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Struggling with Sustainability: Academic and Professional Identities as Barriers to Engaging in Education for Sustainability

This paper describes the current state of education for sustainability in professional social work and legal education, considering the nature of academic and professional identity.

Despite significant advances in many areas of higher education, some professional domains remain reluctant or even resistant to incorporating education for sustainability into core curriculum. Social work and law are two areas where some progress is discernable, but where the pace of change appears glacial, particularly when considered in the context of the urgency suggested by the worsening environmental crisis. One explanation for this reluctance may be found in an understanding of the nature of academic and professional identity, and the ways in which such identities may act as conservative and restrictive barriers to change. In this paper, the authors describe the current state of education for sustainability in professional social work and legal education. The concepts of academic and professional identity are then explored and identified as possible sources of resistance to the integration of sustainability into core curriculum. Academic and professional identities are understood as strongly held yet often "invisible" belief systems which may have a significant impact on the nature of higher education. Suggestions are made for ways in which such identity-based resistance may be addressed and overcome.

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Challenges of Sugar Cane Production in Brazil: Human and Social Costs of Ethanol

This paper considers the living and working conditions of seasonal migrant labor that harvests sugar cane in Brazil, arguing that ethanol production is unsustainable, given the human and social costs.

Sugar cane cultivation has long characterized the economies of many Latin American and Caribbean states. Labor has shifted from the enslavement that accompanied sugar production under colonial powers to wage labor, yet in many ways the working conditions have remained similar. Working conditions on Brazilian sugar cane plantations vary widely, but there is ample evidence to conclude that the exploitation of workers is common in this industry. Brazil's northeast has historically been the primary area of sugar cane production. However, desertification and centuries of poor agricultural practices have resulted in diminished soil fertility in this region. This environmental degradation is compounded by the northeast's historical dependence on agricultural production, contributing to high rates of unemployment, and the vast income discrepancy between the northeast and the south. Labor migration from the northeast to the more affluent south is a consequence of these circumstances. This paper considers the living and working conditions of the seasonal migrant labor force that bears most of the responsibility for sugar cane harvesting in the center-south region of Brazil, and argues that ethanol production is unsustainable under the current mode of production, given the human and social challenges.