Opening up the Pandora's Box of Sustainability League Tables of Universities: a Kafkaesque Perspective

David R Jones
Email: drjones@bournemouth.ac.uk
Tel No. 01202 61702

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the institutional impact of sustainability league tables on current university agendas. It focuses on a narrative critique of one such league table, the UK's 'Green League Table' compiled and reported by the student campaigning NGO, 'People & Planet' annually between 2007 and 2013. Through a Kafkaesque perspective, this paper offers the proposition that such league tables could be acting as an institutional hegemonic mechanism for social legitimacy, through the desire by universities to show that environmental issues are effectively under control. Espoused eco-narratives of the 'carbon targets imperative' and 'engagement', can serve as a form of deception, by merely embracing the narrative as a rhetorical device. Moreover, they can serve the exclusive, particularistic self-interests of a growing legion of 'carbon managers', 'sustainability managers' and 'environmental managers', in satisfying the neo-liberal institutional drive from their Vice-Chancellors.

Introduction

Given the pivotal role of higher education in society and the potential for mutual learning (Scholz et al., 2000), higher education has a unique potential to catalyze and/or accelerate a societal transition toward ecological sustainability (Cortese, 2003). However, as Selby and Kagawa (2010) point out, most proponents of ecological sustainability within universities seem to have found a space where they feel they can more or less shrug off the need for such meaningful critical reflection. There has been a preoccupation with the instrumental and pragmatic task of embedding sustainability in institutions and systems, through developing and establishing a formal, rational bureaucratic organization of benchmarks, indicators and checklists; devising skills taxonomies; refining auditing and monitoring tools; drawing up performance league tables (Stibbe 2009). The approach is one of 'roll up your sleeves and start implementing!' (Jickling & Wals, 2008, 6). As Andrew Smith, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) head of estates and sustainable development points out, 'We've got a load of plans and strategies, but what we really need now is delivery' (People & Planet, 2011).

Sustainability league tables are at the forefront of such delivery. The general aim of this paper is to explore the institutional impact of the ever popular UK sustainability performance league tables, the Green League, on current UK university agendas. As Suwartha and Sari (2013) argue, climate change mitigation and campus sustainability has become a major issue of global concern for university leaders. Whilst core indexes like the Times Higher Education Index, the QS-index and the Shanghai Index tend to focus on indicators like 'research output', 'internationalization', 'student evaluations' and 'external research funding', there is an increasing use of separate sustainability rankings and tables to

benchmark and measure sustainability performance within universities. For example, in 2013 more universities than ever before participated in the UK's Green League Table, with a total of 143 providing information to be entered into the rankings. This is particularly so for non-Russell Group universities, as being seen to be sustainable is increasingly being used as a differentiating, competitive factor to attract students within similar teaching-orientated institutions (Dobson, Quilley & Young, 2010). As Dobson, Quilley & Young (2010, 11) point out, 'University managers are very sensitive to league tables; rightly or wrongly they believe that it makes a real difference to an institution's prospects whether it is near the top or near the bottom'. Universities near the top of the table are externally rewarded and thereby legitimized for such actions by having satisfied certain 'sustainability criteria' (no matter well conceived or ill-conceived). Therefore such tables and the criteria within them can institutionally direct sustainability strategy along particular lines. As John Hindley, Manchester Metropolitan University's environmental manager, points out after rising to the top of the 2013 Green League Table: 'The Green League has had a great effect for the whole sector and despite being in effect compulsory, it's exceptionally competitive' (People & Planet, 2013).

The paper thereby critically focuses on this 'Green League Table', compiled by the student campaigning NGO, 'People & Planet'. In 2007, 'People and Planet' ran its first 'Green League' for universities, assessing their environment-sustainability performance across a range of indicators, and then categorizing them as universities categorize student degrees – First, Upper Second, Lower Second, and so on. Since winning the award for the best campaign of the year in 2007 at the British Environment and Media Awards ceremony, the Green League has amassed much publicity, particularly due to the fact that the 'Green League' was published in the popular university weekly newspaper, the Times Higher Education Magazine and since 2011, in the wider circulation of the Guardian Newspaper.

More specifically, this paper explores the institutional impact of the Green League Table over the seven year period, since its inception. As the People & Planet NGO annually audits and widely reports the relative espoused sustainability performance of UK universities, around their own set of indicators, the resultant league tables along with the respective universities' performative response are readily accessible for such comparative and critical narrative analysis over this seven year period. Therefore, this paper's aim is to highlight how the espoused narratives emerging from the People and Planet's league table have impacted on university managers, whose remit is to further the sustainability agenda of their university. It will achieve this by identifying not only the espoused narratives but any excluded narratives enacted by them, within their respective universities. In order to surface the meaning behind these excluded narratives, the literary work of Franz Kafka is reflected upon.

Conceptual Framing: A Narrative, Kafkaesque Perspective

As Tourish and Hargie (2012) highlight, powerful organizational actors, such as the People & Planet NGO, seek to develop legitimate, espoused narratives for its constituent audiences. However, Tourish and Hargie (2012) also highlight that these legitimate narratives could often mask other narrative intentions. These legitimate narratives can thereby operate, through the exclusion principle, by excluding categories of meaning from comprehension and discussion. In other words, those who encode narratives (the People and Planet NGO) and those who decode them (the university funding bodies, the media, university students, management and academics) may register comparisons and differences between domains, but

may also exclude partially or completely other categories of meaning from consideration by reliance on particular narratives.

Conscious use of the exclusion principle in narrative analysis helps us to more attentively seek out points of ambiguity and provide alternate readings that are essential to a fuller understanding of the Green League Table's impact. This requires an understanding of narratives as rhetorical framing devices, where framing requires the communicator to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

In order to unmask the meaning behind any excluded narratives, this paper explicitly draws on Franz Kafka's perspective on bureaucracy. Kafka is the literary author who was interested in all that lies underneath the formal bureaucratic structure which he explored primarily in The Trial, The Castle and In the Penal Colony (Warner, 2007). As McCabe (2013) highlights Kafka is often associated with a bleak, if not totalitarian view of organizations and society. The image that is conjured up when we refer to something as Kafkaesque is one of dark, impenetrable forces of labyrinthine complexity; forces that might rip us from our beds at night without charge or explanation. Yet this sinister impression does little justice to the subtlety of Kafka's work and the way in which his novels provide a counter interpretation to Weber's formal-rational model of bureaucracy. Moreover, Kafka's bottom-up view of bureaucracy captures important dynamics that Weber's more top down formal-rational model does not (Hodson et al., 2013a, 5). As Munro & Huber (2012) argue, Kafka's novels offer an interpretation that undermine the enlightenment myth, such as man's mastery and domination over nature (Adorno, 1997 [1967]), of a world organized according to unambiguous rules of rationality.

Defining features of bureaucracy for Kafka were around contradictory goals, chaos, deceit and the ability of actors to hoard power and exploit others for personal gain. The key point here is that Kafka was able to link together into a coherent whole these various features of bureaucracy viewed individually as deviant or irrational by scholars (see Kafka, 1937).The genius of Kafka's critique of bureaucracy lies not in identifying that such elements exist in formal organizations (although he was among the first to write about them extensively), but rather in the implicit argument that such features are a normal and foundational part of organizational functioning (Hodson et al., 2013b).

In The Trial, Kafka probes the opaqueness and lack of accountability of modern bureaucracies as the protagonist 'K' is accused and eventually executed for a crime that remains unknown. In The Kastle, 'K' is hired as a land surveyor even though no such position exists. His life spirals downward through a series of contacts with ever more powerless and peripheral officials. Finally, in In the Penal Colony, Kafka depicts a cruel execution device that is simultaneously highly complex and in disarray − symbolic of the merger of complexity and dysfunction of bureaucracy so central to his writings.

It is argued here that Kafka is said to speak to our contemporary concerns, such as the allegedly 'foolproof' organizations, including our universities, we daily encounter in the age of the 'audit culture' and how they can constrain or even dominate you. 'Accountability metrics' are given priority over substantive goals, resulting in inefficiency in the attainment of the actual organizational goals (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Merton, 1940; Morrill, 2008). Mock compliance and even flagrant rule breaking often seem pervasive (Hynes and

Prasad, 1997, 606). The most profound failings of bureaucracy more often involve treating rules as façades to cover actual operations (Hodson et al, 2013b). As Warner (2007) argues, Kafka may help us to better resist the sanitized visions of a brave new world that are being imposed on us (Parker, 2003, 11). The brave new world of university sustainability league tables represent part of a contemporary zeitgeist of what cannot be counted does no longer have value; what cannot be tabulated does not have merit. Targets, league tables and assessments now dominate university life. Could Kafka's perspective provide a dystopian insight into this new managerialist, bureaucratic order? Moreover, could the different foundational themes emerging from Kafka's novels offer an interpretation of the excluded, masked narratives emerging from higher education sustainability league tables into universities themselves. As Kalman (2007) reminds us, Kafka pushes the act of interpretation itself into the foreground. In this sense, it is about interpretation, which is not about the one and indivisible truth but about texts (Kalman 2007, 51). In other words, this paper provides an interpretation of interpretations. As Kalman (2007, 57) highlights, it represents an interpretation of the way in which the world around us is interpreted.

More specifically, this paper draws conceptually for this interpretation primarily on the research by McCabe (2013) who proposes two Kafkaesque elements, conformity and particularism. McCabe's central (2013) Kafkaesque conformity element was derived from a critique of early research by Hodson et al. (2013a, 2013b) who emphasized particularism, a climate of uncertainty and fear, abuse of power, chaos and contested goals. Reflecting on the latter elements, McCabe (2013) argued against such a non-conformity sole focus and highlighted that like Weber, Kafka was acutely concerned with conformity whereby through the bureaucratic dynamic, organizations can operate 'without regard for persons' (Weber, 1946, 214). This paper concurs with McCabe (2013, 6) who asserts, 'the darkness of Kafka's vision lies in conformity not nonconformity. Hence he considers what could happen when the formal-rational model is taken to its extreme – when human beings become so distanced from each other that they begin to regard each other as mere cogs in the machine. Both Kafka and Weber shared this fear and yet through his fiction Kafka was able to bring it to life.'

McCabe's other (2013) Kafkaesque particularism element diverges from Weber, who argued that the movement away from patrimonialism and particularism was a defining characteristic of modern formal-rational bureaucracy. For Kafka, in contrast, particularism permeates and persists in organizational relationships as a means of assuring elite control. Kafka highlights that the official meanings of bureaucratic acts are often secondary to private, personal meanings, and actions. From a Kafkan perspective, particularism is not just a sort of impurity − a carryover of traditional authority relations into modern formal-rational settings − but rather is actively reproduced in and through formal bureaucratic procedures themselves. Organizational elites are often cognizant of and complicit in abuses of legitimate power, especially when they privilege particularistic concerns over universalistic ones, including selective enforcement of rules (Marx, 1981, 226; Salin, 2003). Powerful organizational actors can be quite effective in juggling the appearance of compliance and the reality of subterfuge (Wilson et al., 2013).

This paper poses the overarching question of whether such Kafkaesque elements, such as from McCabe (2013) and to a lesser extent Hodson et al (2013a, 2013b), are pertinent for understanding the bureaucratic organization of sustainability league tables, within the university sector. In the context of this paper, the emergent excluded narratives around the sustainability league tables over the 7 year period are compared with the above two Kafkaesque elements to understand if they fit within Kafka's bottom-up, dystopian

perspective on bureaucracy. Therefore, the engagement with Kafka was not unidirectional but was 'more akin to a mutual dialogue' (De Cock and Land, 2005, 518).

This central Kafkaesque unmasking of power and the abuse of power for personal gain thereby follows Ball's (2003, 217) attempt to 'get behind' the seemingly objective, hyper-rational facade of performativity in higher education. Ball (2003) advocates identifying who is it that determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid. He highlights that such critique extends into examining the subjectivities of change and changing subjectivities which are threatened or required or brought about by performativity. In the context of the wider sustainability, ethical agenda, this paper represents to what extent the wider neo-liberal educational policy reforms are now changing the basis for ethical decision-making and moral judgement around sustainability. To what extent is the notion of 'adding value' and the calculative incentive of performance corrupting the embrace of a multiplicity of values and meanings around sustainability? Has the space for the operation of autonomous ethical codes based in a shared moral language been colonized or even closed down? Similarly, to what extent does acquiring the performative information necessary for perfect control and managerial security consume 'so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvement inputs' (Elliot 1996, 15)? As Shore and Wright (1999, 570) argue, 'to be audited, an organization must actively transform itself into an auditable commodity'.

Methodological Framing

In order to reflect upon the league table changes over 7 years, from 8 criteria in 2007 to 13 criteria in 2013 (see Appendix for latest criteria), overarching espoused narrative threads were identified at different points in time. Such emergent framing of narrative threads is manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements (Tourish & Hargie, 2012). Framing is important because an 'audience's interpretation of and reaction to a discourse can be shaped by the frame in which that information is viewed' (Benoit, 2001, 72). Moreover, through an understanding of the espoused narrative framing, the hidden, masked excluded narratives can be surfaced. In the spirit of Kafka, as Tourish and Hargie (2012) argue, pertinent narratives could unmask complex, ambiguous relationships, intentions and impacts to multiple organizational actors. This paper thereby concurs with Tourish and Hargie (2012) who argue that context appears to be crucial, and merits greater attention in organizationally situated narrative analysis. Therefore, a pertinent narrative analysis would need to acknowledge and account for the various actors' inputs and responses to such league tables. Following the Kafkaesque bottom-up, emergent bureaucratic perspective, this paper acknowledges the relationships between the People and Planet NGO, university managers, and other relevant actors, such as academics involved in the sustainability field. It particularly focuses on unmasking any excluded narratives enacted by university managers, who share the responsibility for advancing the sustainability agenda within their universities.

These narratives are specifically drawn from five universities which have consistently been awarded a 1st class award from the People and Planet's League Table. In order to gain the trust from all respondents within these universities, it was crucial to grant them anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, the universities concerned will be denoted by University A,B,C,D & E within this paper. These five universities were identified specifically because of a particular espoused a year on year commitment from senior management to

advancement within the Green League Table, with a view to realizing their ecological sustainability commitment. This commitment was often supported by an active interest from the VCs of these institutions, at different points in time. Therefore, these universities predominantly fit into HEFCE's (2008) third phase of change (out of a possibility of four phases) towards sustainability, where there is typically significant involvement of senior management, even the VC, resulting in a senior sponsor with real ownership. Furthermore, in this phase a core steering group is seen to be taking a firmer, more directive role, with respect to estates management and wider institutional interests. This phase sees the introduction of a full sustainability estates policy and practice, and the extensive use of quantified targets, with a system of monitoring and the use of sanctions. Put in HEFCE's (2008, 63) words, 'there is still a tendency, however, to favour a self-monitoring system, based on getting operating units to see that 'properly understood' it is in their own best interests to fall in line.'

In order to best represent the type of university which has received a 1st class award, it was decided to choose four teaching-led institutions and one Russell Group institution. It is pertinent to note that teaching-led universities have always predominated within this 1st class award group since the league tables began in 2007. Whilst these five universities have steering groups with the remit of integrating research, teaching and operations together, they were also chosen because these steering groups are led by an influential middle manager within the Estates Management function, such as a sustainability manager, carbon manager etc. They oversee the maintenance of sustainability targets, through a management systems approach and an advocacy of several sustainability declarations, charters and league tables. By identifying key informants from the middle management level, it was felt that they could express their views on how and why sustainability is being implemented and how it is being received within their institutions. Exploratory face-to-face interviews were duly conducted, recorded and transcribed around these general themes, along with the perceived role sustainability league tables play and has played in the respective institution's sustainability journey. Each interview with the chosen key informant was around one and half hours in length and was typically conducted in three 30 minute stages, in order to secure trust and rapport over a number of months. It must be noted that the latter stages became much more semi-structured in nature as the author used probing questions around the different elements of the league tables to ascertain the specific opinions of the respondents.

In terms of data analysis, this research follows Jäger (2001) and Leitch and Palmer (2010) who outline an approach consistent with critical discourse analysis. This methodology also conforms with the approach to metaphor analysis outlined by Cornelissen (2006), Amernic, Craig and Tourish (2007) and Tourish & Hargie (2012). The pertinent texts which were analysed here were around the annual Green League Tables over the course of seven years. The seven league tables, along with their associated notes, were read and re-read, compared and contrasted with the intent of identifying any emergent, espoused narrative and its excluded narrative coded pair. At this stage, an academic colleague also independently and repeatedly read the text to help determine the depth and extent of the various narratives within the text. The final agreed narrative pair was mapped and examples of each were compiled. This process involved a word by word, line by line and paragraph by paragraph reading and re-reading of the text (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009), followed by the enumeration of fresh narrative categories, representing clear instances of narratives that did not fit previously existing categories. This task was accomplished by the author laying the narrative categories and examples next to one another, amalgamating some categories and examples, and circulating this fresh analysis for further elaboration to his academic colleague. The process was repeated on four further occasions, until agreement was reached on the

major narrative pair, as well as integrating the perspectives of the primary actors involved in the input and output of the league tables i.e. the above respondents.

Opening Pandora's Box: the Espoused and Excluded Green Eco-Narratives Emerging from the Green League Table

The Eco-narrative Mask of the 'Carbon Targets Imperative': 2007-Present

The most consistently espoused narrative thread running throughout the league tables over the seven years has been around the primacy of the 'carbon targets imperative': the immediacy of setting and promising to meet certain short-term and long-term carbon targets. As the U.K.'s 'People and Planet' 2011 guide (Green League 2011, 17) indicates, 'the biggest emphasis' in assessing the environmental performance of universities is around carbon reduction, in urgently mitigating the consequences of climate change. Purely in terms of specific sections dedicated to 'carbon', it is pertinent to note the much higher relative weighting given to the explicit categories of 'carbon management' and 'carbon reduction' within the Green League Table, (scoring a collective maximum of 17 points up to 2012 and 16 points in 2013 out of a total of 70 possible points around 13 categories). Such focused attention representing almost 25% of the whole points system also combines with the overarching 'carbon targets imperative' narrative broadly interwoven within the other categories of the league table.

In order to understand the reason why the 'carbon target imperative' narrative focus is so paramount to the People and Planet NGO and to the respective Directors of Estates, Energy Managers, Sustainability Managers etc. within universities (which currently represent the primary external collective actor and voice in shaping the Green League Table methodology, through what is called the Green League Oversight Group), we need to look at the wider dominant institutional pressures which league tables and universities are operating within. Many NGOs, environmentalists and neo-conservatives, exhort that society need to change their ways, and often rely on dystopic, fear communications: Unless we change our lifestyles, societal collapse is right around the corner. This fits into the perspective which Newton (2002) describes as, 'technicist kitsch' and the evangelic imploration that things 'must' change because, ecologically speaking, they 'have to', or the uncritical application of existing organizational change rationality such as around culture change prescriptions. The compounding problem is the rhetoric of many environmental commentators, such as Krebs (2008), who simplistically say that we are living in a century in which the Economic World View will be superseded by the Ecological World View.

It is proposed here that the Green League draws on the immediacy and 'common-sense', doomsday imperative of the climate change agenda. This is in contrast to embracing the sustainability narrative around the more uncertain, contested and complex nature of wider inherent social, environmental and economic stakeholder transitional conflicts and longer term, systemic trans-disciplinary engagement challenges. This paper concurs with Clarke et al. (2012) and asks the question of, to what extent such league tables, along with many western governments and institutions, such as universities, their funding bodies (like HEFCE in England) and non-profit institutions like the Carbon Trust are complicit in focusing on knee-jerk, short-term, top-down, technology focused carbon management plans, targets and performance. As the U.K.'s 'People and Planet' guide (Green League 2011, 11) warn us,

A steep and annual reduction in global carbon emissions is required to avert catastrophic global climate destabilization and keep global warming increases to below 2 degrees…..The UK Government expects all sectors of society to contribute to the 80% reductions by 2050 enshrined in the Climate Change Act (2008) and Climate Change (Scotland) Act (2009).Carbon management is therefore central to the future of environmental management in universities, as recognized by the joint publication by HEFCE, Universities UK and GuildHE's of a Carbon Reduction Strategy (2010) which set a sector-wide carbon reduction target for the first time. Although this strategy applies only to English institutions, similar requirements are in place for institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, for example through the Universities and Colleges Climate Change Commitment for Scotland (UCCCfS) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)…..It rewards those universities with ambitious-short term targets as these are crucial to reducing the impact of cumulative emissions and getting an institution on track for a longer-term transition to low-carbon operations.

In responding to such a key carbon targets imperative narrative around the Green League Table, it is pertinent to note that university management, are focusing much of their attention towards ticking the relevant league table boxes by drawing upon 'Estates Management Statistics' data. Looking more closely at the short–term, retrospective and technical orientation here, it is also pertinent to note that such carbon management statistics only measure energy, electricity and heating data from the previous academic year. Such measurements, initially questionable from accuracy, comparability and availability perspectives (People & Planet, 2012), are spurious to say the least, not only for the reason that prior to 2012/13 indirect emissions (called Scope 3 emissions) from procurement, travel and flying were not included, but more crucially such statistics are silent in assessing the future wider stakeholder capability and engagement to reduce such emissions i.e. the carbon performance of universities does not even factor in the People and Planet's own limited stakeholder category of 'staff and student engagement' (see below). It could be no surprise that league tables and their university follow-ship have focused on prescriptive, short-term techno-fixes and provision, around such transport, waste initiatives as teleconferencing, recycling bins, printing quotas, car sharing schemes, without any critical reflections around taking account of the various long-term, pluralistic, conflicting stakeholder attitudes, emotions, behavior and lifestyles.

In line with this techno-fix approach, universities typically set up discreet 'environment' working groups, following league table, compartmentalized criteria, such as 'the waste group', 'energy group', 'transport group', 'management systems group' and the increasingly popular 'carbon management group' who measure, implement, monitor and control 'singular', 'real' issues, without analyzing whether such management actually impacts upon the social and cultural context and respective embodied practices of universities.

Just reflecting upon the fact that average emissions per head across the UK university sector has actually increased only adds weight to this critique around the primary piecemeal, techno-fixes of the 'carbon targets imperative' narrative. Similarly, in 2012, the sector's carbon footprint as a whole was still 0.22 % higher than its 2005 baseline (People & Planet 2012).

An example of this espoused narrative enacted within universities is Plymouth University which has been consistently the highest ranked overall in the UK in the Green League Table: No. 2 in 2007, No. 2 in 2008, No.6 in 2009, No.1 in 2010, No. 4 in 2011 and

No. 2 in 2012 and 2013 in the 'Green League Table'. Plymouth University aims to become carbon neutral by 2030 and reduce emissions from its own operations by 25% by 2015. They argue that over 60% of the carbon savings will come from what they call an 'Intelligent Energy Control Centre' that analyses & controls all the energy consuming devices and systems in their public and private buildings. In 2012 they claimed to have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 18% on 2005 levels, despite a large increase in student numbers over the same period. The university identified over 40 carbon reduction projects which they claim to make an estimated £2.3 million in financial savings by 2015 (People & Planet, 2012).

Universities such as Plymouth are being increasingly driven by short-term technological, systemized fixes and controls with an explicit financial incentive. National funding body policies such as HEFCE are formally linking capital funding with published Carbon Management Plans with short-term targets (actively supported by institutions like the Carbon Trust), which are in turn institutionally legitimized through the Green League Table. Institutions would have been penalised financially if they did not prepare such a Carbon Management Plan by 2011. HEFCE, through the Capital Investment Framework, also supported one-off expenditures in institutions based on the institutions reducing normalized emissions. For example, the Carbon Investment Framework has imposed penalties on four institutions for failing to reduce normalised emissions such as Leeds, LSE, Sheffield and UCL during the most recent round of funding.

The question remains of whether such an institutional incentive and legitimization only furthers the wider neo-liberal agendas of universities, as university managers are rewarded for such narrow instrumental, economic-driven, exclusive managerialism, favoring corporate interests? It is pertinent to note that Plymouth University's explicit strategic aim is to become 'the enterprise university, truly "business-engaging" and delivering outstanding economic, social and cultural benefits from our intellectual capital' (University of Plymouth, 2013).

The Excluded Conformity Kafkaesque Narrative of the Carbon Targets Imperative

Following this paper's narrative perspective, could the above urgency of mitigating universities' negative impact on climate change through 'knee-jerk', quick fix, centralized uncritical solutions, provide a space for other more masked narratives to surface within universities. Drawing from the interviews with sustainability and carbon managers and officers with the five universities drawn from the top of the Green League, a different Kafkaesque abuse of power sub-text was evident. As several of the university managers highlighted the 'carbon targets imperative' was actually the prime motive for further control over the various actors across their universities:

> Climate change is here and now and we need enough of a response to affect real change. We all know what we need to do so let's do it (Carbon Manager, University D).

> If we don't do something drastic now we will suffer the drastic consequences of our lack of courage. We don't know what these drastic consequences will be exactly but I for one am not prepared to stop this drive for a few academics who like the sound of their own voice (Carbon officer, University B)

> When I suggested that surely a central part of a university sustainability strategy is the fostering of student activism, I was immediately collectively lambasted for such an 'anti-

sustainability philosophy…. Surely the point …. is that we want the students and staff to do what we have decided is sustainable rather than questioning this (Academic, University A).

Look…. we all share this problem which needs to be fixed urgently and we should push ahead rather than discussing issues endlessly. I do not understand we can't design a carbon strategy and implement this as it is in the interests of all of us to not worry about the 'nitty gritty' of so-called democracy (Sustainability Manager, University E).

Could the espoused Carbon Targets Imperative narrative be enacting a Kafkaesque distanced and fearful response from university managers, where the ends justifies the means, to focus on the conformity to the authority of the management system around league tables, rather than focus on a wider pluralistic, contested dialogue? Could an example from Kafka's novels illuminate this question? According to McDaniel (1979), Kafka's novel The Castle, illuminates 'a world where means-ends rationality has been extended to its ultimate degree: where all relationships are functional and mechanistic and impersonal – and thus absurd' (McDaniel, 1979, 368). As McCabe (2013) highlights, The Castle explores how 'respect' for authority is 'instilled into you in all sorts of ways' (Kafka, 1926, 164), which develops an acquiescence on the part of the villagers and those who serve the Castle. The villagers accept the hierarchical structure of society which serves to divide and individualize them. They describe themselves as 'lesser folk', who 'stick to the rules' (Kafka, 1926, 13). The Castle and its authorities, appear to be all knowing with unlimited power, for one is merely a 'tool' (Kafka,1926, 104) of an 'impregnable' and 'indestructible' (Kafka, 1926, 104) distant authority that one learns to 'love'. In this way, Kafka could equally be talking about the league tables here, where these university managers have learned to be 'employees' (Jacques, 1996) and to think and act 'as a representative of the power and prestige of the entire structure' (Merton, 1940, 566) of these league tables.

Furthermore, more than ever before, university senior managers are thus embracing the sustainability league table agenda as many top-down decisions can now draw on the unquestionable legitimacy of the climate change imperative. The fear and uncertainty of the climate imperative is prioritized, rather than embrace the chaotic, contested nature of wider stakeholder involvement, participation and legitimacy (Hodson et al., 2013a). This concurs with Holmqvist (2009), who similarly highlights the possibility that clothing an activity with a seemingly benevolent, legitimizing narrative may be a mechanism of further abuse of power & self-serving corporate rationality over an organization's environment and its various actors. Furthermore, following Hodson et al. (2013a) argument, Weber's vision of formal-rational bureaucracy, in this league table context, serves mainly as a legitimizing smokescreen for, and a means of carrying out, more rapacious behavior (Jackman, 2003).

Some worrying signs from the university managers within this research highlight the autocratic nature of such potential behaviors:

We need to meet the targets, so let's get the proverbial stick out rather than pursue an endless game of offering carrots to people who are not vaguely interested in changing their behaviour (Sustainability Director, University C).

This is all about behavioural change in work and at home. So over the next year my team will certainly be watching out for any member of staff who is not taking this seriously (Sustainability Manager, University A).

Reflecting on the extremes of such rapacious behavior, Kafka's short story, In the Penal Colony may prove illuminating. Here, Kafka explores the relationship between an execution machine and the officer responsible for it (Kafka, 1961/2007). The 'torture device' works by 'slowly' carving 'the words' (Lowy, 1997, 127), which represent the person's crime, deeper and deeper into their flesh until the person dies. The officer appears more preoccupied with explaining to a passing traveler 'the procedure' (Kafka, 1961/2007, 169) and the 'the process' (Kafka, 1961/2007, 169) of the execution whilst actually carrying out an actual execution. It becomes evident that the officer embodies what Weber (1968) termed 'formal rationality', for the 'means' of the execution are more important to him than the 'substantive rationality' or 'end', of executing someone. He is more interested in the workings of the machine, its operation and preservation, than the person who is being executed (McCabe, 2013). The corollary is where league tables become the formal rationality even though the wider sustainability 'substantial rationality' agenda may or may not be furthered.

Similarly, what is the impact on those wider university actors who are on the receiving end of such masked decision making around sustainability? Referring back to Kafka, the officer becomes annoyed when the traveler is 'distracted by the condemned man' (Kafka, 1961/2007, 158). When the traveler vomits he even retorts that 'the machine is being treated like a cowshed' (Kafka, 1961/2007, 163), highlighting a disregard for the condemned man. However, it must be said that Kafka also illustrates that bureaucratic conformity is not only calamitous for those on the front line but also for those who instigate discipline. When the officer finds out that the machine is to be decommissioned, he allows himself to be killed by it: 'He identifies with the machine to such an extent that he has become the machine and so, if the machine must perish, so must he' (McCabe, 2013, 8).

Despite this, Kafka does provide some hope here. As Hodson et al. (2012b) points out, the officer is concerned that 'others appear to have the ear of the new Commandant and are intriguing against his prize device' (Hodson et al., 2012b, 263). Is it possible that wider university actors could provide a significant resistance to such league table narratives? In 2010, in response to several critiques around the lack of inclusion and plurality of the league tables, The People and Planet instigated a review of its criteria in which the paper will now focus upon.

The Eco-narrative Mask of Engagement: 2010-Present.

In the context of the above critique, it is pertinent to note that, ironically, the league tables and the increasingly compliant and cooperative universities are increasingly using the language and espoused narrative of engagement. This is despite maintaining their top-down, techno-centered, set of quick fixes. In fact, the People and Planet league table 2010 included, for the first time since its inception in 2007, an added criteria of staff and student engagement but dealt with this issue as an add on to the other 10 criteria at the time (People & Planet, 2010).

A pertinent reflection around such an inclusion is that universities could score a maximum of 3 points, compared to a maximum of 8 points for an inclusion of a management system such as ISO14001, EMAS, Green Dragon and EcoCampus. As a review of the league table highlighted, engagement represented… 'only 4% of the overall marks available in the Green League, the impact on institution scores has been limited….. given the tighter bunching of institutions about the mean, these few points will have affected placings in the

League table' (Brite Green, 2010). This was indeed beneficial, as many universities unsurprisingly scored 2 out of 3 points if they achieved the following 4 minimal actions:

- University supports an annual 'Go Green Week' or 'Environment Week'
- Inter-halls energy saving competitions (e.g. 'Student Switch Off')
- Inter-halls recycling competitions
- Provision of land for student / staff food-growing projects

It is proposed that this situation of paying lip service to engagement had not changed in 2011, as although the number of actions had slightly increased by 1, the maximum number of points for engagement was still 3 points. This means that universities could effectively make some easy pickings from this list, as explained above, and still effectively score 2 out of the meager 3 points by achieving 5 actions. It is pertinent to note that in 2013, the weighting for this category increased by 1 point but relatively speaking this still represents a slight incremental change to the overall weighting.

Such measures miss much of the contested, chaotic dynamic and situational quality of engagement (Bryson et al. 2010). As Bryson et al. (2010) argue, the measures here actually obscure the participant voice with no opportunity for a perspective that does not fit the predefined questions. As Kahu (2013) points out, blending such institutional practices with an apparent link to student behaviour has resulted in a lack of clear distinction between the these factors that supposedly influence engagement, the measurement of engagement itself, and the consequences of engagement. This apparent link with student and staff behaviour is highlighted within the rationale for identifying the different initiatives under the engagement category, within the Green League Table 2013,

> Universities that play an active role in encouraging and engaging students and staff in sustainable behavior change will be able to make their transition to a low-carbon, lower-energy future much more smoothly, cheaply and quickly. Furthermore, behavior and values learnt whilst at university have long-lasting impacts on graduates throughout their lives. (People & Planet, 2013)

However, much of the focus is on institutional practices such as an annual Environment Week; whilst these may be important influences on engagement, they do not represent the psychological state of engagement (Wefald and Downey 2009). By focusing only on elements that the institution can control, a wide range of other explanatory variables are excluded, such as student motivation, expectations and emotions. As Kahu (2013) argues, a clearer distinction would be to recognise that what is considered to be the process is not engagement, instead it is a cluster of factors that may or may not influence student engagement (usually the more immediate institutional factors). Moreover, it ignores the distal consequences of student engagement such as active citizenship (Zepke, Leach and Butler, 2010): the students' ability to live successfully in the world and have a strong sense of self, as a lens in their conceptual organiser of student engagement.

The Excluded Particularistic Kafkaesque Narrative of Engagement

This final section follows McMahon and Portelli's (2004, 60) critique that popular discourses of engagement are too narrowly focused on the procedural, as defined by management, with their particularist interests, and so 'fail to address substantive ethical and political issues'. Authors such as Knight (2005) argue strongly against what they see as the

imposition of a specific value set, behaviour or 'political orthodoxy' on students and staff. In this context, legitimized initiatives such as The Environment Week could act as part of a benevolent 'engagement' narrative, masking what Mann (2001) asserts as alienating neo-liberal socio-cultural conditions and power imbalances within universities.

Furthermore, if a university was 'savvy' about this and wished to make a spurious correlation between its carbon management performance and engagement, it could certainly endeavor to tick the easy, yet legitimized checklist boxes. It is certainly pertinent to note that a report on the 2010 league table highlighted that there was a strong correlation between the points gained in this area and overall performance, with all but one of the first class institutions gaining 3 points (Brite, 2010). The report moves on to assert this very connection '…..this illustrates the importance of grassroots support and behavioral change to the success of environmental initiatives on campus' (Brite, 2010, 5). Of course, purely from a procedural critique perspective, such measures do not even remotely measure grassroots support and behavior change and the short term success of many environmental initiatives could be due to technological, eco-efficiency reasons.

In order to understand the Kafkaesque aspects of the Engagement narrative, the following represent insights into the practices of several of the university sustainability committee managers:

> We held a specific meeting to make sure that we scored highly on inconsequential engagement measures so we claimed all the points. I know this is not really the point but can you blame us as my VC will be on my back if we do not rise up the league table this year (Sustainability Manager, University A).

> Let's face it, you can score highly and do nothing really…… we have all the systems in place but clearly they are not working. What this engagement category does for us is to signal that people are doing things which give the appearance of behavioural change but in reality I am not sure whether we are disengaging our staff and students (Carbon Manager, University D).

> What these league tables do is to prop up careers of myself and some of the estates staff but I sometimes wonder whether this is all a game and it takes us in exactly the opposite direction to what is in the interests of the university and the planet for that matter (Carbon Officer, University B).

> Talk about being disillusioned, what is happening is so wrong….. People and Planet and such league tables do not know what they are doing. My manager the other day asked me if I could look through the different categories of the league table and contact everyone on the committee to tick these damned boxes….. I was tempted to say that surely this is not the point but of course I didn't (Sustainability Director, University C).

Whilst the signed up universities are duly ticking the metaphorical engagement boxes of such league tables (which their university managers have played a key role in shaping), the proposition here is that they are simultaneously enacting a Kafkaesque particularistic, self-serving control institutional narrative, excluded from this tick box disclosure. The engagement narrative could be seen in contrast to the distanced and fear-inducing Carbon Targets Imperative, as a seemingly pluralist, inclusive, more human-centred embrace but this appears to be a masked, conditional, tick-box act, dependent upon satisfying particularistic career interests of these university managers. Put in another way, the appearance of such an enabling bureaucracy often reflects only symbolic changes from the more coercive form of

bureaucracy (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005). While university actors may enjoy greater involvement in deciding the details of specific, piecemeal institutional engagement initiatives, such practices are unlikely to represent a fundamental change in the underlying goals or dynamics that guide strategic action or bureaucratic decision making (Vallas, 2006, 2007).

Furthermore, such control narratives within universities could in fact compound any institutional inequities, promoted by neo-liberalism, as highlighted by Acker et al. (2012) and Van den Brink & Benschop (2012). Put in another way, engagement and inclusion may be espoused but the institutional impact of such espoused narratives are disengagement and exclusion within universities due to the priorities placed on other league table narratives such as carbon management within an overarching espoused narrative of continuous improvement of league table position.

In order to illustrate the extreme consequences of such particularistic actions, Kafka's novel of The Trial (Kafka, 1925) is reflected upon. Kafka writes about 'K', whose life is threatened, when warders come to his home to arrest him. However, the warders refuse to say what 'K' is charged with, which haunts him throughout the book. Kafka then introduces a character called the 'The Whipper', who has been instructed to flog the warders who first arrested 'K'. The reason for this is that we learn that 'K' has 'complained about' and has 'reported' them to the authorities (Kafka, 1925, 66–67). We then find out that 'K' surprisingly discovers the whipper in a junk room in the bank where he works, who is about to flog the warders. 'K's' particularistic, career concerns surface here when we learn of his anxiety around not informing the bank of his arrest. Similarly, the warders who are about to be whipped, complain to 'K', because they 'had every prospect of advancement and would surely have become whippers' (Kafka, 1925, 67) themselves, had he not reported them. They are not concerned with the suffering of those they might have whipped but only with the threat to their 'careers' (McCabe, 2013).

Continuing with this theme, whilst we discover that 'K' is trying to persuade the whipper to end the flogging, we then realise that this benevolence is short-lived. When one of the warders screams out loudly as he is being whipped. 'K' immediately stops trying to persuade him. He gives up trying only as he realises his personal position or career is threatened. We then see a different side to 'K' giving one of the warders 'a shove, not hard, but hard enough for him to fall down unconscious, clawing at the ground with his hands by reflex; he still did not avoid being hit; the rod still found him on the floor; the tip of the rod swang regularly up and down while he rolled to and fro under its blows' (Kafka, 1925, 70). Furthermore, we also find out that in the following day, when 'K' went back to the junk room he discovered the whipper still flogging the warders. When the warders, 'began to wail and call out "Mr. K.!" K. slammed the door immediately shut, and even thumped on it with his fists as if that would shut it all the firmer' (Kafka, 1925, 70).

What this example illustrates is a warning signal to universities around the way in which particularistic concerns override benevolent intentions within a league table context. Similarly, Milne et al (2009) argue, organizations construct themselves as sustainable or becoming (more) sustainable, while still engaging in pragmatic tradeoffs in their own interest. Vice chancellors, estate managers and so-called 'carbon officers' as well as 'sustainability managers', based almost exclusively within estates departments, are the real winners of such an agenda as they can appear to still conduct their ecological sermon from their office pulpit, whilst achieving their own career tick box criteria. Furthermore, as stated previously many in the environmental lobby appear happy with and legitimize this situation, as this sermon

appears to justify their own judgment around those actors which appear to resist any dialogue with such rhetoric.

Ironically, this self-serving 'ecological agenda' in fact serves an economic, quick-fix, piecemeal agenda which at best reduces un-sustainability. The importance of such an economic outcome is illustrated by the environmental officer, Grant Anderson, of Nottingham Trent University, ranked number 1 in the Green League 2011, when he describes in glowing terms, how their chief financial and operations manager, Stephen Jackson, as 'like a pit bull' in finding funding for projects that save energy and money. As Gray et al. (1999) argue, performance management is most likely to encourage a search for tactical improvements which result in short-term improvements.

Moreover, it is particularly pertinent to this deconstruction to take a closer look at the so-called, 'Enterprise University', Plymouth University again as it has consistently scored highly around the engagement category within the Green League Table whilst consistently representing the highest overall 'performer' in the Green League Table up to the present day. In 2010, the 'Centre for Sustainable Futures' at Plymouth University, one of the leading government funded (through HEFCE) Centers of Teaching and Learning published an ethnographic research report, highlighting that their respondents 'unanimously reported that at present, students felt somewhat excluded from contributing to a dialogue about sustainability at Plymouth' (Cotton, Dyer & Winter 2010, 2). Ironically, this finding is in the context of an explicit 2006 aim of the university to embed sustainability throughout the university curriculum, community, culture and campus (University of Plymouth, 2006). As they also have been accredited with an international environmental management system standard of ISO140001 and have scored top marks in carbon management and performance, along with other externally awarded, institutional rewards, such as gaining silver status for corporate social responsibility within a university scheme called 'Universities that Count', Plymouth University's self-confessed lack of wider engagement and involvement of one of their key stakeholders, represents a concern not only for the leading universities, such as Plymouth (Cotton et al., 2009), but more importantly 'The Green League' in providing what DEFRA (2005) call an essential institutional context for education for sustainable development to become transformative.

Discussion & Conclusions

It is proposed here that a Kafkaesque perspective provides a way of drawing out excluded meaning from the rhetoric around university league tables for sustainability. It is specifically proposed that the benevolent, ecological, espoused narrative of carbon targets imperative has added, to a lesser extent, the benevolent, social, espoused narrative of engagement to its legitimizing function, within the opening up and reporting of the league tables by People and Planet.

The role of 'sustainability committees' within universities becomes a pursuit of ticking as many boxes as possible so they can rise up the Green League Table and thereby portray themselves as moving towards a 'sustainable university' or the increasingly popular 'carbon-neutral'. So as Dobson, Quilley & Young (2010, 11) argue, while there may be issues regarding People and Planet's criteria and survey methodology, universities seem less bothered about the research niceties and more bothered about league table position. Those that are successful make a big play of the fact, and those that aren't keep very quiet about it. The 'reputation factor' for sustainability issues seems to be very high, so Dobson, Quilley &

Young (2010, 11) find a wide range of institutions proclaiming their success – in the belief that it really will make a difference to how they are perceived, particularly by students. This focus on students could explain the specific attraction of the People and Planet NGO to university 'sustainability' managers, as it is pertinent to note that the NGO is student-led. As Gabriel (2005) points out, managers increasingly are turning their sights away from the employees and other actors and towards the consumers whose whims, desires and fantasies they strive to stimulate. In this context, the People and Planet league table, representing a measure of the extent to which universities can highlight that they are satisfying these desires and whims of students around sustainability, becomes university management's preoccupation. Furthermore, within this pursuit, if universities can manage the illusion and appearance for student actors that more boxes have been ticked around these desires per year, then this becomes a powerful underlying institutional legitimacy for the sustainability agenda for the university. Seen through a different neo-liberal critique, this paper represents a reflection on whether the relationship between the student and university in a sustainability context has been diminished through such league tables, to one where the main preoccupation is for a few managerial, university technocrats to appear to satisfy and 'engage' the student as a customer. This is in contrast to embracing the complexity and pluralistic citizenship voice of students amongst the many other relatively silent actors.

As one other silent (or silenced) actor, a senior academic colleague (an organizational psychologist) who did actually become involved 'albeit at arms length' on his university's 'sustainability committee' recalled,

I represented a visible, token academic gesture (Academic, University A).

In the context of developing a Kafkaesque perspective to counter the bureaucratic popularity of the sustainability league tables, it is pertinent to note that carbon emissions are actually still increasing for universities as a whole. A sector-wide target calls for 43% decrease in emissions from 2005 levels by 2020, but at 63% of universities in the tables they've actually increased. The average increase per university is 7.4%, with rises of more than 50% recorded at 9 institutions and total emissions from 139 institutions have risen by 3.9% between 2005 and 2010. All this is despite the fact that their capital funding, in England at least, is now linked to the reductions they can achieve against sector targets. Even People and Planet admit the results were 'incredibly worrying' and suggested that, unless there is a rapid turnaround, the sector would not achieve its commitment to cut emissions by 43% by 2020 (People & Planet 2013). It should also be noted that HEFCE is moving from being a university regulator and funder to becoming a 'champion of the student'. As a result, the future of directly linked funding and emission reduction is in doubt, with wider connotations for the sector as a result of limited impetus to meet targets in 2020 (Robinson, Kemp & Williams, 2014).

In order place these findings into perspective, it must be noted that although higher education has serious problems with meeting carbon reduction targets, it is important to reflect that the public sector overall needs to improve. For the whole public sector, it is only showing a year-on-year CO_2 reduction of 0.4%, which represents around 8% of UK total carbon dioxide emissions. Within this sector, in terms of the year-on-year change in CO_2 emissions, central government and local authorities are leading the way with reductions of 1.3% and 1.5% respectively. Health has a reduction of 0.3%. Whilst further, higher education and schools show the only public sector increases, higher education is certainly not the worst with an increase of 0.7% for schools. Further and higher education show an increase of 0.1%. However, in terms of relative total CO_2 emissions, further and higher education has the least

with 11% of the total, health has the largest with 31% and schools come next with 23% of the total. Local authorities are responsible for 18% of emissions and central government 15% (Bryan, Cohen, & Stepan, 2012). Reflecting on the latter statistics, it is pertinent to highlight that health and schools offer the most scope for reduction in absolute levels of CO_2 emissions. However, as a leading role-model in our society, higher education has pivotal role to play in reversing the overall trend of increasing carbon emissions. They possess the differentiated ability to influence governance at the local, national and international level as a result of their population size, scope and affluence (Sedlacek, 2013).To this end it certainly remains to be seen if such targets will be accomplished overall within the set time frame to 2020 (Robinson, Kemp & Williams, 2014).

Finally and most crucially what this paper points out is that whilst reducing emissions is important, it cannot be at the expense of the academic merits they provide (Williams et al., 2012). Sustainability is much more than meeting carbon targets and is very much reliant on the fundamental organizing processes, such as greater active participation in decision-making (Savageau, 2013) and the wider academic outcomes from universities. As the chief executive of Universities UK, Nicola Dandridge, argues,'it's important to focus also on universities' wider and invaluable contribution to the green agenda in terms of their environment-related research and teaching' (People and Planet, 2011). Education for Sustainable Development is considered critical for altering values and behaviours of students and staff to move towards sustainable universities (Lozano, 2006), especially in the context of HEI carbon management (Barth et al., 2013; Williams and Kemp, 2013).

Focusing on the historical exclusion of sustainability research within the Green League, it is pertinent to note that newer, teaching-focused institutions tend to be at the top, while research-intensive Russell Group members are hardly to be seen in the higher rankings. Louise Hazan, People and Planet's climate change campaign and communication manager, argues, 'For non-Russell Group universities, being green is definitely a selling point and a way to attract students. . . . [T]hat's not the case for Russell Group institutions.' None made it into the top 20 in 2010. Only five of the Russell Group members received an Upper Second, 10 received a Lower Second, and three—Oxford, Sheffield, and Liverpool—managed only Third. Cardiff was deemed to have failed. Similarly in 2011, Cardiff University gained only 130th position in the Green League Table, whilst being recognized as a world-renowned sustainability research profile and reputation.

In 2013, only two Russell Group members had managed to break into the top 20, with Exeter placed 13th and Newcastle 15th, both receiving firsts. With London School of Economics at 22nd and Bristol at 23rd, these were the only other two firsts. Moreover, six were awarded fails or thirds: Oxford (fail), and Cambridge, Imperial College London, Liverpool, Warwick, and York (all thirds). People and Planet itself admits that the weightings for this category are relatively low.

Rather than to reflect that the League Tables may not be effectively incentivizing and engaging with Russell Group universities, Louise Hazan dismissively comments on the reasons for these findings, 'in terms of policy, I think it could be said, for some institutions, to come down to a certain arrogance that this is not a priority for them' (People and Planet, 2011). In response Wendy Piatt, the Russell Group's Director General remarked:

> Environmental concerns are taken very seriously. . . . [A]ll our universities treat their
> environmental obligations, policies and goals as high priorities. Research in science and

engineering, particularly, involves a relatively high level of energy consumption and important work in the environment field is being carried out at Russell Group institutions. Researchers are working on new low carbon energy technologies at Imperial College London, for example, the development of greener aircraft at Bristol and catalyzing cleaner fuels at Oxford. Such initiatives are crucial if the UK is to remain a world-leader in global efforts to deal with climate change. (People and Planet, 2011)

Clearly, for these institutions the wider sustainability impact around a high level of environmental research does not seem to correlate with the present criteria and weightings of the league tables. Seen from this perspective, such league tables, no matter how well intentioned, provide a dangerous signal to universities that they could pay lip service to systemic stakeholder engagement, such as around the research agenda. Meanwhile, strategy, policy, and resources are directed to a top-down, short-term set of technical carbon fixes that are rewarded and legitimized by the student campaigning group.

It is proposed here that the primary focus on the continuously improving carbon instrumental, whilst paying lip service to engagement within the People and Planet's Green League Table, has provided a legitimacy for universities to sidestep the ongoing debate and discussion on first principles and root values. It has obfuscated understandings, Kafkaesque chaos and contested sustainability goals and tensions and conceding impetus in the field to the neoliberal marketplace ideology now tacitly embedded in international agendas of universities.

In summary, rather than pushing ahead with delivery around satisfying league table criteria, this paper concurs with Dey and Steyaert (2006) and argues that there is much merit in moving away from the performative consequences of the techno-, systemized, short term fixes of such emerging areas as carbon management plans and targets. As Weick (1979) puts it more bluntly, 'Stamp out utility!' In fact, what might seem useful today can become the obstacle to tomorrow's success. As Nietzsche (1974, 301), argues, the notion of utility is 'the most fatal stupidity by which we shall one day be ruined'.

Such utility rules in and of themselves may simply create more contradictions and opportunities for discretion, interpretation, and selective enforcement (Evans and Harris, 2004). So what are the implications of such propositions for universities in their pursuit of rising up sustainability league tables. For Hodson et al. (2013a) the problem is not, an absence of rules as much as it is a lack of accountability (McGoey, 2007). They argue that successfully regulating organizations may require a certain degree of internal democracy, not just externally imposed rules (Braithwaite, 2008). Moreover, following Hodson et al. 's (2013a) argument, more proximate representative democracy within universities may be required to avoid the particularism, chaos, abuse, manipulation, and even fear emerging from such sustainability league tables. By taking Gouldner's (1954) call for participatory bureaucracy seriously, could the enthusiasm for such league tables be re-directed towards empowering university actors and sustained internal debate about competing organizational goals (Hodson et al., 2013a). As Ball (2003, 226) highlights, in the context of the wider policy technologies of market, management and performativity, we need to find a way of re-opening a space for the autonomous, ethical self. It is hoped that on-going research, by the author, around generative metaphors for sustainability in universities could endeavour to fill such a space.

Rather than dismiss league tables all together, could the Green League possibly offer future spaces for such an autonomous, ethical self? Maybe the planned major review of the

Green League Table in 2014 will take account of the recognized wider critique: 'certain critiques of the Green League methodology persist and we know there is more to do ensure it is measuring each and every institution according to its own merits in a fair and flexible way' (People and Planet, 2013). Furthermore, could other examples of such league tables which are found across the world, such as the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS), in the U.S.A, offer some signposts for the Green League. For example STARS recognizes much wider engagement within open space and natural area management for such ethical reflection (AASHE, 2012). However, in order to answer the question of whether such changes are enough to facilitate more critical reflection for the university managers within this paper, it remains to be seen. A closer look at their responses highlight that for many of these managers, they felt that it was the tick box process itself which corrupted their behavior and shared a hope to move away from becoming such an audited commodity themselves. The question emerges of how to restore university managers' autonomous ethical selves in the context of developing a sustainable campus. Further research has been around exploring how universities can provide restorative bio-cultural spaces on campus, which could facilitate reflection amongst the university managers around the wider aesthetic, emotional systemic notions of sustainability, both for themselves and wider actors. One crucial overarching value for these managers was around furthering ecological sustainability and their willingness to affect change in line with this, albeit in a narrow particularistic fashion. If a wider agenda for sustainability was embraced from the VC of these universities, could these 'whippers', in Kafkaesque terms, become more aware of the means-ends relationship in terms of the impact any practice has on their wider particularistic selves and wider actors. In this way, conformity is acknowledged and paradoxically particularism is embraced, not in narrow 'employee', 'career' terms but one in which celebrates the ambiguity of their multiple, fractured, dynamic identities as citizens, family members and their community selves.

In Kafka's account of the 'whipper', 'K' is appalled at the prospect of people being whipped. He knows both emotionally and ethically that he must act to prevent this and yet he remains selfishly preoccupied with securing his job and career. This reminds us of our contemporary academic lives in which many of us are preoccupied with our own academic jobs and careers. We are inept at balancing family versus career; publishing versus teaching; individual advancement versus a concern for others. These existential tensions are explored in one of Kafka's (1961/2007) other publications, 'The Burrow', which explores the constant, competing anxieties of an isolated, mole-like creature around the need to both fortify his burrow to ensure his personal safety and his longing to connect with others (McCabe, 2013). Similarly to Wright and Horst (2013), this research has in itself initiated a wider ethical dialogue around sustainability, particularly with one VC and three of the university managers within this research. This has in turn resulted in much deeper reflective, inclusive change processes within their respective universities around sustainability. In all three of these universities, league tables are now seen in context much more, with greater emphasis placed on how sustainability could provide an opportunity for individual, organizational and societal change. Could further research around the above restorative bio-cultural spaces on and off campus assist both management and academics in at least embracing their pluralistic selves and thereby reflect on the wider pluralistic sustainability journey, yet to be realized.

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Appendix

Current 2013 Criteria & associated points system for the UK's Green League Table

- Environmental Policy: 3 points

- Environmental Staffing: 8 points

- Environmental Auditing: 8 points

- Ethical Investment: 3 points

- Carbon Management: 6 points

- Ethical Procurement & Fair Trade: 2 points

- Sustainable Food: 3 points

- Student & Staff Engagement: 4 points

- Education & Learning: 3 points

- Renewable Energy: 6 points

- Waste & Recycling: 8 points

- Carbon Reduction: 10 points

- Waste Reduction: 6 points