrase of sustainability's goals, drawing from the headwaters of its original formulation (Brundtland et al., 1987), is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future ability of others to meet their needs as well, especially by meeting "the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given" (Brundtland et al., 1987, p. 41, emphasis added). In this context, the world's poor are those who are globally more vulnerable, less advantaged, or otherwise have less access to essential needs in any given context; they are the world's *poorer*. Ensuring that global and local efforts actually achieve sustainability's goal of prioritizing the essential needs of those with less access to meet them is critical for the survival of not just the human species but all life on the planet, especially in light of ongoing and anticipated future impacts on forests due to worsening climate extremity (Augustynczik et al., 2020; Canadell and Raupach, 2008; Hou et al., 2020). Throughout this paper, the urgent and looming menace of the effects of worsening climate change, especially for the

world's poor, are the continuous prompt and goad for taking to heart and undertaking the needed changes for achieving genuine sustainability.

For sustainability in wood-based solutions more narrowly, one self-evident and practical aspect of this is simply ensuring a *reliably indefinite (renewable and resilient) source of wood*. In one sense, this is the most basic sense of sustainability. However, the core sustainability value of granting overriding priority to meeting the needs of less advantaged stakeholders must also apply at every link of a value-chain (from solution-design to production to distribution to receipt). For example, at the production link, this means prioritizing and meeting the needs of workers performing the production; at the solution-design level, this means prioritizing and meeting the needs of those who physically transform conceptual designs into blueprints, design images, and so forth. In all cases, the actual balance or triple-bottom line of environmental, social, and economic priorities at each link will vary significantly in terms of maintaining it sustainably.

These link-differences of emphasis will have dramatic consequences for sustainability depending on where they fall in the chain. What is meant by sustainability at the production-side link of design-solutions has tended to prioritize economic sustainability (i.e., the design-solution's production cost-effectiveness and ROI) over any social and

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environmental sustainability. As such, the emphasis on triple-bottom-line sustainability affects and applies not simply to value-chain end-recipients or economics (Cashore and Vertinsky, 2000; Gulbrandsen, 2004; Schepers, 2010) but also to the workplace environment and longer-term social supports for employees in the value-chain (including benefits and pensions). Similarly, while the end-recipient link of the design-solution value-chain is often critically shaped by economic sustainability (the cost of the solution for end-recipients), the solution itself can often have social and environmental costs that unsustainably outstrip or negate any economic gains (Corntassel, 2008; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Mather et al., 1999; Rudel and Horowitz, 1993; Schneider et al., 2010).

An objection to this call for integral sustainability at every link of a value-chain from source to producer to recipient is that wood-based design-solution producers can simply assume or assure sustainability of wood-sourcing *upstream*. However, even producers (who are seemingly at the front of a value-chain) are already a recipient (at the end of another one). Equally, solution recipients (seemingly at the end of a value-chain) will often become new headwaters for subsequent design changes or innovations (at the front of a value-chain). This suggests that a value “chain” more resembles a mutually dependent circle than a linear chain (Frandy, 2018).

For wood-based design producers specifically, this situation leaves them liable to unsustainable (or even harmful) upstream social, environmental, or economic effects from non-sustainable wood sourcing by suppliers. This is not only the basic problem that wood suppliers may openly or secretly engage in expressly non-sustainable, possibly illegal, or purely economically driven and environmentally harmful extraction from forests or protected reserves (Brack, 2003; Vasco et al., 2017). It also includes more indirect issues for solution-designers, including but not limited to

- suppliers’ unsustainable pricing decisions, large-scale shifts in markets, and bad PR optics (c.f., the child slavery lawsuits facing major chocolate producers due to their suppliers’ labor practices, Balch, 2021)
- Non-renewability or non-resiliency in suppliers that cut off a wood source and negatively impact or preclude long-term sustainability and viability of wood-based solution designing (Hajmohammad and Vachon, 2016; Ridwan Kurniawan and Nuraeny, 2018; c.f., the short-term vs. long-term discussion in Turnidge and Kelly, 2021), and
- An inability to get good partners for sourcing, absent the (contractually unlikely) premise of making *their* long-term sustainability explicitly a part of *your* long-term sustainability also (Hessels and Terjesen, 2010; Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Sherer and Lee, 2002).

The foregoing suggests that sustainable wood-based design solutions might advocate for and adopt a stance toward design sustainability based more on prioritizing end-user criteria over the producer’s (Barnaud et al., 2014; Barreteau et al., 2014). This would also more align with the Brundtland Report’s (1987) criterion to grant overriding priority to meeting the needs of less advantaged stakeholders’ in any sustainable design scenario. However, because being a “recipient” does not automatically or inherently make a stakeholder the less advantaged one in some given scenario, achieving sustainability will at times require producers (as supply-recipients) to meet the essential needs of their supplier-links upstream of them. An instance of this is visible in wood-sourcing forest certification regimes that can distribute more benefits to developed countries than the developing countries where the wood originates (Schepers, 2010). Consequently, Frandy (2018) speaks explicitly of “indigenizing sustainabilities” (p. 1) as a way to more holistically frame and operationalize sustainability—to make sustainability itself more sustainable. This paper’s two cases explore that suggestion. At its broadest, the findings apply indigenized sustainability to (how we think about) global sustainability efforts, while also more

“narrowly” or “practically” framing this for wood-based solution-designs specifically.

2. Method

2.1. Case study selection

Motivated by Bello-Bravo (2020b), which explored local tensions and negotiations around multispecies sustainable stewardship efforts to restore a sacred forest in Benin under local people’s traditional (indigenous) use, this paper qualitatively explores other contemporary indigenous forest use practices that support sustainable wood-sourcing practices against a background of the revisited sustainability concept generally. The research question was, “What aspects of forest use practices support reliably indefinite (renewable and resilient) wood-sourcing” for wood generally and wood-based solutions specifically. As will be seen, although much research on sustainable forest management exists, when narrowed to indigenized sustainability practices for forests, the number of relevant studies plummets.

Initially, a combined search including Google Scholar and BASE specifically for journal-published, intitle-delimited “wood sourcing practices” studies since 2017 counterintuitively yielded only two results: Kittler et al. (2020), which assesses the US wood pellet industry’s sourcing practices, and Sikkema et al. (2017), which discusses the EU’s energy policy and wood. Notably, even without the title delimiter, “wood sourcing practices” yielded only 46 results for the search period; when further delimited by “indigenous,” the number of results drops to 15. None of the studies were relevant to the focus of this paper.

Another initial search for “sustainable forest management” + “wood sourcing” yielded only 75 results for the search period; when further narrowed by ~indigenous, this yielded 19 studies, but none provided sufficiently “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) for qualitative analysis. Trosper (2007) has also noted that a framework of “forest management” may analogize with, but does not accurately capture, indigenous wood-sourcing patterns or forest use.

Taking a cue from the emphasis on “indigenous stewardship” in Schang et al. (2020), a search for intitle:“indigenous stewardship” during the same period yielded 18 results. Adding the further limiters ~wood and ~wood ~forest yielded 6 and 5 results, respectively. Of these last, two (one a thesis) explored the discourses around environmental justice and biodiversity vis-à-vis indigenous stewardship (Holm, 2021; Mulrennan and Bussi eres, 2020), two (one a thesis) explored indigenous stewardship related to waters (Hewitt, 2019; Lee et al., 2019), and one explored indigenous stewardship of forests specifically (Waller and Reo, 2018). Upon review of these studies, Waller and Reo (2018) met the search criteria.

For the sake of completeness, we note that since originally conducting this paper’s literature searches in 2021, two more studies have been published: one on the archeological history of indigenous stewardship on the Santa Cruz coast (Lightfoot et al., 2021) and a second on plant stewardship by the Wolastoqiyik and Mi’kmaq communities in North America (Baumflek et al., 2021). While the focus on “indigenous plant stewardship” in the latter is closely related to the specific focus of this paper, because it fell outside of the search period, it was not included in this paper’s data or analysis. Also of note, an original element of this research intended to focus on multispecies sustainability specifically, but the paucity of studies overall discouraged adding that delimiter. Nevertheless, Waller and Reo (2018) include multispecies themes in the forest sustainability investigated.

2.2. Data analysis

Using the theoretical frameworks of *sustainability* and *use* below, both researchers independently coded the two studies (Bello-Bravo, 2020b; Waller and Reo, 2018) that matched the research question and conferred to resolve any coding discrepancies until a >95% inter-rater

agreement was reached (Gwet, 2014). Codes were then further clumped for emergent themes.

2.3. Theoretical framework

Sustainability. While Circular Ecology (2021) tallies at least 200 definitions for sustainability and sustainable development, a majority emphasize that initial and oft-cited formulation for sustainability and sustainable development from *Our Common Future* (e.g., the Brundtland Report) (1987); namely, that sustainable projects must “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 41). Less frequently emphasized from this formulation are “two key concepts” that *Our Common Future* explicitly highlights; namely,

- The concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs (p. 41).

Out of this initial formulation has gradually emerged a general notion that the design-solutions of sustainable developmental should maximally balance a triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental benefits while also minimizing any harmful impacts from the design-solution in the milieu where it is intended to be used (Afful et al., 2019; Luetz and Walid, 2019; United Nations, 2020). This principle echoes the medical sense of *outcomes* and *impacts*, where the intention is to intervene into a problem or condition with the most effective (short-term) procedure that also has the least disruptive (long-term) impacts (Bello-Bravo, 2019).

At the heart of this insight are two additional criteria that ultimately constrain sustainable design-solutions as well: the notion of “first, do no harm” and the mandate that interventions be minimally invasive. Although scholarship differs about the origin or exact wording of the mandate *first, do no harm* (Arling, 1965; Inman, 1861; Markel, 2004; c.f., Smith, 2005, for a thorough historical discussion; Sokol, 2013), Inman (1861) captures its core value: “We believe that the principle of doing evil to the constitution that good may come is as false in medicine as it is in theology” (p. 244). Usually attributed to Hippocrates, Smith (2005) notes, “According to medical historians, the only known relevant Hippocratic sayings are found in Epidemics (Book I, Chapter XI): ‘As to diseases, make a habit of two things—to help, or at least to do no harm’ (p. 371). Part of doing no harm suggests the second implied criterion: that interventions will be *minimally invasive* (Brooks, 1998). Thus, while always striving to do the least harm (if harm must be done at all), then one must also apply the smallest intervention possible that is still effective (Bratt et al., 1997; Brooks, 1998).

Taken together, these two criteria underscore what sustainability for design-solution *outcomes* and *impacts* could look like—namely, a minimally invasive but still effective (short-term) intervention that has the least disruptive (long-term) impacts in the milieus where the design-solutions are implemented (Bello-Bravo, 2019). Not integrating these criteria at all points along the value chain or circle risks doing more harm than good with design-solutions.

Remembering “in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given” (Brundtland et al., 1987, p. 41), the criteria and approach described above require a genuine disavowal of “business as usual”—for example, not practicing production-side climate-smart agriculture efforts toward sustainability that merely “greenwash the status quo” (Zundel, 2017, p. 80) and fail to foster short-term-effective, long-term-nondisruptive sustainability locally. While even more stark differences can be seen between corporate and non-corporate sustainability (In and Schumacher, 2021; Kalra, 2019; McIntyre et al., 2018; Pjevic, 2017), some of the most prominent governance structures for sustainability may not be adequately

giving, operationalizing, or supporting an overriding priority to meeting the needs of the world’s poorer with respect to forests, especially given that

- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) efforts have “seen more success in developed than developing countries in terms of amount of forest certified and number of chain-of-custody certificates issued” (Schepers, 2010, p. 279, emphasis added),
- The corporatist nature of the PEFC (Cashore and Vertinsky, 2000; Gulbrandsen, 2004) is directly opposed to the notion of the sustainability of a commons (in this case forests) (Schepers, 2010, p. 280), and
- Certification processes in general function (by design or by accident) to *exclude* access by the world’s poorer to economic opportunity and its concomitant social wellbeing (Arthur, 2014; Bello-Bravo and Amoa-Mensa, 2019; Biyase and Zwane, 2018; Counsell and Loraas, 2002; Currie, 2018; Onwuegbuchulam, 2018; Taylor, 1978).

These challenge for sustainability occur within academic and scientific design-solutions research as well (emphasizing again the need for integral sustainability across an entire value-chain). In their recent review of sustainable supply-chain management research, Sánchez-Flores et al. (2020) note that “a clear research gap is the global integration of the three dimensions of sustainability in emerging economies” (p. 19). More broadly, Holmgren et al. (2020) analyzed 59 studies on forest-based “bioeconomy transformations and pathways” and found that “much of the research tends to replicate a bioeconomy imaginary articulated in EU and national bioeconomy policies and strategies. Accordingly, the research primarily reproduces a *weak approach to sustainability, which prioritize economic growth and competitiveness*” (Holmgren et al., 2020, p. 1860, emphasis added). This echoes the criticism raised by Schepers (2010) for forest certification specifically but also work by other researchers that identifies a prevailing tendency to prioritize the economic pillar of sustainability over (or at the expense of) the social and environmental pillars (Afful et al., 2019; Luetz and Walid, 2019).

Efforts likely to achieve actual sustainability goals in the world—efforts that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the future’s capacity, while giving overriding priority to meeting the needs of the world’s poorer—requires a change of perspective. This change of perspectives involves a committed *stance*, as a reorientation within solutions-design work as well, out of which changes of practice will follow in a new repertoire for sustainability (Barnaud et al., 2014; Étienne, 2014). Obviously, such a call for a change of stance will seem the most challenging aspect, because it specifically requires not just that *others* change how they do things, but that *we* must as well.

Nevertheless, without some pragmatic or concrete guideposts and insights into what those changes might be—above and beyond the perennial obstacles to change that occur due to institutional inertia, a lack of solidarity or consensus about any needed changes of direction, and resistance by stakeholders who already benefit from the current arrangement (Farrell, 2019; Jankó et al., 2020; Munck af Rosenschöld et al., 2014; Walther et al., 2005)—it may seem difficult if not impossible to decide what direction to take. Fortunately, a growing literature already documents indigenous patterns of sustainability that disclose what that stance and change of practice might look like (Bangura, 2005; Baumflek et al., 2021; Karsten and Illa, 2005; Kimmerer, 2002; Tsosie, 2019; Waller and Reo, 2018). At its deepest roots, the needed change of stance is not so difficult in practice but does hinge on a fundamental change of worldview regarding *use*. Briefly, we must turn to that.

Two Worldviews around ‘Use’: Modernist and Traditional. There can be no question that sustainable wood-based solutions require the *use* of an in-principle indefinite (renewable and resilient) source of wood, whether through (1) repurposing or waste recycling, including wood ash (Shahidul et al., 2018; Stupak et al., 2008), (2) stewardship or management of existing stands of forests and other woody materials

(Baumflek et al., 2021; Bello-Bravo, 2020b; Canadell and Raupach, 2008; Posey, 1985; Waller and Reo, 2018; Wiersum, 1997), (3) conversion of existing ecologies to or from sources of wood (whether as deforestation, conservation, restoration of sacred forests, or attempts to balance of these forces) (Aggestam et al., 2020; Bello-Bravo, 2020b; Köhl et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2004), or (4) artificially engineering or creating wood-like materials (Ueitele et al., 2021; Zafar and Siddiqui, 2017; Zaman et al., 2014). Arguably, some of these approaches may no longer fall within the ambit of wood-based solutions; for example, Bin-hussain and El-Tonsy (2013) engineered a wood-like building material out of plastic and date palm waste.

Such use constitutes “any activity that has a manifest effect in the world, whether physical, psychological, or socioeconomic” (Bello-Bravo, 2020b, p. 3). That human beings (not alone among animals) use the world’s materials is not just inevitable but unavoidable (Kimmerer, 2013). However, this notion of use also includes prohibitions and restrictions on use, whether private or public, or for scientific, humanitarian, conservationist, or political ends (Beissinger et al., 2017; Bendix, 2000; Frandy, 2018; Singh et al., 2017). The shared assumption across all of these examples (in both indigenous and non-indigenous settings) is that the “purpose” of Nature (in this case forests and other woody plants) is to be used by human beings (Bello-Bravo, 2020b; White, 1967).

However, because human beings (in common with other heterotrophic species) must and will consume the things of the world to persist (Kimmerer, 2012; Mangena, 2013), the question is not *if* we consume but *how* we choose to do so, along with the narratives we spin around those choices (Mangena, 2016). Accordingly, our species has a breadth and scale of choice—even a duty (Kimmerer, 2012)—unrivaled among others to assess the consequences of those choices and narratives. For example, do we (1) describe and treat a forest instrumentally as “nothing but” a commodity, wood, which we can freely use (sustainably or not) without constraint and without consideration of anything else, including other species, or do we (2) address forests as a living and communal entity whose help in the preservation of all species generally (both now and into the future, as also throughout the entirety of our existence as a species) is as critical and vital as the help of other people?

Merely for the sake of having a distinction to refer to, these two ways of viewing the use of forests (or Nature generally) are *modernist* and *traditional*. Notwithstanding the perils and inadequacies of all seemingly binary dichotomies (Goulden, 2009; Perea, 1998), this distinction turns back to the previous criteria above requiring a choice of the most effective (short-term) intervention-solutions with the least economically, socially, and environmentally disruptive (long-term) impacts. Acknowledging the global socioeconomic gains from the modernist worldview over the last three centuries (Williams, 1983), these also have now self-evidently led to unsustainable long-term (and still longer-term) impacts from technological industrialization (White, 1967; Williams, 1989)—both directly and indirectly, and in their consequences as pollution, environmental degradation, and effects from industrialization of food production, especially hoofed meat animals (Bondu 2017; Bondu et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2018; IPCC, 2014; Khalid and Shahid, 2017; Osborne, Bellante, and von Hedemann, 2014; Rayan, 2020).

This situation is not a result of technology per se but rather its current industrialized socioeconomic form. Every human society from the beginning has been technological (culture and language being the most fundamental human inventions of all) (Maturana and Varela, 1987). It may well be that impacts from pre-industrial technologies (both currently and in the past) were simply smaller-scale and less disruptive over the long-term, when not explicitly sustainable (Magni, 2017; Reynolds and Stafford-Smith, 2002; Taylor, 2010). However, in the current face of looming climate extinction, better sustainable forms of use are called for to avoid that outcome, especially for the sake of the world’s poorer who face steeper consequences from the primary and secondary aspects of worsening climate extremity (Dervis, 2007; Farbotko, 2020). What Frandy (2018) refers to as “indigenized sustainabilities” represent one instance of better sustainable forms of use—as

illustrated in the case studies matching this study’s research parameters below.

3. Results & discussion: case studies in indigenous wood-based sustainability

Summarizing the findings from the data analysis of the relevant articles in advance, these include three themes within indigenized practices: (1) longer-term timeframes of planning and action that achieve the most short-term effective interventions or outcomes with the least long-term disruptive effects, (2) a more holistic or systems-view of the economic, social, and environmental actualities of a setting that take account of human and nonhuman stakeholders, and (3) a stance, attitude, or worldview that narrates forest use not in instrumental terms. We address these themes separately for each case study below.

3.1. Forest stewardship in northern Wisconsin

Waller and Reo (2018) report on present-day indigenous forest management practices among the Menominee and Ojibwe peoples (in northern Wisconsin). For context, these communities practice selective logging and harvest rotation (as a traditional use) in these forests (Trosper, 2007), yet also exhibit higher biodiversity and tree regeneration (Waller and Reo, 2018). Comparing the adjacent and similar state and federal forests, indigenously managed forests held larger carbon reserves in more mature trees, maintained greater or increased biodiversity, had fewer invasive species, and lower deer density per acre (Waller and Reo, 2018).

Holistic (Multispecies) Perspectives. Waller and Reo (2018) particularly highlight indigenous hunting of deer (specifically, white-tailed deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*) as a keystone to these observed forest patterns. Grazing deer affect tree regeneration by eating or damaging new tree saplings but also have multiple downstream effects on other forest ecologies (Côté et al., 2004; Waller, 2014). Culling deer populations becomes essential for achieving the healthier qualities of indigenously managed forests (Waller and Reo, 2018).

This approach contrasts with recreational or individualistic non-indigenous deer hunting on nontribal lands (Waller and Reo, 2018). Equally, the observed practices in Wisconsin reflect the broader, more community- or communally-oriented valuation placed by indigenous peoples on hunting (McCorquodale, 1997; Sayles and Mulrennan, 2010). More significantly, culled venison is also shared with other nonhuman living beings in the forest—eagles and bears, but especially wolves (*ma’ingan*), who are treated by the Ojibwe as family members integrally involved in the fate of the community generally (Usik, 2015). Specifically, the human culling of deer reduces the means of livelihoods and survival for other populations within the forest. Thus it follows, both morally and practically, that those otherwise harmful human effects should be offset by more sustainable activities toward other stakeholders in the forest who would not otherwise have access to the essential need of food. This personification and extension of moral status to a nonhuman Other in a world where humans live (Mangena, 2013) also informs indigenous decision-making around the selective logging of trees (Yazzie, 2007).

Indeed, forests offer much more besides wood (Baumflek et al., 2021). The indigenous “systems look” understands not only its many economic gifts (Kimmerer, 2013)—including food, medicine, materials for culture-building or trading, and homes for other living beings and spirits (Bello-Bravo, 2019) as well as genetic biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and species restoration (Mäder et al., 2002; Neuenschwander et al., 2003; Pimentel et al., 1995)—but also its social role in the formation of multi-community organizations to maintain them (Gilmour, 2016; Muttaqin et al., 2019). All of this depends foremost on woods as the keystone of land itself. As such, much in the same way that channeling investments to women can have a multiplicative benefit effect compared to similar investments in men (Anderson et al., 2021;

Ashby et al., 2009), centering woods as a keystone for sustainability also has multiplicative, holistic, and system-wide effects.

The moral argument for including nonhuman actors in our human calculations is not easily dismissed or intractable (Kimmerer, 2012, 2017; Mangena, 2013) but can seem weak or readily fall to the wayside under the pressure of survival (see the topic of hunting endangered monkeys in the case study below). However, the argument here is not only moral. The now-present and worsening long-term effects of industrialized instrumental-only use of environments has brought the entire globe, along with our own species to the brink of mass extinction (Fears, 2019; Strona and Bradshaw, 2018). In contrast, the collaboration between the Ojibwe and *ma'iingan* communities illustrates how we (as a species) can benefit from the indigenized social habit of extending moral status (Mangena, 2013) to all other living beings (Kimmerer, 2012). As such, treating Nature as instrumental-only causes short-term harms with long-term detrimental effects and denies us the benefit of collaborative action.

Long-term Perspectives. Especially characteristic of this indigenous “systems look” approach to forest stewardship is a long horizon of planning, sometimes even generations ahead (Davis, 2000). This embraces completely the notion of meeting the needs of today without sacrificing tomorrow’s and contrasts starkly with short-term corporate profit-taking (Wright and Nyberg, 2017) and decision-maker tenures based in four- and six-year political cycles (Mändmaa et al., 2020; Schulze, 2021). It also implicitly aligns with problems of climate, which operate at very long time-scales already (Barfuss et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, Trosper (2007) cautions that while this indigenous future-vision of sustainability could be likened to non-indigenous notions of “sustained yield,” its underlying rationale (among the Menominee specifically) is not rooted in a “sourcing” or “management” narrative but, rather, in an origin narrative and its accompanying values that contextualize human beings as part of Nature generally, as one among many in a “democracy of species” (Kimmerer, 2017, p. 133) with other nonhuman flora and fauna. The constraints this strategy of “origin narrative” places on human use of forests is resultantly less invasive, as measured in the greater health of indigenous forests compared to nearby similar state and federal land (Waller and Reo, 2018). As such, this “origin narrative” approach better aligns with applying a least-invasive but most-effective (short-term) intervention with the least-disruptive (long-term) impacts.

Narrative perspectives. As Mangena (2016) convincingly argues, if the prevailing mood of postmodernism asserts a situation and opportunity (if not a mandate) to choose between competing narratives about life, culture, and how to live, then as “fanciful” and anthropomorphic as the indigenous narratives about forests may seem, it is clear that they have a greater power to elicit, foster, support, and perpetuate commitments to sustainability among human cultures; Kimmerer (2012) and Waller and Reo (2018), in any case, demonstrate the relevance and applicability of indigenous criteria even for national-level decision-making.

In these ways, sustainability around “respecting” (rather than “sourcing”) woods will better ground environmentally sustainable future prospects for wood-based design-solutions generally. Such an approach also more broadly and socioeconomically benefits all living beings through its manifold “downstream” effects. Through these more holistic, long-term, and empirically supported narratives, it becomes more apparent how to achieve maximally effective (short-term) benefits with the least disruptive (long-term) impacts (Bello-Bravo, 2019). The hybrid modernist-traditionalist forest use in this case represents an instance of what Frandy (2018) calls indigenized sustainability, as an adaptation of traditional practices and values re-contextualized within the contemporary era. Here again, we are reminded by Trosper (2007) that this continuity is not some romantic holdover from days gone by, but emerged from, and was shaped by, intense socio-legal opposition from the surrounding non-indigenous State and culture.

3.2. Restoring a sacred forest in Benin

Bello-Bravo (2020b) analyses the fruits of a more than two-decade project to restore a neglected sacred forest in Benin within a context forest use by several classes of human and nonhuman actors. Originally purchased by a European, the long-term vision was to restore the biodiversity of the sacred forest and provide a habitat for endangered species of flora and fauna, especially the red-bellied monkey (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*). While the sustainability goals of this project were explicitly environmental, it required extensive interplay between the social (and, to a lesser extent, the economic) aspects of the nearby village community to achieve its success. In particular, local villagers’ traditional use of the forest for food, medicine, and (fire) wood regularly threatened or impacted efforts to restore species. Depredation of wood reserves, more often due to population increases than conversion to farmland, is a characteristic problem for sustainability, especially in Benin (Tola, 2010) despite national effort for the sustainable protection of forests (ADBG, 2017; Government of Benin, 2012; Rombolli, 2008).

Narrative perspectives. Attempts by the sacred forest owner to redirect or change local harvesting and hunting practices found little traction with locals until he became an initiate of the *zan-gbeto*, a Beninese men’s society that traditionally guards villages. This membership afforded him the socio-legal standing to create and enforce policies within the forest under his supervision (Bello-Bravo, 2020b, p. 5). More exactly, such initiation is the preeminently traditional cultural form by which someone becomes *recognized as having attained* the status of a person with real access to participation within social life (Eliade, 2009).

Effectively, this meant that he was seen differently by local villagers, and thus the identity and story told about him locally changed. From Mangena (2013), initiation confers and extends moral status. Moreover, while many narratives about encounters between modernist and traditional peoples rightly emphasize an arbitrary or harmful colonializing imposition of alien values on pre-existing cultural forms (Bello-Bravo, 2020a; Desai, 2017; Sanya et al., 2018), in this case the social power was almost entirely on the side of the villagers, such that the forest owner was the one required to assimilate. As such, this captures an instance of what Frandy (2018) calls indigenizing sustainabilities.

Consequently, the forest owner’s change of social identity also socially mandated that he distribute largesse and donations to people in the village for help with medical expenses, tuition, and other costs, as is traditional for forest stewards. “Few people in the village outside the small circle of immediate friends would tolerate the forest if it were not for this assistance” (Neuenschwander et al., 2015, p. 35). Subsequent attempts to redirect or change wood foraging practices also received implicit support from the national legislation for the protection of sacred forests (Government of Benin, 2012). This law specified and included “buffers” around the perimeters of protected areas specifically for traditional uses, including farming, medicinal plant growth, and wood sourcing. Unlike in the first case above, where harvesting wood is an integral part of the picture, wood preservation in the present case precluded any harvesting whatsoever; for that reason, the provision of buffers affording alternative sources of wood were integral to enabling and maximizing the environmental and social aspects of sustainability in this case.

Further social and economic negotiations were still required and took a long time. Initially, the owner hired villagers to guard the forest against human incursions (thereby transforming the traditional village role of village guards to forest guards). However, village elders demanded to be kept in the loop for that new income stream. An *ad hoc* committee was subsequently established and eventually became permanent, a new institution within social life. Its purpose was partly to oversee money, but it also formalized the airing of grievances related to the forest (as an actor). These were often raised by farmers against inhabitants of the forest (usually monkeys foraging from surrounding farmers’ crops, whether actually or purely by accusation). But local offenses by humans against the forest (e.g., prohibited hunting or

foraging) were also adjudicated.

In particular because this project of forest restoration arose as a new practice within the long-existing context of village life, shifts in narrative, identity, and purpose are more prominent here than in the first case. Thus, the identity of the “on-paper legal” owner of the land to be restored had to undergo a change (through his initiations) to become socially accepted as an “off-paper recognized” steward of the sacred forest. Similarly, the local populace gradually changed its narrative about the edibility of (endangered) red-bellied monkeys, which the forest owner wanted to protect, while the zan-gbeto (as traditional protectors of the village only) transformed into protectors of the sacred forest as well. Inescapably, these and still other cultural shifts and negotiations necessary to make the restoration of the sacred forest sustainable and successful took a long time, sometimes years.

Long-term perspectives. The ongoing sustainability of this project required a long-term vision that could successfully mediate and meet short-term needs (i.e., otherwise destructive foraging of newly restored plant and animal species) without long-term disruptions to the forest. This required a provision of viable alternatives to those short-term needs. For example, buffers around the sacred reserve itself afforded flora otherwise foraged from the forest to be cultivated in the buffers instead. The forest itself also offered an alternative to hunting red-bellied monkeys, after another species of abundant and not endangered green-bellied monkeys took up residence in the forest and became an alternative source of meat.

Critically, these changes of practice were not necessarily accompanied by a change of understanding across actors. This will prove essential for multispecies sustainability. For example, the motivations for the forest owner’s scientific project to promote biodiversity and species restoration—while requiring local people *not* to use the gods-given local bounty of the forest to meet their needs for food and medicine—did not (and may never) make sense to local people, and understandably so. As mentioned in the previous case study, this is an instance case where a moral (or scientific) rationale can fall by the wayside in the face of survival. Conversely, from a scientifically materialist perspective, that the national law in Benin protects sacred forests explicitly, in part, because they are a “home to several gods” (Government of Benin, 2012) may not (and may never) be ideologically untenable. That local people claimed evil spirits had had a hand in an instance of severe forest vandalism demonstrated, in the owner’s opinion, “the possible negative effects of local beliefs” (Neuenschwander et al., 2015, p. 34). These are irreconcilably divergent worldviews.

Nevertheless, over a long period of time, both the forest owner and the villagers arrived at forms of interaction that supported sustainability within the restoration of the forest despite their incommensurable difference of values about the rationale for protecting the forest. So also between the incommensurable realities of *ma’iingan* (wolves) and humans in Wisconsin, where over a long period of time, forms of interaction were negotiated that support the long-term sustainability of a sacred space of forest.

Holistic perspectives. In this case, the sustainability of the forest (economically, socially, and environmentally) required interactions between actors consisting of insider and outsider (or transitioning) humans, nonhuman other species (including red- and green-bellied monkeys, and restored or newly introduced flora), and the forest itself. Economically, a possible burgeoning ecotourism to the sacred forest may offset some villagers’ opinions that maintaining such an enclave makes them look backward (Bello-Bravo, 2020b). Socially, new institutions have emerged while existing ones (including forms of identity) have changed. Notably, this includes a committee to assess the legal culpability for impacts on farmers’ crops by the forest itself (represented by the spokesperson of the forest steward himself). Environmentally, the health of the forest is vastly improved, its biodiversity has increased dramatically, and it now serves as a refuge for threatened animal and plant species (Neuenschwander and Adomou, 2017). More broadly still, this system of indigenized sustainability itself is further enmeshed in the

immediately surrounding region—which at one point attracted outside hunters threatening predation in the forest and prompted the transformation of zan-gbeto men from village to forest protectors—and national-level sacred forest protection.

What especially emerges in this case of sustainability, with its capacity (as also in Wisconsin) to include in its activities the needs of nonhuman actors (other flora and fauna inhabiting the forest), are the edges along boundaries where this happens. These can be quite distinct, i.e., the buffers between the forest and village, or more ambiguous, i.e., the ways that the identity of the forest owner (who is simultaneously a European outsider and an initiated insider) straddles both; similarly, the zan-gbeto, who no longer protect only the village but the forest as well. Negotiating these edges across incommensurable value-differences requires an especially capacious and holistic perspective, along with sufficient time to sort out how to act.

3.3. Recommendations

Findings from the data analysis and discussion highlight indigenized practices for sustainability that include (1) longer-term timeframes of planning and action that achieve the most short-term effective interventions or outcomes with the least long-term disruptive effects, (2) a more holistic or systems-view of the economic, social, and environmental actualities of a setting that includes human and nonhuman stakeholders, and (3) a stance, attitude, or worldview that narrates forest use not in instrumental terms. Above all, this change of worldview or perspective is the most needed, and, as already noted, its argument is not only moral. Treating Nature as instrumental-only has self-evidently caused unsustainable short-term harms with long-term detrimental effects while also denying us the benefit of collaborative action with other members of the world’s “democracy of species” (Kimmerer, 2017).

More narrowly and pragmatically for wood-based solutions, ensuring reliably indefinite (renewable and resilient) wood-sourcing addresses only the economic pillar of sustainability both for organizations and across the arc of design processes overall (from production to receipt). As such, implementing design processes and products under the criterion of maximizing short-term solution effectiveness with the least long-term disruptions would better support an organization’s social and ecological pillars of sustainability. Similarly, making provisions for alternative ways to meet short-term needs (especially economic ones), while utilizing the design criterion above at every point over the process of solution-production, also better reflects social and environmentally sustainable action, e.g., prioritizing longer-term capacity building over short-term profit-taking.

Further, wood-based solution designers can recognize that collaborative design processes (and solution-design circles) can sustainably occur even when incommensurable differences of worldview otherwise seem to get in the way. Pragmatically, this means it may only be necessary to establish among stakeholders *what* an outcome should be without enforcing, utilizing time and resources, or attempting to generate a consensus around a rationale for attempting the effort. It is clear in the cases of wolves and humans in Wisconsin (or humans and a sacred forest in Benin) that otherwise incommensurable value-systems need not preclude collaborations that result in more economically, socially, and environmentally reliable, renewable, and resilient wood-sourcing outcomes now and into the future.

4. Conclusion

This paper asked the question, “What aspects of forest use practices support reliably indefinite (renewable and resilient) wood-sourcing.” The core of the answer consists of narratives, perspectives, and criteria that incorporate longer-term, more holistic approaches to support human *and* nonhuman worlds. In postmodern terms of competing ideas, this is a rejection of the use of Nature as instrumental only and a recognition of the co-participation in life of nonhuman actors. While the

indigenized sustainabilities of this paper proactively argue in favor of this possibility, the increasingly looming and ongoing effects of worsening climate change actively argue against continuing business as usual. It is the case that human beings have no choice but to be consumers—including consumers of wood for wood-based solutions—but how we choose to consume still remains open.

Whether applied to wood-sourcing for wood-based solutions themselves, as part of the complete arc of design-solutions practices from production to recipient, or in the course of acting as one among the many of the world's democracy of species, the perspectives, criteria, and narratives of indigenized sustainabilities in this paper illustrate a use of Nature that is not instrumental-only and which achieves more sustainable results. The committed stance of these perspectives and criteria incorporate meeting the essential needs of the least advantaged, both now and in the future, whether these are trees, forests, or other human and nonhuman people. Doing so gains us the benefit collaborative effort and force amongst all species on the planet and co-implicates meeting the needs of them all as well.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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