



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Natalia Rodríguez**

Will defend her prospectus

**Understanding and Working with Sustainability Perceptions**

To achieve a sustainable future, it is essential to not only address external/physical sustainability challenges through technological means but also to analyze how individuals internalize and willingly engage in sustainable lifestyles. Sustainability is continuously redefined and reframed by local and international actors who may emphasize a limited scope or worldview of sustainability practices, solutions, and behaviors to maintain a socio-economic status quo, without promoting transformative socio-economic changes. The approach might be confusing to many individuals, who are constantly bombarded by calls to live sustainably; this confusion likely promotes detrimental attitudes and weak sustainability behaviors and lifestyles. Thus, to achieve a sustainable future, it is critical to possess a holistic understanding of the field including the history of the ideas and processes that shaped it and our perceptions and attitudes toward it. I suggest that, once we understand the past and acknowledge the present, we will be better equipped to promote participation in sustainability practices and lifestyles. For this dissertation research, I propose a holistic analysis of the field of sustainability drawing on a mixed-method research approach in three complementary studies.

The first is an integrative review exploring the emergence and evolution of sustainability temporally and spatially, highlighting the gap between public perception and sustainability knowledge. In the second study, I will conduct an empirical analysis of the current knowledge, perceptions of, and attitudes toward sustainability amongst the general public at the national and local level. Using these data, I will develop a sustainability assessment tool adapted from constructs of sustainable behavior (e.g., green citizen) to categorize and analyze the factors that motivate or limit individuals from engaging in sustainable lifestyles. The final paper will involve the development and study of practices to promote sustainable lifestyle changes that simultaneously

promote well-being/happiness with members of two local communities. The expected outcomes of this study include (1) a holistic understanding of the origins of the sustainability, (2) identification of factors that limit or promote sustainable lifestyles, and (3) a grounded assessment tool and applied practices to promote holistic sustainable living amongst individuals.

November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
9:00 AM  
Wrigley Hall, Room 323

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:  
Scott Cloutier, Chair  
Joshua MacFadyen, Member  
Hanna Breetz, Member