



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Leah Gibbons

Will defend her prospectus

**Regenerative Community Development: A Framework and
Assessment Tool for Co-creating Thriving Living Systems**

Sustainability research and action in communities should integrate social, cultural, spiritual, ecological, and geophysical components and their temporal and spatial dynamics. Regenerative development offers such potential as it considers humans and the rest of life as an autopoietic system. Regenerative development aims to grow capacities in whole living systems to manifest increasingly higher levels of health and well-being for all life, catalyzing shifts towards vitality and abundance across scales. Although regenerative development has been implemented for more than 20 years, it has been developed largely by practitioners. Its frameworks, methods, and tools are nascent and relatively insular. Until recently, no empirical scientific research studies had been published on regenerative development processes and outcomes. Further, regenerative development has been applied mostly at small scales or focusing on particular aspects of larger projects.

My dissertation attempts to fill gaps between empirical evidence and practitioner experience by investigating how regenerative development can be integrated better with scientific knowledge, methods, and tools. I draw on the supporting fields of sustainability, ecology, and design to explore regenerative development's role in creating transformational change in communities at all scales. My research integrates mixed-method natural and social science research in three complementary studies. The first is an integrative review that contextualizes regenerative development within the fields of sustainability, sustainable design and development, and ecology by identifying its conceptual elements and introducing a regenerative landscape development paradigm. The second study builds upon the first by inductively integrating existing regenerative development and sustainable community design and development practices and theory to create a regenerative community development framework and assessment tool. The third study pilots the tool in applied case studies in Tempe, Arizona and Honolulu, Hawai'i, analyzing

communities' regenerative potential, assessing existing sustainability projects for regenerative characteristics, and conducting workshops to assess to what extent and why the tool creates regenerative outcomes. Expected results of workshops include participants' worldviews shifting toward more holistic ones; enhanced capabilities to identify relationships, flows, and connectedness in living systems; and enhanced capabilities to envision and manifest vital and abundant living systems. Aims are to further evolve the tool in transdisciplinary longitudinal studies that can generate knowledge on the long-term process of regenerative development and catalyze additional and larger-scale regenerative development projects throughout communities, cities, and regions.

Wednesday, June 27, 2018
2:00 PM
Wrigley Hall, Room 481

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Scott Cloutier, chair
Dr. Paul Coseo
Dr. Dan Childers