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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode 19 of the Let's Talk Government podcast. Components of sustainable development what about equity. I'm joined by Dr. Russell Fricanofrom the planning program of the urban and regional studies Institute at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Fricano brings to ersi over 20 years of professional planning experience and seven years of teaching in higher education. His work has included the training, and assessment of urban planning practitioners, and students research, and community outreach. Dr. Fricano has served as a section head for Los Angeles County Department of regional planning and organization which provides planning services to the nation’s most populous county. He also applied his experience in teaching and training students with planning practitioners. He has also served in other educational environments including being an instructor in environmental planning and policy, planning theory, urban economics, and planning studio at Alabama, A&M University. At ersi here at MSU, Mankato, he currently teaches courses such as long range, and strategic planning, urban design, transportation planning, program evaluation, community leadership, and many more. So, thank you for joining me today. So of course. Well, first I'm going to stumble over the word sustainable 50 times. I think. But let's start off with it. Why did you want to call your podcast components of sustainable development? What about equity? What does that mean?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well, sustainable development is at the forefront of urban planning, and it's a primary approach to climate change. And sustainable development consists of three components. Known as the three E's. You have environment, equity, and economy. And these are supposed to be considered equally or at least in a balanced way. Now, I once did some research in Google Scholar to determine how much attention is given in scholarship to each of these components. So, I typed in three phrases in the search engine. Sustainability and the environment, sustainability in the economy, and sustainability and equity. For a sustainability environment, I had three million 380,000 results. For sustainability and economy, I had 2,720,000 results. However, in sustainability and equity there are only 1,530,000 results. Now, if we were to add up all these results, only 20% of these works are devoted to equity.

**Dr. Nelson:** Very interesting. So, you used a couple of phrases here that I'd like you to define a little bit for our listeners. So, when you talk about sustainable environment. What does that mean to you?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Sustainable environments and I'll get into this shortly by the Brundtland Commission. Where we have to preserve our resources for future generations. And then we also have developed do consider approaches that reduce greenhouse gases that are attributed to climate change.

**Dr. Nelson:** Excellent. Well, I figured you were probably going to cover it. I just want to make sure. So, what do you attribute to the low coverage of equity and sustainable development?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well, the number of things. I wanted to first talk about the green new deal by Alejandra Okasha Cortez. And I took great interest in reading it. And when I see provisions like reduction in greenhouse gases, clean air and water, clean up hazardous waste, 0 mission energy resources, to me that's all plausible because it's environmental. But when you consider other provisions of the same resolution, right of workers to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain, high quality education, non-discriminations, create millions of good highway jobs. It sounds more like a wish list. And the point I'm trying to make is that the traditional model standard element is weak on equity. And it's not as obvious as the other components. And I think there is only a tenuous connection. But in terms of why I feel there is low coverage of equity and stable development. There are four factors. First, it's how sustainable development was initially conceived. So, let's look at the report that started the Brundtland Commission report. Our common future that was published in 1987. Now this report was mainly response to climate change. Which are primarily environmental issues. And the brilliant Commission did not adequately discuss equity in comparison to the other components. It discusses is equity mainly in terms of citizen participation, and equity and property ownership resource depletion, and environmental impacts. So, with that is an insurance that the poor get the fair share of resources that are required to sustain growth. And equity would be aided by political systems that secure effective system participation in decision making and greater democracy and international decision making. But to me this sounded more ideal than real. The report also discuss is intergenerational equity. Meaning the present needs without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. Another issue I have with sustainable development is that it has contradictions all its own. The model of sustainable development has competing outcomes which lead to contradictions. And these take three forms. You have a property conflict, a resource conflict, and a development conflict. Now in a property conflict. That's a conflict between economic growth and equity. So first, if you want to redevelop a neighborhood, but the neighborhood gentrifies. What happens? Property values increased due to redevelopment and leads to increase in taxes and rents. And eventually, the low income residents can no longer afford to live there and their forced to relocate. Then you have a resource conflict. It is between growth and Environmental Protection. For example, say we want to strengthen our economic development. And so, we clear an environmentally sensitive land to build a factory. Well, that's a property conflict cause you're weighing that the jobs and the increases in tax from you versus the environment. And other green industries have this problem too. Now, when natural land is clear to produce methane crops, the destruction of the area leads to what we call a carbon debt. When you take out a natural area, it takes decades to regain the environment where it used to be in that area. And also, with methane crops you have corn, artichokes, soybean. Those are food crops. And so basically instead of feeding people were feeding automobiles. Then there's a development conflict. There's a conflict between social equity and environmental preservation. Say for example, that residents suffering from Elba trischen want to cultivating a community garden on a vacant parcel land in their neighborhood, but the city wants to maintain an urban forest to reduce carbon footprint. Well, you can't eat trees, but it certainly urban forest goes a long way in reducing the carbon footprint. Urban aquaculture does in some ways. But here you have, you know, competing projects with pretty much some of the same objectives. And the third insert issue is a matter of semantics. The term greens. When you think of green, you think of the natural environment – forest, vegetation. But we don't envision equity. So, let's consider the green building practices that's promoted by the US green building council. These practices reduce pollution, energy, and conserve natural resources, but they don't cover equity impacts. And this is also on parent in green buildings LEED certification. That's spelled LEED. And it stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. But none of those E stand for equity. So, in our own backyard, in the state of Minnesota, the Minnesota green step cities are a voluntary challenge assistance in a recognition program. And this helps cities achieve their sustainability and quality of life goals. And this is managed by a public private partnership. And it's based upon a menu of 29 optional best practices. Now, none of these 29 best practices explicitly state anything about social equity.

**Dr. Nelson:** So that's really interesting. And thank you for defining methane crops because I had no idea what you were talking about. But really what you're talking about here is even if somebody maybe of a middle or lower income wanted to develop, or bake their areas sustainable, it would be really expensive for them to do that. Like installing solar panels or better insulation or better materials. That they really don't have the ability to do that, that somebody who is well economically could. So, you talked about low coverage. So how do we strengthen this equity component of sustainable development? Is it all about money?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well, not necessarily. But I'd like to talk about first of all how why low coverage exists and then get into some approaches. Now there are some ways that equity is already considered, but it's not been considered directly through sustainability. The first is environmental justice. And environmental justice movement is a blend of civil rights and environmentalism. And it basically asked do people of color or low income groups very disproportionate burden of environmental impacts. And in his book dumping in Dixie Robert Bullard contended, that the location of hazardous waste sites is based on racial characteristics of communities. And environmental justice issues also occurred in urban renewal programs. Urban renewal after World War Two was not successful. And in the name of redeveloping cities, it demolished established neighborhoods and it relocated its residents in multi Storey tenement houses. And where did they locate these housing projects? Next to freeways. So back in the 50s and 60s automobiles trucks and buses did not have pollution control devices. And they didn't burn cleaner fuels. And so, these poor residents were breathing in carbon monoxide diesel emissions ozone and lead and they suffered from respiratory illnesses. So, relief finally came in executive order 12898, which was passed in 1994. And under the national environmental policy act, or nipa, in an environmental review process at jurisdiction must identify and address disproportionately high in adversely human health or environmental effects in their actions on the minority or low income populations. And this is done to the greatest extent permitted by law. So, it's now standard practice. That you when you do an environmental group you have to include environmental justice impacts. I did one when I was a planner. And then we have sustainable transportation. And this is also addressed equity in certain ways though not entirely. Well first of all, I find that there's a strong overlap between environmental and equity components when we talk about transportation. So, if commuters give up their car for public transit, that reduces greenhouse gas emissions. But there's also an equity side to it. When you think of transit options for the disadvantage, you think of public transit. And not only for low income riders, but also for seniors and the disabled. And for households without automobiles public transit provides access to the basic necessities of life - employment, grocery shopping, and healthcare. But we also have to be careful. Now when we think about modern public transit, most of us would envision light rail. And right now, the planning profession it's enamored with trains. But light rail is limited. It only runs on a fixed track. And if you can't write a bus to a light rail station or you can't drive to a park and ride, you simply don't have access. And neighborhoods around light rail stations can gentrify. Development forms along the transit station. It raises property values. Rents go up. And disadvantage can’t afford to live near them anymore. So light rail is also regional in nature. And it for that reason that tends to serve more affluent suburban riders. So, transit agencies also favor light rail because it's more cost effective. You need less personnel to run it. And your primary costs are capital costs. But buses are more labor intensive. And you have to consider human resource costs, employee benefits, and the rest. So, buses may not seem as glamorous as trains, but we still need them. And clean buses. And in urban areas bus routes are abik whitus. We even have them in Mankato. And low income and disabled rely very much on them. Another strategy that doubles edged sword is mixed use development. And this has been dubbed the Europeanisation of America. In a mid-rise building, we have commercial use on the ground floor with apartments on top. So instead of driving out to a coffee shop or pharmacy, tenants can simply patronize the ones that are in the same building. No car needed. And Norman’s claim that this type of development by virtue of it having apartments is providing affordable housing which is a social good. Or are we really doing that? Well, you have to consider the ultimate rent of these apartments. This type of development is also trendy. And it could command higher rents. And if apartment runs for 3000 to 4000 a month, which I've seen in Marina del Rey, that is not affordable. So, from that we turn to how we strengthen the equity component. So, first is inclusivity. In some ways I'm going back to the Brundtland Commission report, which focuses on citizen participation. But the keyword here is meaningful participation. So, if you're in a neighborhood where the dominant language is not English, you have to use interpreters at community meetings and public hearings. Another issue is the digital divide. And that comes from relying completely on social media to get the word out. If you rely on Facebook and Twitter, you can make three fatal assumptions. First of all, everyone owns a computer. And secondly, everyone that owns the computer has Internet access. And third, everyone that has Internet access uses social media. So, some citizens feel overwhelmed at the technical analysis that accompanies an environmental review. So, it's the responsibility of planners to educate them on the process and make it easier for them to comprehend. And on a further point, I would like to make about being inclusive is that citizen participation can be constrained by the law. One of my former students at Alabama, A&M, explored system perception of empowerment and redevelopment of brownfield sites in low income African American neighborhoods in downtown Birmingham, AL. And residents did not feel their power in the process did not go beyond tokenism. In other words, they were given information about the projects and given an opportunity to provide feedback. But there was no guarantee their feedback was followed. And they were not involved in higher levels of decision making. And this could very well be due to legal constraints in circle. Circle stands for a comprehensive environmental response compensation and liability act of 1980. And this governs brownfield redevelopment process. It requires government agencies to seek public input on projects. However, on higher levels of participation such as citizen partnerships involvement in decision making, its silent. And so public official saying, ”well, that's all we may need to do. Give him information get their feedback and that's it.” Then there are proactive policies that we could consider. Mixed use is usually accompanied with higher density which is a good thing. And there's a policy known as density bonuses, which allows the developer to build more units, if the developer agrees to provide certain percentage of units to affordable housing usually it's about 20%. So, to valpar more units mean a higher profit. However, you have to form an ironclad agreement with the developer to make this happen. I've seen cases where developers will promise higher density on the project just to get it approved. And they come back later on to “I really can't afford this. You know we've got to cut back on the affordable units.” So, you have to make sure this is strong contractual agreement in place for this. The third is to look at equity impacts behind development purposes. Norm Krummholz served as a planning director for the city of Cleveland, Ohio. And he's renowned as being a very socially conscious planner. And if you been to Cleveland, you will note an impressive redevelopment the waterfront. We’ve got the rock and roll Hall of Fame, new ballparks, and so on. But Krummholz looked beyond the glamour of these projects and asked, “who's really benefiting from this? The people are or the developer?” So, another thing you can do you could take some of these green solutions that I've mentioned and make it equitable. So, if you build a new park to reduce carbon footprint of a city, you make sure low income residents have access to its facilities. You can also be proactive in preserving neighborhoods. One scheme for addressing gentrification is to form a tax increment financing district in the redevelopment area. And use some of the proceeds from the district to fund affordable housing or keep low income housing tax is stable. And then you also look for social equity in existing development. Now, most planning is not about designing utopian cities as a lot of people may think it is. You're basically working with development that's already constructed and that's been around for years. So, the questions you can ask might be: are low income neighborhoods located in areas subject to flood hazard? Do neighborhoods have sufficient places to shop for food? We have what are called food deserts. There aren't any places that sell nutritious food per miles. Your local businesses hire people that live in the neighborhood. Is there any way we can provide affordable housing in an area zoned for single family? And this way low income residents have better access to suburban development. Right now, the city of Minneapolis is considering those types of approaches. So, the challenge lies in what's called not in my backyard or NIMBY attitudes. And putting these issues on the local agenda. Now, by all means Pat this isn't an exhaustive list of approaches. But it tests our creativity. So, the bottom line to me is that we have to be proactive. And we have to revisit and take a close look at the paradigm a stable development. And also look at its related legislation. And find ways to expand and strengthen the equity component.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, that's great. This is great information. I do have a couple of questions that I hope don't put you on the spot too much. You mentioned how high density especially in urban areas is a good thing. Right? For equity and sustainable development. So how do you address the people that are in the NIMBY mindset of a single family neighborhood? Where there's a high density development proposal? How can you sell them on the fact that it is good? It is sustainable and it's equitable. What would you do?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Two ways aesthetics and amenities. Usually, these developments come with new places to shop. They are beautiful structure is too. They fit in nicely. And that's usually a good cell for a project like this. The same approach is used with transit oriented districts.

**Dr. Nelson:** It's actually really good idea. And then you brought up food deserts. I know for a fact here in Minnesota we have some in urban areas. So then how do you balance out taking maybe an empty lot and saying that's a community garden versus being able to sell it to a developer who wants to put a high density housing on there. I mean what would be the arguments on both side? Would they both address equity?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well so with some newer developments, some of them include community gardens. So, you get kind of the best of both worlds there. But aside from that, planning is governed by a comprehensive plan. It usually reflects the priorities of the community. And so there would be some policies in there that promote that. Not to say that that would automatically work because plans also have conflicting policies. But you would justify that based upon was permitted in the zone. What does the comprehensive plan recommend for this particular area? And this also subject to the public hearing process. But there are some ways in planning that you can also provide incentives. Like if someone wants to establish a community burn down on their lot, you can give him a break on their property taxes. Because urban agriculture isn't the highest and best use of land. So, there's a number of ways you can do it using planning policies and different techniques. And of course, it's situational as well.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, then I'm going to move a little bit outside the urban ring, out into like that suburban semi-rural areas. Where we've seen maybe farm lands being brought bought up by developers and they're putting in some housing that may not be high density, but there's definitely high capacity type areas. How does that play into sustainable development? And where do you see that issues with equity there?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well, what I'm thinking about that is what's called parent urban agriculture as agriculture on the urban fringe. And these areas are important to preserve because they produce crops like produce. That are also perishable. And so, you have to locate nearest cities to reduce the truck transport and to ensure you know fresher produce. Now, also these areas can serve as open agriculture sites for cities at our land form. I think they've had that issue in Boston. And people from urban areas or senior citizens could go out to different lots in these areas. What's really needed is interjurisdictional coordination. It that involves planning on a regional basis. Usually when you consider both urban versus rural together, that requires a regional form of planning. And original plan at the top would give very general recommendations and then you get into more specifics as you work your way down to the local comprehensive plans. And what's good about regional planning involves coordinating between more than one jurisdiction.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, with regional planning. Does it become harder to incentivize that? Give him an economic like a tax break or attack screen increment financing if it's regional? Does that make it easier?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** That's a good question. I think it's easier to do it on the local level because there's more control. And likewise, when you consider growth or land use, most of decision making is done at the local level. Now they could be bound by the state or the planning region to follow some of these regional directives. But it's primarily up to the local government to provide incentives or to control the landing sentence jurisdiction. But certainly, regional governments could give a break to local governments in certain ways too. Like maybe exempting them from certain policies or so. I think there is a little room for adjustment there.

**Dr. Nelson:** Alright. I'm going to go to one of the topics. I know you've written on about sustainable development and a little bit about equity. But I think the last one I want to touch on is water. Clean water. How can we ensure that when they're doing development that we also have clean water for everybody in the neighborhood and not just certain people? That type of thing. I'm thinking of like a Flint, MI and larger urban areas. But water is important.

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Indeed, it is. And even in the land of 10,000 lakes. So, but would you believe that most surface water in the US is not drinkable. You have to treat it first. And part of the issue of the water supply is with stormwater runoff. And you have to put in what are called best management practices. Natural ways of filtering water before it hits the water body. And you can do this a number of ways. You may have seen the rain garden and individual property. These pretty raingardens filter rainwater before it goes into the groundwater. And once it goes through the soil, the soil purifies as it gets down to the water table. Then you have detention ponds and actually these are also aesthetically pleasing. They look like natural ponds, but you store rainwater or storm water in them. And as they see into the ground it gets purified. And claims as it enters the water table. But also using green infrastructure. In other words, natural ways of drainage then putting in concrete. Part of the issue with stormwater runoff is that when the rainwater hits concrete drainage infrastructure or streets, it picks up a lot of toxics elements. Like oil from the cars, fertilizer pesticides and all that goes drains into the water body. And so, the major cause of water pollution incidentally is stormwater runoff. It's not the factory with the pipe as much anymore. And because the automobiles are everywhere. And when the rain hits the road and the water goes into the drain, then we have a pollution issue. We call that non-point. Where we can attribute it to just to one source. Because basically we're all partners in crime if we drive our automobile on every day.

**Dr. Nelson:** So really that green it is important. It is not just having a concrete jungle but having the green space and green plant around it. So that's very interesting. Well do you have any other closing thoughts on equity and sustainable development or anything that you'd like to champion as we go forward?

**Dr. Russell Fricano:** Well, I'd like to go back to norm crumbles. And he questioned who really benefits from public actions sustainable development. And to me really that's the bottom line. And planning is comprehensive. We're supposed to look at the big picture and sustainability is comprehensive too. So, I think you know we have to be proactive in recognizing that certain equity issues exist. And find ways to address them.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, thank you. This has been very interesting, and I probably have 500 more questions in my head, but we'll wrap it up there. Thank you so much for your time and your expertise Dr. Fricano.

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