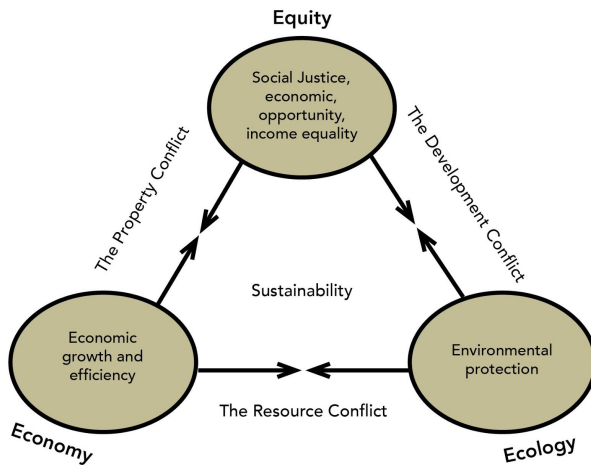


Sustainability's Tension with Environmental Justice



The ecotopian perspective of sustainability received an influential critique in the mid-nineties. One urban planner scholar offered a revisionist view of sustainability “since its current formulation romanticises our past and is too vaguely holistic” according to Campbell (1996, p. 296). He instead conceptualized a triangle with three corners representing economic, ecological, and equity aims (see figure below). Instead of a harmonious kumbaya convergence, three dynamic conflicts instead shape sustainability planning, policy, and outcomes.

First, the resource conflict pits economic growth and efficiency against environmental protection. This often is conceived as the jobs versus environment dichotomy. The second division is between economic growth and social justice. Often in urban settings, this tension emerges in conflicts over displacement gentrification where a neighborhood experiences an influx of more affluent and typically white residents. This raises rents and leads to the displacement of less affluent and typically non-white residents. Third, a development conflict divides environmental protection and social justice. Campbell associates this dynamic with environmental racism and others with equitable development as the main challenge for achieving EJ.