



# The impact of cultural settings on sustainability narratives: an explorative study with the Indian diaspora

Claudia Speidel<sup>1</sup>

Received: 8 October 2023 / Accepted: 1 August 2024  
© The Author(s) 2024

## Abstract

Achieving sustainable futures is complicated by the diverse understandings and prioritisations of sustainability issues and practices. A reason for the lack of common ground is the fact that sustainability is a global project which is primarily driven by the North, rather than one that consistently integrates local and cultural diversity. Research has shown that sustainability expectancies of Southern civic society are lacking in the considerations of crucial sustainability frameworks. This investigation focuses on the expectancies of a community with Southern cultural origins and identities—the Indian diaspora in Australia. The unique bicultural positioning of diasporas and their growing influence on the cultural scaffolds of societies, make their assessment of sustainability distinctly relevant and insightful. The objective of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the Australian Indian diaspora's understanding of sustainability, their prioritisation of diverse sustainability concerns, and the cultural underpinnings of these perceptions and preferences. Seven focus groups including components of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique and personal storytelling, were conducted in Sydney, Australia from September to October 2022. This study demonstrates that two distinct sustainability narratives direct the meaning of sustainability—one has a global application and environmental focus, the other a localised Southern application and social focus. Cultural context is critical in directing the adoption of either narrative by mobilising relevant cultural social identities and promoting their resonance. Education emerges as a strategy to reframe the sustainability narrative and create a more balanced sustainability discourse.

**Keywords** North/South divide · Sustainable development goals · Sustainability narrative · Culture · Diaspora · Social identity

---

✉ Claudia Speidel  
claudia.speidel@student.uts.edu.au

<sup>1</sup> Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney, Ultimo, NSW, Australia

## 1 Introduction

The pledge to ‘leave no one behind’ is central to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda approved by all United Nations (UN) member states in 2015. Still, only 12% of the SDGs are projected to meet their targets at the halfway mark of the agenda, leaving over 50% of the world behind (Economic and Social Council 2023). The latest UN SDGs progress report thus makes an urgent appeal to increased multilateralism, commitment, financing, and collaborative action (United Nations 2023). However, these calls rely on a cohesive vision and sound understanding of the various pathways and processes appropriate for all relevant stakeholders to reach a sustainable future. Therein lies the challenge.

Sustainability practices and processes are inevitably embedded in, and dependent on, a larger, more intricate ecosystem (Kramer and Pfitzer 2016; Thompson and Norris 2021). Fundamentally, people are members of families, communities, and nations. Similarly, governments and businesses operate in local, regional, and global contexts. That is, no one unit operates in isolation. As the extended societal networks become progressively more complex and dynamic conditions surface, it becomes increasingly imperative for governments, businesses, and citizens to work collaboratively for a sustainable future (Kramer and Pfitzer 2016).

Integral to sustainable practices is the widely adopted Brundtland definition which stipulates that sustainable development must address current needs without jeopardising the needs of future generations (WCED 1987). However, differing interpretations and prioritisations of sustainability issues make finding that necessary common ground for sustainable practices difficult. Interpretations of sustainable practice vary widely, from, say driving an electric car, to driving a car with low fuel consumption, to not driving a car at all. There are also multiple parameters through which sustainability is viewed—society, economy, and environment. In turn, deciding if one parameter should take precedence and which one it should be is not straightforward. While some may argue that food security trumps biodiversity, others might contend that affordable clean energy eclipses the need for food. Clearly, these are challenging decisions to make, and their outcomes depend on the specific settings in which they are made.

Not only is trading off one parameter over the other extremely difficult, but it is also governed by contrasting stakeholder interests, needs, and contexts (Mensah 2019). The interests of an oil company’s employees are likely to clash with those of environmental activists. Similarly, the needs and preoccupations of nations of the South (often referred to as the Global South) are likely to differ from those of the North (often referred to as the Global North)<sup>1</sup> (Idowu and Vertigans 2021). As such, the most likely explanation for the sustainability discord is the fact that sustainable development is a global project, rather than one that readily integrates local and cultural differences (Byrch et al. 2007; Kopfmüller 2015; Mensah 2019; Nurse 2006; Parodi 2015; Soini and Birkeland 2014). Moreover, this global approach is strongly driven by Western, Judeo-Christian and/or secularist and scientific ideologies (Nurse 2006; Parodi 2015; Purvis et al. 2019; Tulloch 2014). This,

---

<sup>1</sup> The division between the developed nations of the North and the developing nations of the South was introduced in the North–South: A Programme for Survival report issued by the Commission on International Development Issues in 1980. The report aimed to identify measures to lessen the inequalities between the two hemispheres and used socio-economic descriptors such as life expectancy, income, and education to highlight the differences in development.

in turn, raises concerns about its applicability and validity across cultural boundaries (Kopfmüller 2015; Parodi 2015), whereby many scholars argue that cultural relevance is essential to the achievement of sustainability (Nurse 2006; Parodi 2015).

### 1.1 The importance of culture in the sustainability narrative

Culture is considered a cornerstone of societal values and processes (Mironenko and Sorokin 2018). In his seminal work *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams describes culture as a tell-tale system embedded in activities, relations, and institutions of everyday life—in essence, a “whole way of life”. (Williams, 1958 as cited in Bérubé, 2006, p. 78). Mironenko and Sorokin (2018) expand on this description and suggest that culture is a multidimensional phenomenon that incorporates both external, social, and collective processes, as well as internal, individual, and psychic processes. As such, culture acts as both a conduit and driver of shared meanings, beliefs, and antecedents (Schwartz et al. 2010); it frames individuals’ social identities and creates a systematic tendency of thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Cleveland and Xu 2019). Yariv (2002) further explains this skew with peoples’ inherent desire for consistency. To cope with uncertainty, people interpret new information in ways that confirm their existing beliefs and then act accordingly. The more culturally relevant the information, the more likely it will inspire a desired action (Chabay 2015). That said, culture in today’s global world is less essentialist, static, and bound by origin and geography. Rather, it is fluid and constantly shifting identities (Vahed 2007), making it increasingly multi-faceted and complex to navigate. Regardless of these complexities, folding cultural sensitivities and belief systems into the sustainability narrative is crucial for sustainable development, as people who can relate to new information, are more motivated to engage with it (Chabay 2015).

### 1.2 The globalised Western sustainability perspective and the North–South divide

Research shows that sustainability concerns and efforts differ between the developed economies of the North and the developing economies of the South (Blowfield and Frynas 2005; Idowu and Vertigans 2021). Developed economies include those of North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Developing economies comprise all of Africa, Latin America (including the Caribbean), most of Asia and Oceania (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2022). Many argue, that while Northern actors are preoccupied with environmental concerns, the South is primarily focused on socio-economic issues such as poverty and gender inequalities (Barkemeyer 2011; Ward and Fox 2002; Yazdani and Dola 2013). That said, public expectancies of the South are remarkably absent in the considerations of sustainability frameworks (Barkemeyer 2011; Sénit and Biermann 2021). A study investigating the inclusion level of the world’s poorest civil societies at the SDGs negotiations showed that these groups were both underrepresented and misrepresented in the process (Sénit and Biermann 2021). The study conducted by Sénit and Biermann (2021) found that only 26% of the civil society contributions made at the Major Group hearings of the SDG negotiations were representations from developing countries, even though they account for 83% of the global population. Notably, only 3% of the interventions were made by Brazil, China, India, and South Africa combined, although these four countries comprise 40% of the global population. This includes 42% of those living under the US\$1.90 poverty threshold. In contrast, 73% of the representatives were from countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

which account for only 17% of the global population. Moreover, the study found that the processes favoured civic organisations such as international, Northern-based NGOs, as well as English speakers, who are literate, have access to the internet, and time to spare, i.e., the Northern middle class.

The global aspirations of frameworks like the SDGs agenda are thus criticised as devoid of the realities of the most destitute in the South, limiting the effectiveness of the agenda for those it is meant to serve the most (Esquivel and Sweetman 2016; Struckmann 2018; Yazdani and Dola 2013). Indeed, Southern countries have been most vulnerable to this collective inefficacy (Economic and Social Council 2023). Some attribute the challenges of the SDG framework to its holistic logic. That is, the goals aim to complement each other, rather than stand alone, generating an interdependent yet flexible connectedness. While this correlation may result in synergistic efficiencies, wherein achieving one goal may contribute to the progress of another, it may also lead to trade-offs whereby the pursuit of one goal jeopardises or stalls another. (Barbier and Burgess 2017; Breuer et al. 2019; Mensah 2019) These trade-offs can lead to frictions of prioritisations amongst key stakeholder groups, such as between actors of the North and South. Therefore, it is arguable that an increased involvement of Southern actors is imperative to overcome the Northern bias in sustainable development (Barkemeyer 2011; S nit and Biermann 2021). This research takes this approach and is focused on one community with Southern origins and identities: members of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

### 1.3 Diasporas shaping society's new cultural scaffolds

There is broad scholarly agreement that the term 'diaspora' has shifted from its classic reference to Jewish populations forced to disperse in exile towards a metaphorical portrayal of people's identities (Budarick 2014; Safran 1991). In other words, the term no longer represents a strictly typological or categorical designation but has evolved to describe a social process and condition (Alexander 2017; Anthias 1998; Brubaker 2017; Budarick 2014). This more recent understanding of diaspora points to a model of acculturation, in line with today's global and pluralistic societies. It underscores how subcultures can assimilate to new (or host) cultures in some respects but can maintain their cultural identities in others (Bhatia and Ram 2009; Brubaker 2005; Mathur 2012; Schwartz et al. 2010), thereby forging a cultural plurality (Faist 2010; Hall 1994; Sheffer 2003) and/or hybrid identity. This hybrid identity or simultaneous "same and otherness" is not built on an inflexible, national essence, but rather on a malleable narrative of memories and history that transforms with time (Hall 1994) and space. The fluidity of the diasporic cultural identity, in turn, "de-territorialises" their social identities and enables identities that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (Sheffer 2003). Therefore, diasporans not only serve as a bridge between the homeland and the host land (Pradhan and Mohapatra 2020), but also between the local and the global (Cohen 2008), and between groups, societies and states (Sheffer 2003).

The postmodern notion of diaspora presents it as an active condition driven by cultural shifts and contexts (Anthias 1998; Brubaker 2017; Budarick 2014). The bi-cultural, polycentric nature of a diaspora arguably leads to a unique directive of shared meanings, values, and behaviours that are different to other cultures, including that of the diasporan home and host land. Moreover, the polycentricity expands the diasporic position beyond the limits of both the home and host land. So, while the Australian Indian diaspora will inevitably share cultural characteristics with almost any other Indian diaspora (e.g., in Canada, Fiji or the United Kingdom), it will also and necessarily exhibit

tendencies and/or inflections specific to its own history and evolution. As such, the contemporary Indian diaspora, including the Indian diaspora in Australia, is characterised by its diversity (Cohen 2008; Dufoix 2008; Varghese 2018).

Its members speak various languages, practice different religions, engage in disparate professions and range from being long-standing populations in, for example, Fiji and South Africa, to burgeoning, relatively new populations in Canada and Australia. Reducing the Indian diaspora into one national, ethnic or religious group is thus impossible. However, their choices and practices are rooted in India (Vahed 2007), instilling a common “Indian-ness” (Dufoix 2008; Pradhan and Mohapatra 2020) with ties that transcend India’s national boundaries (Ho et al. 2015).

The Indian diaspora is currently the largest in the world, with an estimated thirty million non-resident Indians (NRIs), overseas citizens of India (OCIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs) living across 146 countries (Edmond 2020; Pradhan and Mohapatra 2020; Varghese 2018). In Australia, it is currently the second-largest and fastest-growing diaspora (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). This development is reflective of a shift from the cautious and reserved Indo-Australian relations during the fifty years following India’s independence to more open and amicable relations since the turn of the Millennium (Jaishankar 2020; Varghese 2018).

Further, Australia’s skilled migration policies since the mid-1970s have shaped the socio-demographic profile of its Indian diaspora (Baas 2018). India is Australia’s most sizable source of skilled migrants and the second most important source of international students (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). In line with the socio-demographic profiles of other industrialised countries, such as Canada and the US, most of the Indian Australian diaspora is highly educated, earns higher than median incomes, and holds professional and managerial positions in companies or public offices (Pradhan and Mohapatra 2020; Singh 2017; Varghese 2018). It is this elite position that allows its members to shape social, political, and industrial ideas, behaviours, and decision-making. Indeed, the Indian diaspora’s formidable influence on society is considered reflective of Joseph Nye’s notion of soft power, i.e., the capacity to persuade through cultural values and policies rather than through force and coercion (Kapur 2010; Mohapatra and Tripathi 2021; Pradhan and Mohapatra 2020; Singh 2017). Therefore, investigating the Australian Indian diaspora’s perspective on sustainability not only presents a distinctive and highly pertinent cultural evaluation that helps to contextualise the global sustainability narrative on a localised, yet multi-national scale, but it also serves as a compelling model of inquiry that can be applied to other regions and diasporas.

The purpose of this explorative inquiry is thus to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings and priorities that a community with Southern cultural origins and identities associates with sustainability. Key here is the need to foster more integration of cultural sensitivities into the sustainability narrative and thereby help to improve and amplify the resonance of sustainability messaging. Specifically, this paper will address the following questions: (1) What meaning does the Indian Australian diaspora associate with sustainability?; (2) How does the Indian Australian diaspora prioritise sustainability concerns as they are framed in the SDGs?; and (3) How do cultural norms and diasporic, social identities underpin and direct sustainability perceptions and preferences? Considering the Indian diaspora’s diversity and complexity, the basis of this study’s participant profile is the Indian birthplace.

The next section of this article introduces the study’s methodology, followed by the findings, discussion, and conclusions.

## 2 Methodology

Given the explorative nature of this inquiry, a qualitative research approach using a thematic analysis was implemented. Originating in the social sciences, qualitative research is commonly used in situations where phenomena still require the identification of key variables, and the subject matters and/or sample groups are still understudied (Creswell 2014). It serves to discover the meanings and experiences people attribute to phenomena, whereby the data is presented in text, visuals or sounds rather than ordinal values (Guest et al. 2013). This data becomes representative of the social, cultural, and physical backdrop in which experiences occur. It offers a deeper understanding of the collective discourse derived from individual narratives and/or actions. As such, qualitative research allows for multiple realities and no unanimous or totalising reality is sought (Guest et al. 2013).

Distinct to qualitative research is the inductive, iterative, and flexible quality that is integral to its data generation and sample size determination. The loosely organised generation of data, the open-ended questioning, and the inductive probing of participants' responses (e.g., "Can you explain a bit more why you feel this way?") fosters a richly detailed description of participants' opinions, experiences, and understandings. Hence, qualitative research is particularly useful for delving deeply into psychological processes such as motives, values, and behaviours, as well as explaining causal connections (Guest et al. 2013). Moreover, qualitative data offers more knowledge of context by unveiling the logic of the participants' thinking patterns in their own voices (Kelle 2006; Leathwood et al. 2007). Importantly, it provides the researcher with an understanding of context-specific, social, and cultural phenomena particular to a community (e.g., the Indian diaspora), to which they (as non-members of the group) would otherwise not have access (Kelle 2006).

While the flexible nature of qualitative research may be detrimental to reliability in its conventional sense, it arguably enhances its face validity (Guest et al. 2013). During the research process, the researcher can not only reformulate questions to ensure that they are fully understood by the participants but can also confirm that the participants' feedback was understood correctly. In addition, the triangulation of diverse data sources is considered a strategy that increases the integrity and authenticity of qualitative research findings (Creswell 2014). In this study, the research problem was addressed through various means of input, including metaphorical associations, individual photo stories, group activities, and conversation, all of which enhanced the density and validity of the findings. This approach also helped mitigate response biases, such as social desirability bias or interviewer bias (Bispo Júnior 2022). Interviewer bias can occur when respondents perceive the interviewer to be in a position of authority (Bispo Júnior 2022). To minimise the perception of authority, the researcher participated in the same introductory process as the respondents did. The researcher also acknowledged the participants as the experts of the discussion, creating both a respectful and relaxed environment. Furthermore, the discussions progressed from general questions to more specific ones, enabling a sense of trust and confidence in the respondents (Bispo Júnior 2022).

### 2.1 Thematic analysis

The adaptable character of qualitative research extends to the analysis of the data, whereby the analytical process occurs concurrently with the collection process (Creswell 2014). Researchers organically build on learnings made during one component of the exploration

to guide the direction of the ones that follow. In other words, they play an active role in the analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017) using both inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell 2014). Thematic analysis (TA) is a popular method used to establish patterns of meaning, i.e., themes that are relevant to a research problem. These themes become foundational for the identification and interpretation of features that are central to the data (Clarke and Braun 2017). Given the intention of this inquiry is to explore underlying, latent drivers in a socio-cultural context, this TA was conducted within a constructionist framework.

According to Clarke and Braun (2017), TA offers systematic procedures and review processes (e.g., first collating codes into themes and then checking if identified themes and codes relate) that lead to more rigour in the analysis. The TA applied in this study thus adopted the six-step procedure proposed by Clarke and Braun (2017). Following the collection of the raw data (audio recordings, participants' visual contributions and the researcher's journal and field notes), the data was first organised and prepared for analysis. Audio recordings were transcribed, visual contributions were labelled, and the journal and field notes were typed and synthesised. All data was read carefully and evaluated manually to get a more comprehensive impression of outcomes. Subsequently, emerging patterns relating to the research questions were noted in the margins of the transcripts and then transferred as codes into the qualitative software tool Nvivo. Next, the codes were reassessed, defined, and clustered as themes in a summarising codebook. The themes were then reviewed in conjunction with the codes and interrelated by generating a mind map. Table 1 shows a synthesis of the key themes, their related codes, the number of references relevant to the codes, and the number and identification of the groups that made the references. Finally, the meanings of the data relative to the research topic were evaluated and then converted into a report.

## 2.2 Research participants and sample size

A total of seven mini-focus groups (i.e., dyads and triads) were held in Sydney over six weeks in the spring of 2022. Participants were aged between 23 and 36 years and were either enrolled in or had completed an Australian tertiary degree. Five of the groups were comprised of first-generation, Indian-born individuals who were residing in Australia. Two groups, comprised of second and third-generation Australians, served as a control. Second-generation Australians had one parent born in Australia and one parent born in a country from the Global North to maintain the Northern perspective. The objective of the control group was to improve the ability to isolate the impact of the Indian culture and diasporic social identity on the perceptions of sustainability and the SDGs prioritisation.

The Indian groups were divided into groups of new migrants (i.e., Australian settlement within the last seven months) and more settled migrants (i.e., settlement between five to 20 years ago). This group segregation served to highlight potential differences regarding the saliency of the diasporic identity and the impact of the acculturation process. Three of the groups were mixed-gender, four were single-gender, and four groups were made up of friendship groups (i.e., people who knew each other before attending the groups).

The total sample involved 17 participants (five Australians, including three females and two males, and twelve Indians, including seven females and five males), spread across seven relatively homogenous groups. The size of this purposive, non-probability sample was based on a general rule which holds that theoretical saturation (i.e., the point at which little new information is generated through an increase in sample size) is generally achieved with six to twelve participants and/or as few as three focus groups per population (Guest

**Table 1** Synthesis of Thematic Analysis

Themes / Codes	Descriptions of Participant Response	Number of groups, <i>n</i> , (Group ID)	Reference Frequency, <i>n</i>
Environmental understanding dominates			
In balance with nature	Creating a better balance between human developments and nature. An equitable give and take. Reducing human impact on the environment and preserving nature	7 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	32
Linked to nature	Instant associations with sounds of nature: birds singing, waterfalls, "voices of an ecosystem", absence of manmade noise, and smells of fresh, clean air without pollution	6 (1,2,3,4,5,6)	12
Preservation	Preventing the harm of the environment, using the earth's resources wisely to prevent their depletion and to ensure their longevity	6 (2,3,4,5,6,7)	18
Waste management	Waste and managing the disposal of it, is one of the biggest issues. Too much waste is being generated which could be avoided, reduced, recycled. It is a contribution that everyone can make. Three R's a pervasive mantra	6 (1,2,3,4,6,7)	30
Longevity / supporting future generations	Sustainability is about instilling practices that help perpetuate life and the environment for the future	6 (1,2,3,5,6,7)	25
Southern setting introduces new sustainability perspectives			
Fulfilling basic needs	The satisfaction of physiological human needs (food, water, shelter, health) is not accomplished in many parts of the world but is a prerequisite for human survival. Because it is a prerequisite for survival it must be a sustainability priority	7 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	34
North/South divide	Because sustainability issues differ between the North and the South, so does the prioritisation of solving those issues, e.g., basic needs vs clean energy. Sustainable practices are dependent on institutional infrastructure e.g., sanitation systems, and cultural foundations e.g., packaging. Not all countries are/have contributed to the sustainability crisis equally	7 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	32
Education as steppingstone	Education as a prerequisite to understanding and supporting sustainability, as well to a brighter future for the individual, e.g., equality for girls and lower socio-economic groups	7 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	29
Global vs local	Sustainable development must be practicable on a worldwide scale. Different countries have different priorities and needs. Addressing sustainability on a local level is relevant from a social sustainability point of view, but environmental sustainability has a global effect	7 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	26



**Table 1** (continued)

Themes / Codes	Descriptions of Participant Response	Number of groups, <i>n<sub>i</sub></i> (Group ID)	Reference Frequency, <i>n</i>
Economic sustainability	Whilst the circular economy is important for sustainability (connected to waste), economic growth can slow the pursuit of sustainability. It can be a support tool for sustainability but is less important than the other pillars. It seems a Western priority	6 (1,2,4,5,6,7)	22
Prioritising between environmental and social dimensions is problematic	The Earth / climate is the basis of life, the crux of the problem. Environmental issues are irreversible and urgent. Climate is a global issue & includes the developed world. Environmental issues are top of mind because of the prevailing language around sustainability	4 (1,2,4,7)	25
The planet must be the priority	The existence of people is the foundation for sustainability. Human survival and the satisfaction of basic needs is paramount. Social justice is a fundamental human right and seems more actionable	6 (1,2,3,4,5,6)	19
People come first	A Western construct that cannot be globalized. Gender equality is not crucial for survival and can be achieved through other goals. Issues of gender inequality are unfamiliar	4 (3,4,5,7)	16
Gender equality not a priority	Connection to diaspora is affected by time of settlement; the longer people have been settled the weaker the connection. Settled Indians don't seek the connection. New arrivals either feel culturally different to the diaspora or see diaspora as replacement family	4 (3,4,5,7)	14
Indian diasporic identity is complicated	India's socio-economic, linguistic, and religious diversity hampers the Indian connectivity, leading to alternate affinities based on region, city, religion, socio-economic position	3 (3,5,7)	13
Time of settlement affects connection with diaspora	Despite India's diversity and the disagreements with certain cultural aspects, being Indian remains integral to their person	3 (3,4,7)	7
Indian diversity can make connection harder			
Underlying Indianness remains			

Groups 1 & 2 = Australian control groups, Groups 3 & 4 = Indian-born participants settled less than one year ago, Group 5 = Indian-born participants, mixed settlement times, Groups 6 & 7 = Indian-born participants settled 5 + years ago.

et al. 2013). This saturation point was supported by the fact that the study aimed at offering deeper, big-picture insights across a relatively homogenous sample, rather than establishing the intricacies and differences within a heterogeneous sample (Guest et al. 2013). In addition, the use of a semi-structured discussion guide and the triangulation of diverse data sources (e.g., metaphorical associations, individual photo stories, and group activities) further contributed to the necessary understanding of the issues at this point.

The sample was recruited through social media posts on Sydney-based Indian community and university Facebook pages, advertising flyers displayed in central locations such as food courts, and snowballing. The objective of the purposive sampling method was to select participants who were central to the subject of investigation and, therefore, able to offer meaningful information (Guest et al. 2013). In addition, the recruitment strategies also served to mitigate social desirability and self-selection bias. Social desirability bias is caused by a respondent's tendency, either conscious or unconscious, to provide responses that may seem socially desirable but are inaccurate (Zikmund et al. 2014). Socially sensitive research topics (e.g., income levels), or involve entrenched social norms (e.g., sustainability) run the risk of a social desirability bias (Bispo Júnior 2022). However, the relative homogeneity of the groups (age, gender, time of settlement, type of profession) and inclusion of friendship groups enabled a sense of commonality and familiarity, increasing the likelihood of more authentic responses (Bispo Júnior 2022). Equally, the inclusion of friendship groups reduced the presentation of self-selection bias. Self-selection bias occurs when participants choose to participate in research because they have strong feelings and/or opinions about a topic (Zikmund et al. 2014). The friends of participants who joined the groups agreed to do so because of their friendship rather than their values in relation to the topic.

### 2.3 Research data collection

The data was generated using seven 75-min, guided mini-focus groups. Focus groups are regarded especially useful for subjects involving shared values and collective standards, such as cultural norms (Guest et al. 2013), and were thus ideal for this study. In addition, the unsolicited and unexpected thought processes that can be stimulated by the group dynamics (Acocella 2012) were considered beneficial given the latitude of the topic of investigation.

Mini-focus groups (i.e., dyads and triads) were implemented because (1) detailed explanations and narratives were sought, (2) the recruitment of the newly arrived migrants was deemed more difficult, and (3) to ensure the psychological well-being of participants (Guest et al. 2013), particularly of the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants.

Components of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) were integrated into the group discussion. In this technique, the use of visual, metaphorical imagery relevant to the topic under investigation serves as a foundation of the discussion. The visual material is collected by respondents before the groups meet and, therefore, promotes the expression of their personal stories (Coulter et al. 2001). Hence, it helps uncover deep thought processes and emotive connections without potential biases (e.g., social desirability) created by the researcher and other participants (Coulter et al. 2001). In this study, the visual contributions were also considered a potential support tool for the CALD migrants, whose first language was not English. In addition to the self-provided stimulus, the researcher introduced 25 visual representations of the individual SDGs, each symbolising one of the five Ps, (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships) in one form or

another and in an Indian context. In this way, the sustainability context was placed into an Indian environment, showing, for example, solar panels in an Indian village, an Indian rain forest, an Indian father with his young daughter and son in school uniform, an Indian cityscape (including business high-rises as a backdrop to a slum area), an Indian agrarian female scientist and Indian businesspeople shaking hands in agreement.

The group procedure was outlined by a semi-structured discussion guide. The discussions were organised around three key sections: (1) the general understanding of sustainability and the participants' individual sustainability stories, (2) the laddering of sustainability stories following the inclusion of an Indian context, and (3) sustainability prioritisations.

In the first section, participants were asked to introduce themselves, create metaphorical sensory connections with the concept of sustainability (e.g., What does sustainability smell like? Sound like?) and define the concept in basic terms. They were also asked to explain the collection of visual material they had posted on a sharing platform before the group discussions. The visuals were illustrative of their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of sustainability. In the second section, the researcher introduced the Indian SDG representations. Participants were asked to select those illustrations that contributed to their sustainability story and/or resonated with them the most, and those which were considered unrelated or peripheral to the topic. Next, the researcher introduced the participants to all the SDGs and asked them to collaboratively organise the goals in descending order of importance. Last, participants were asked to evaluate the influence of their cultural position in steering the discussion.

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 The environmental narrative dominates the understanding of sustainability

At the outset of the group discussions, participants were invited to share their understanding of sustainability by providing a simple definition to someone completely unfamiliar with the concept. Participants defined sustainability as a carefully titrated, long-term relationship between humans and the environment. It was considered an equitable, symbiotic exchange between humans and nature, and a reduction of excessive, greedy behaviours that harm or deplete the earth's resources. The aim of the equitable exchange was the preservation of the planet for future generations. One participant explained that if one only needs five pieces of fruit, why take twelve (Indian male, settled 5+ years)? Another participant compared the exchange to replanting one tree for every one cut down, ensuring a future with enough trees (Indian male, new arrival). Participants' sustainability explanations thus revolved around the environment. They shared recounts of eco-friendly practices such as upcycling old clothes into blankets, the use of e-bikes in large corporations, and other efforts to reduce the carbon footprint.

The visual sustainability stories that participants posted online extended the environmental narrative. Indian respondents showed examples of pristine nature and metaphoric illustrations of harmonious and spiritual connections to it. They also included visuals of environmentally friendly products and behaviour (e.g., wicker mats and baskets, recycling bins, drying clothes in the sun), as well as depictions of the three systems model, which places sustainability at the intersection of society, economy, and the environment. They acknowledged that an interaction and balance between the three components was

necessary to achieve sustainability. However, the prompt of the interaction was primarily environmental. One newly arrived Indian female illustrated this sustainability intersection with a wildlife bridge. She explained the purpose of the bridge was to support the environment by protecting wildlife and their habitats, the construction of the bridge supported the economy by creating jobs, and the unhindered access from A to B supported society. Australian respondents also provided examples of environmental support tools, but they were more systemic in nature (e.g., solar panels, vertical farms, the circular economy). Moreover, they also included visuals depicting the negative consequences of unsustainable behaviours (drought, pollution) and the capitalist contradictions inherent to the concept (e.g., farmers' markets that are more expensive than supermarkets and the mass production of electric luxury vehicles).

Participants justified their environmental sustainability focus with the rise of worldwide environmental disasters caused by climate change and the prevailing messages spread by media and other dominant institutions. The perception was that news channels and government legislation were highlighting the importance of climate action and preservation over anything else in the sustainability paradigm (Australian female). Government and business policies aimed at reducing single-use plastic, for example, have reinforced their environmental awareness and inclinations (Indian males, settled 5+ years). Proper waste management thus became fundamental to their understanding of sustainability, with many citing the "Three Rs" – reduce, reuse, recycle – as their sustainability mantra.

The principle of the "Three Rs" was appealing, not only because it was a very familiar, widespread concept, but also because it was a contribution an individual could make. Newly arrived Indian participants, for instance, engaged with the concept during their environmental studies in high school. The Australian and more settled Indian participants, on the other hand, felt the principle was entrenched in everyday living. For them, segregating waste and/or using reusable water bottles or shopping bags was a conventional practice. As one participant said: "*When you're shopping, you use a bag instead of disposable bags, right? It's just a habit (Indian male, settled 5+ years).*" While this did not represent the solution to the problem, it was a step in the right direction that would gradually bear fruit. After all, change could not be expected to happen all at once (Indian male, settled 5+ years). Nevertheless, Indian participants had faith that their individual actions effectively contributed to sustainability. For them, a tally of individual, incremental contributions could produce a collective impact, just like "*many grains of sand together can create a vast beach (Indian female, settled 5+ years)*". This conviction was further supported by their perception that Australia's sustainability operations and initiatives were effectively promoting sustainable behaviours amongst the public (e.g., recycling or using public transport). Both newly arrived and settled Indians noted that they engaged in some of these sustainable practices since they settled in Australia. In fact, some felt that they embraced these practices more wholeheartedly than the Australians. One settled Indian female, for example, described how she organised a recycling bin for her apartment block due to her strong feelings about waste segregation and her frustration with other residents' nonchalance. As a result, the matter-of-fact approach and "can do" attitude of the Indian participants accorded them a feeling of satisfaction and hope that they were bolstering the sustainability agenda.

Conversely, Australian participants had a more critical tone. Their sustainability stories focused on detrimental behaviours such as pollution and greenwashing. For them, a larger-scale, transformative approach, such as the implementation of clean energy systems or vertical farming industries, was a prerequisite to sustainability. However, they questioned and mistrusted the motives and validity behind some of these institutions. Consequently,

control group participants seemed more despondent and pessimistic about their contributions to the sustainability cause.

### 3.2 A Southern setting brings social sustainability into the conversation

The researcher's introduction of stimulus material portraying a Southern context (e.g., pictures of solar panels in an Indian village, an Indian father with his daughter and son in school uniform, and an Indian city skyline) shifted the conversation away from environmental sustainability. The participants recognised that although sustainability is a global challenge, it requires significant regional variations due to socio-economic differences between the Global North and South. In the Southern setting, social aspects of sustainability became central to the conversation. In the participants' view, while people of the North could deliberate about global, long-term sustainability challenges, people of the South needed to focus on their immediate survival and basic well-being. The sustainability discussion was thus considered a privilege for those who had their basic needs satisfied and who had the infrastructure in place to engage in sustainable practices. *"Look at our worries and look at their worries,"* said one participant, *"We think of all this, and they're thinking, well we don't have food, we don't have shelter, no water. Most of us are so privileged (Indian male, new arrival)."* As a result, the focal point shifted from the initial waste management strategies to collaboratively tackling the fulfilment of basic, physiological human needs of the world's poorest by providing them with food, clean water, and good health. Hence, asking all countries to uniformly address sustainability challenges was considered unreasonable.

The issue of gender equality presented another example of the North–South sustainability divide. Participants argued that while people of the North may consider it a crucial issue, people of the South were still concerned with meeting more fundamental needs. As one newly arrived Indian female explained, the expectation that an impoverished Indian father of five should invest equally in his girls' education as in his boys' education was unrealistic. Once married, the girls would leave the family. The father's primary focus was to provide the girls with food and shelter in the interim. Gender equality was thus viewed as a Western construct that could not be globalised. Its attributes were deemed country-specific, with different aspects of equity of varying relevance. Another Indian female who had settled 5+ years ago clarified that *"Here in Australia, what you need is for women to have the same level of pay as men. They already have a quality education. In India, you first need women to be allowed to go and study."*

In addition, some newly arrived females found the terminology itself confusing. They queried its meaning and relevance ("What is this?", "I never thought about it.") and felt that at face value, it was unrelated to sustainability. During the discussion, however, their discontent with the position of women in Indian society became evident. They highlighted that, in Indian settings, women lacked equal educational opportunities, were less respected, and were excluded from decision-making positions. Moreover, they suggested women could be more qualified to deal with sustainability issues. One highlighted: *"There should be women doing that (agrarian sciences). Because, as we know, there are not enough women involved in technology. I'm not sure about the rest of the world, but in an Indian context, I feel that women are more aware of the waste generated in the house. So, they are in a better position to determine how much waste needs to be reduced"*. Therefore, while the concept of gender equality initially seemed unrelated to sustainability, its tenets for sustainable living were not.

Finally, Indian participants emphasised that social inequalities and divisions are firmly entrenched in India's highly diverse society and, therefore, more challenging to overcome. Divisions were related to skin tone, religion, geographic regions, language, and the caste system. Indeed, a South Indian female felt the divisions were so deeply rooted that they extended to the Australian Indian community, who ostracised her because of her darker complexion. Consequently, their cultural affinities and social identities were often highly localised and segmented, although a robust yet underlying common Indian-ness prevailed.

### 3.3 Prioritising between planet and people is 'Sophie's Choice'

In the final group activity, participants were asked to rank the SDGs in order of importance. Reaching a consensus in this activity was problematic for participants. They agreed that comparable to the three systems model, the five SDG themes—people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships—were indissolubly linked. Attributing prominence to one dimension was like “Sophie's choice”, that is, choosing the favourite child amongst your children (Indian male, settled 5+ years). That said, as discussions progressed, it became clear that participants either gravitated towards prioritising the social/people dimension or the environmental/planet dimension. The economic/prosperity dimension, peace and partnerships were judged as enabling tools only and received little consideration.

Proponents of the environmental dimension posited that it was the climate that regulates life on Earth. Climate issues were at the root of the sustainability crisis and needed to be addressed first. They argued that the irreversibility of climate challenges, such as the extinction of animals, renders climate action more urgent and thus a priority. In addition, addressing environmental issues provides global benefits, while solving social challenges mainly supports the developing world.

Conversely, proponents of the social dimension argued that without the existence of people, the principle of sustainability was redundant. “*Why talk about sustainability if we don't have people to be part of it? What is the point of achieving it? (Indian male, settled 5+ years).*” Human survival and the satisfaction of basic human needs, such as good health, food, and water, were thus held paramount. Not only was social sustainability deemed an elemental human right, but it was also seen as more actionable. The discussions, therefore, reflected a “chicken or the egg” dilemma, whereby it seemed impossible to identify which component should come first and how to choose between global and local challenges. It created philosophical divisions within and amongst the groups, whereby the Indian participants who supported the environmental stance had either settled 5+ years ago or had a background in environmental studies. Otherwise, no gender or age bias was discernible.

### 3.4 Education as the bridge between people and the planet

As the people versus planet debate advanced, quality education increasingly emerged as the solution to the problem. Education was considered fundamental in the endeavours of sustainability. Not only could education promote the understanding, awareness, and fulfilment of an inherently complex concept, but it could also offer the opportunity for a more viable lifestyle. If children were instructed on sustainability early on, they could adapt their own behaviours and be influential in transforming those of others. Specifically, the education of girls was instrumental in the transformation process. As one Indian female explained: “*When you educate the girl (future mother), you educate the family. That's what*

*is said.*” Participants’ personal accounts of inspiring their siblings, parents, and grandparents to engage in sustainable practices, such as installing solar panels in the home, further underscored the transformative process. Participants argued that once awareness and knowledge were achieved, sustainable action would follow. In essence, education was the building block for sustainable practices and behaviours.

Moreover, quality education could feed into the achievement of other SDGs. Education was considered a potential gateway out of poverty and thus addressed *SDG #1 No Poverty*. Equally, it could lead to more egalitarian futures not only for girls but also for rural communities, therefore addressing *SDG #5 Gender Equality* and *SDG #10 Reduced Inequalities*. As such, education boosted sustainable action and alleviated socio-economic concerns, satisfying the demands of both the people and the planet advocates. Quality education thus became the cornerstone of sustainable development amongst all participants.

### 3.5 The diversity of the Indian community complicates social identity connections

At the end of the group discussions, participants were asked to complete a five-item diasporic social identity scale and to explain the rationale behind their responses. The discussions revealed that the diversity of the Indian diaspora and the time of settlement were instrumental in determining either a connection or disconnect to the diasporic community. Participants highlighted that the diversity of religions, languages and regions in India complicated the level of connection amongst the Indian diaspora. For example, those who were adherents of Indian minority religions (e.g., Catholics or Muslims) recognised that their faith could be a stronger source of connection than their nationality. Moreover, some highlighted that socio-economic and regional divisions (i.e., caste and colour divisions) of India persisted in the Australian Indian diaspora and felt that the diasporan community was out of touch with contemporary Indian culture.

However, some of the females, who had recently arrived and had no family in Australia, referred to the diaspora as their “replacement family”. For them, sharing the same culture created a sense of comfort and familiarity and reduced their nostalgia for home.

Conversely, those who had lived in Australia for over five years were not seeking contact with the Indian community, nor were they actively maintaining their initial connections. They had established new family networks through extended family members or through the creation of their own families. That said, participants agreed that an underlying, common Indian-ness united the community. Although they found themselves judging life both here and there, at their core, they remained Indian.

## 4 Discussion

The objective of this inquiry was to explore the Australian Indian diaspora’s understanding of sustainability, their prioritisation of diverse sustainability concerns, and the potential cultural underpinnings of these perceptions and preferences. The findings of the group discussions show that two distinct sustainability narratives guide the understanding and meaning of sustainability. The first is piloted by Northern value systems and is global, scientific, and singular in nature (Nurse 2006; Parodi 2015; Purvis et al. 2019; Tulloch 2014). This dominant narrative generally adopts an environmental sustainability perspective. The second, more peripheral narrative, is bound to territory, culture, and diversity, and

is commonly associated with social sustainability. It requires variation depending on the circumstances, making it less tangible and more complex (Mensah 2019).

This study shows that in a universal setting, the meaning of sustainability is consistently related to the environment for all participants. Specifically, sustainability is associated with the preservation of the planet's resources and the adoption of accessible mottos such as the "Three Rs". The social and economic sustainability component is not integral to the immediate understanding. This is somewhat surprising, with multiple scholars arguing that environmental concerns are a Northern preoccupation, while Southern actors are primarily focusing on socio-economics (Barkemeyer 2011; Ward and Fox 2002; Yazdani and Dola 2013). It suggests that the singularity of the environmental discourse has rendered it ubiquitous in the media and key institutions (e.g., schools, businesses and governments) on a more global level. In addition, the perceived increase in worldwide environmental disasters has given it global relevance. The environmental narrative is, therefore, a relatable and familiar proposition fostering widespread pro-environmental social norms and identities. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Prati et al. (2017), which showed that comprehensive institutional environmental narratives enhance pro-environmental social norms, identities and behaviour. Similarly, it aligns with the Lahire (2003) assertion that repeated reinforcement of specific narratives leads to the indoctrination of correlated belief dispositions, which can be activated and transferred in certain contexts or conditions. Thus, the institutional pervasiveness of the environmental narrative could explain the participants' commitment to this narrative. This was the rationale articulated by both the Indian and Australian participants. However, the activation of belief dispositions and their related social identities are unlikely to be founded on single, explicit and conscious factors. Rather, both internal and external forces are bound to be driving the narrative.

The Indian participants primarily associated environmental sustainability with a reduction of societies' excessive and wasteful behaviours. Descriptions of sustainable behaviour included limiting food waste, drying clothes outside, avoiding the use of plastics, or segregating waste. As a result, the notion of the "Three Rs" was not only central to the interpretation of sustainability, but it was also inherent to everyday domestic and civic practices. These practices were part of the participants' upbringing and cultural norms. However, the initial purpose of the practice is not necessarily motivated by environmental concerns. Instead, the original motivation could be related to the less materialistic Indian lifestyles and experiences. Encounters with poverty, or resource scarcity, for example, may well be promoting a thrifty lifestyle, which in turn supports environmental paradigms. The achieving of environmental goals is inadvertent and/or secondary. Rather, the participants' environmental care is driven by an internalised thriftiness and frugality established in the Indian family home. This view is supported by prior research, which argues that Australian migrants from the global South often engage in unintentional environmentalism, be that through repurposing, minimalism, home-grown food (Khorana 2024) or the use of public transport (Head et al. 2019). Pre-migration knowledge, skills and lifestyles are thus considered enablers of environmentalism (Head et al. 2021), even though they are not presented through the common, green sustainability vernacular (Head et al. 2019; Khorana 2024). Hence, the participants' adoption of the environmental narrative is not only triggered through explicit and conscious stimuli but also through underlying, implicit and subconscious influences derived from their Indian heritage and origins.

Nevertheless, once the study introduced sustainability within a more explicit Indian framework, a shift occurred from the global, environmental sustainability proposition to a social, more culturally bound dimension. The Southern cultural context led to the realisation that while sustainability was a global problem, its resolution required local variations



and nuances. In a Southern setting, satisfying basic human needs became paramount. This shift to the social dimension also introduced a more affective quality to the discussion, with participants questioning the authenticity of sustainable development and pointing to the innocence of the poor. In other words, embedding sustainability into an Indian cultural fabric changed both the interpretation and expression of its meaning.

This reaction suggests that a different, yet relevant context can re-direct a narrative by changing its understanding and activating alternate belief dispositions and social identities. Particularly, a cultural context, which inevitably evokes an emotional position, is likely to resonate. Other researchers concur that cultural context is crucial for the development and enhancement of narratives and their ability to elicit empathy and action (Chabay 2015; Chabay et al. 2019). However, as Hawkes (2001) highlights, culture is not an isolated system. Instead, it is inspired by a myriad of sources ranging from personal and local experiences to global influence. As a result, the social sustainability narrative is more intangible and diverse, making it difficult to model on a universal level (Mensah 2019).

This complexity of the social sustainability narrative was not only demonstrated by the participants' lack of immediate and unprompted association with sustainability but also by the diverse interpretations and applications of its aspirations, such as gender equality representing a reduced pay gap versus an opportunity to study. In addition, solutions to these daunting issues were more difficult to conceive, with challenges such as social inequities deeply entrenched and harder to shift. Therefore, while social sustainability goals are considered vital for sustainable futures, their complicated nature (be that their intangibility or attachment to territorial and cultural boundaries) renders their systematic institutionalisation through public policy and practices challenging. Regardless of these challenges, the outcomes of this study clearly demonstrate that a more balanced coupling of both narratives is necessary to support the sustainable development we require. However, to achieve a greater recentring toward the social narrative, both globalised and local cultural nuances need unpacking to facilitate its understanding, resonance and activation.

The unique bi-cultural positioning of diasporas seems *comme il faut* to provide the cultural know-how that can facilitate such contextualising. The multi-faceted social identities of diasporans allow them to navigate across multiple cultural groups and frameworks. The complexity of their cultural schemata increases their cultural metacognition, leading to higher intercultural effectiveness (Brannen et al. 2009; Chand and Tung 2014). This cross-cultural capacity was supported by the participants' seamless transition from their global position to the Indian one and the associated shift from the environmental narrative to the social one. That said, the change of discourse cannot simply be reduced to the influence of a national social identity. Other aspects of the participants' social identities undoubtedly provided additional direction to the discourse.

While the participants' profiles varied in terms of religion, language, regional backgrounds and duration of settlement in Australia, they were united by their Indian birthplace, urban origins, high level of education and relatively privileged socio-economic standing. Their self-identification as an educated and relatively privileged group was clearly influential in guiding the necessary trade-off decisions between the environmental and social sustainability narratives. Education emerged as the priority in achieving sustainable transformations, and the only means to address the tension between both narratives.

The value of education was distinctly fundamental to their self-concept and a reflection of their own experiences. Not only did participants attribute their sustainability knowledge to their schooling, but they also credited their successes and opportunities to further education. In addition, they felt their position of privilege gave them the responsibility to promote sustainability by building awareness and encouraging others. The salience of the

participants' social identity as an educated and relatively privileged group, shaped their attitude towards education. Consistent with existing studies, this suggests that social identities are embedded in people's attitudes and preferences and, in turn, that the mobilisation of a given identity permits a certain projection of these attitudes and preferences (Mangum and Block 2018; Mols and Weber 2013). That said, this does not preclude the influence and impact of other less evident social group identities or individual personal experiences and histories. In fact, the presence of multiple, competing identities is likely. The salience of a social identity, therefore, becomes a conjectural rearrangement within the hierarchy of social identities (Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001; Lakha and Stevenson 2001), allowing people to make sense of themselves in their social world (Mols 2012).

Importantly, it is not this study's intention to attribute a singular identity to the vastly heterogeneous Indian community of Australia. The objective is to explore the impact of identities embedded within a cultural framework, whereby the participant group represents a snapshot of the bigger picture. In this study, the participants' time of settlement in Australia ranged from less than two months to twenty years ago, their ages from 19 to 36 years, and all but one participant arrived as students. They were part of the student migrant wave since the turn of the Millennium. Their migration history and experiences are thus very different to those of Indian migrants who arrived under the professional skilled migrant policies since the 1970s (Baas 2018). Not only are they arriving to well-established Indian community structures, with large numbers of restaurants, specialty shops, places of worship and community organisations (Lakha and Stevenson 2001; Vahed 2007), but they are also leaving behind a more imposing geo-political and economic India. As a result, they are more confident and vocal in asserting their Indian identity. Indeed, Khorana (2014) refers to the newer, less subaltern Indian migrants as "rabble rousers" and the more long-standing, well assimilated Indian migrants as "de-wogged" or "model migrants who have assumed a symbolic whiteness" (Khorana 2014, p. 262). It would, therefore, be useful to investigate other segments of the Indian Australian diaspora to further explore the cultural nuances within it. Nevertheless, while the Indian Australian diaspora's identity cannot be condensed into one cultural dimension, their Indian-rooted practices and preferences serve as a rich and invaluable data source within Australia's multicultural demography.

## 5 Conclusions

This study has contributed to understanding sustainability meanings and priorities in a cultural context specific to the South. It shows that the introduction of a Southern context shifts the conversation from an environmental sustainability focus to a more social one. A more adjusted coupling of these two narratives is necessary to promote sustainable futures in the South and reframe the extant global sustainability discourse. However, due to the complexity and diversity of the social narrative, the unpacking of local and cultural nuances is imperative for its understanding, resonance, and activation. Grassroots education emerges as the strategy to foster this understanding and create a more balanced narrative.

Diasporas are undoubtedly a defining characteristic of 21st-century demography. The evaluation of their unique, bi-cultural frameworks is well suited and highly pertinent in the efforts to contextualise the sustainability narrative on a more local, Southern level and disrupt the dominant Northern discourse. Integrating diasporan perspectives and cultural sensitivities into the sustainability narrative could improve its resonance and

effectiveness in a Southern context and ultimately support sustainability engagement and action. Further, it could support a greater balance of the sustainability narratives.

Multi-cultural Australia offers an exceptionally rich source of diverse cultural data that can help reframe the sustainability discourse. Future research should seek to increase the input of diasporan representatives, especially of the South, and expand this evaluation model not only to other diasporas in Australia but also to other diasporas in different regions and countries around the world.

**Funding** Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

**Data availability** The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Due to confidentiality agreements with participants and privacy considerations, access to the data will be provided in accordance with applicable regulations and ethical guidelines. Requests for data access should be directed to XXXX.

## Declarations

**Competing of interest** The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## References

- Acocella I (2012) The focus groups in social research: advantages and disadvantages. *Qual Quant* 46(4):1125–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9600-4>
- Alexander C (2017) Beyond the “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora”: a response to Rogers Brubaker. *Ethn Racial Stud* 40(9):1544–1555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1300302>
- Anthias F (1998) Evaluating ‘Diaspora’: Beyond Ethnicity? *Sociology (oxford)* 32(3):557–580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038598032003009>
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (n.d.) India Country Brief. Australian Government. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/india-country-brief>
- Baas M (2018) Indians in Australia: Understanding the changing face of a community. In (1 ed., pp. 317–329). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315672571-25>
- Barbier EB, Burgess JC (2017) The Sustainable Development Goals and the systems approach to sustainability. *Economics* 11:1–23
- Barkemeyer R (2011) Corporate perceptions of sustainability challenges in developed and developing countries: constituting a CSR divide? *Soc Responsib J* 7(2):257–281. <https://doi.org/10.1108/1747111111141521>
- Bérubé M (2006) The “cultures” of cultural studies. In: Baldwin JR, Faulkner SL, Hecht ML, Linsley SL (eds) *Redefining culture; perspectives across disciplines*. Routledge, pp 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410617002>
- Bhatia S, Ram A (2009) Theorizing identity in transnational and diaspora cultures: A critical approach to acculturation. *Int J Intercult Relat* 33(2):140–149

- Bispo Júnior JP (2022) Social desirability bias in qualitative health research. *Revista de Saúde Pública* 56: 101:1–9. <https://doi.org/10.11606/s1518-8787.2022056004164>
- Blowfield M, Frynas JG (2005) Setting new agendas: critical perspectives on corporate social responsibility in the developing world. *Int Aff* 81(3):499–513
- Brannen M, Garcia D, Thomas D (2009) Biculturals as natural bridges for intercultural communication and collaboration. In: International workshop on intercultural collaboration. pp 207–210. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1499224.1499257>
- Breuer A, Janetschek H, Malerba D (2019) Translating Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) interdependencies into policy advice. *Sustainability* 11(7):2092
- Brubaker R (2005) The “diaspora” diaspora. *Ethn Racial Stud* 28(1):1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997>
- Brubaker R (2017) Revisiting “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora.” *Ethn Racial Stud* 40(9):1556–1561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1308533>
- Budarick J (2014) Media and the limits of transnational solidarity: Unanswered questions in the relationship between diaspora, communication and community. *Global Media Commun* 10(2):139–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766514540070>
- Byrch C, Kearins K, Milne M, Morgan R (2007) Sustainable “what”? A cognitive approach to understanding sustainable development. *Qual Res Account Manag* 4(1):26–52. <https://doi.org/10.1108/1176690710732497>
- Chabay I (2015) Narratives for a sustainable future: Vision and motivation for collective action. In: Werlen B (ed) *Global Sustainability; Cultural Perspectives and Challenges for Transdisciplinary Integrated Research*. Springer Cham, pp 1–11
- Chabay I, Koch L, Martinez G, Scholz G (2019) Influence of Narratives of Vision and Identity on Collective Behavior Change. *Sustainability* 11(20):5680
- Chand M, Tung R (2014) Bicultural identity and economic engagement: An exploratory study of the Indian diaspora in North America. *Asia Pac J Manag* 31:763–788. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-014-9375-y>
- Clarke V, Braun V (2017) Thematic analysis. *J Posit Psychol* 12(3):297–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- Cleveland M, Xu C (2019) Multifaceted acculturation in multiethnic settings. *J Bus Res* 103:250–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.01.051>
- Cohen R (2008) *Global diaspora*, 2nd edn. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203928943>
- Coulter RA, Zaltman G, Coulter KS (2001) Interpreting consumer perceptions of advertising: An application of the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique. *J Advert* 30(4):1–21
- Creswell JW (2014) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*, 4th edn. SAGE Publications Inc
- Dufoix S (2008) *Diasporas*. Univ of California Press
- Economic and Social Council (2023) *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet*. United Nations. [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_Special\\_Edition\\_2023\\_ADVANCE\\_UNEDITED\\_VERSION.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG_Progress_Report_Special_Edition_2023_ADVANCE_UNEDITED_VERSION.pdf)
- Edmond C (2020) Global migration, by the numbers: Who migrates, where they go and why. World Economic Forum. Retrieved 16/09/21, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/>
- Esquivel V, Sweetman C (2016) Gender and the sustainable development goals. *Gend Dev* 24(1):1–8
- Faist T (2010) Diaspora and transnationalism: what kind of dance partners? In: Bauböck R, Faist T (eds) *Diaspora and transnationalism: concepts, theories and methods*. Amsterdam University Press, pp 9–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mz31.4>
- Forehand MR, Deshpandé R (2001) What We See Makes Us who We are: Priming Ethnic Self-Awareness and Advertising Response. *J Mark Res* 38(3):336–348. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.38.3.336.18871>
- Guest G, Namey EE, Mitchell ML (2013) *Collecting qualitative data: a field manual for applied research*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506374680>
- Hall S (1994) Cultural identity and diaspora. In: Chrisman L, Williams P (eds) *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader*. Routledge, pp 222–237
- Hawkes J (2001) *The fourth pillar of sustainability: culture’s essential role in public planning*. Common Ground P/L
- Head L, Klocker N, Aguirre-Bielschowsky I (2019) Environmental values, knowledge and behaviour: Contributions of an emergent literature on the role of ethnicity and migration. *Prog Hum Geogr* 43(3):397–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518768407>
- Head L, Klocker N, Dun O, Waitt G, Goodall H, Aguirre-Bielschowsky I, Gopal A, Kerr S-M, Nowroozipour F, Spaven T, Toole S (2021) Barriers to and enablers of sustainable practices: insights from

- ethnic minority migrants. *Local Environ* 26(5):595–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2021.1904856>
- Ho EL-E, Hickey M, Yeoh BSA (2015) Special issue introduction: New research directions and critical perspectives on diaspora strategies. *Geoforum* 59:153–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.12.006>
- Idowu SO, Vertigans S (2021) Global challenges of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development: An introduction. In S. Vertigans & S. O. Idowu (eds.), *Global Challenges to CSR and Sustainable Development*. Springer Nature. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62501-6\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62501-6_4)
- Jaishankar D (2020) The Australia–India Strategic Partnership: Accelerating Security Cooperation in the Indo–Pacific. L. I. Analysis. Lowy Institute. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/australia-india-strategic-partnership-security-cooperation-indo-pacific>
- Kapur D (2010) *Diaspora, development, and democracy: the domestic impact of international migration from India*. Princeton University Press
- Kelle U (2006) Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in research practice: purposes and advantages. *Qual Res Psychol* 3(4):293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478088706070839>
- Khorana S (2014) From ‘De-wogged’ Migrants to ‘Rabble Rousers’: Mapping the Indian Diaspora in Australia. *J Intercult Stud* 35(3):250–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.899950>
- Khorana S (2024) Running in the Family: Australian Migrants’ Environmental Care as Inter-generational and Domestic Civic Practice. *J Intercult Stud*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2024.2325954>
- Kopfmüller J (2015) Sustainable development: a global model - universal and contextual. In: Enders JC, Remig M (eds) *Theories of Sustainable Development*. Routledge, pp 112–126
- Kramer MR, Pfitzer MW (2016) The ecosystem of shared value. *Harv Bus Rev* 94(10):80–89
- Lahire B (2003) From the habitus to an individual heritage of dispositions. Towards a sociology at the level of the individual. *Poetics* 31(5):329–355. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2003.08.002>
- Lakha S, Stevenson M (2001) Indian Identity in Multicultural Melbourne. Some preliminary observations. *J Intercult Stud* 22:245–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256860120093984>
- Leathwood PD, Richardson DP, Sträter P, Todd PM, van Trijp HCM (2007) Consumer understanding of nutrition and health claims: sources of evidence. *Br J Nutr* 98(3):474–484. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000711450778697X>
- Mangum M, Block R (2018) Social identity theory and public opinion towards immigration. *Soc Sci* 7(3):41. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7030041>
- Mathur A (2012) Consumer acculturation in the age of globalization: A study of first-generation Indian immigrants in the United States. *J Int Consum Mark* 24(5):372–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2012.741480>
- Mensah J (2019) Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review. *Cogent Soc Sci* 5(1):1653531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531>
- Mironenko IA, Sorokin PS (2018) Seeking for the definition of “Culture”: Current concerns and their implications. A comment on Gustav Jahoda’s article “Critical reflections on some recent definitions of Culture.” *Integr Psychol Behav* 52:331–340. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9425-y>
- Mohapatra A, Tripathi A (2021) Diaspora as a soft power in India’s foreign policy towards Singapore. *Diaspora Stud* 14(2):161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2021.1935108>
- Mols F (2012) What makes a frame persuasive? Lessons from social identity theory. *Evid Policy: J Res Debate Pract* 8(3):329–345
- Mols F, Weber M (2013) Laying Sound Foundations for Social Identity Theory-Inspired European Union Attitude Research: Beyond Attachment and Deeply Rooted Identities. *J Common Mark Stud* 51(3):505–521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2012.02316.x>
- Nurse K (2006) Culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. *Small States: Econ Rev Basic Stat* 11:28–40
- Parodi O (2015) The missing aspect of culture in sustainability concepts. In: Enders JC, Remig M (eds) *Theories of Sustainable Development*. Routledge, pp 169–186
- Pradhan R, Mohapatra A (2020) India’s diaspora policy: evidence of soft power diplomacy under Modi. *South Asian Diaspora* 12(2):145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1712792>
- Prati G, Albanesi C, Pietrantonio L (2017) The interplay among environmental attitudes, pro-environmental behavior, social identity, and pro-environmental institutional climate. A Longitudinal Study *Environ Educ Res* 23(2):176–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1118752>
- Purvis B, Mao Y, Robinson D (2019) Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. *Sustain Sci* 14(3):681–695. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5>
- Safran W (1991) Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: J Transnat Stud* 1(1):83–99

- Schwartz SJ, Unger JB, Zmaboanga BL, Szapocznik J (2010) Rethinking the concept of acculturation: Implications for theory and research. *Am Psychol* 65(4):237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019330>
- Sénit CA, Biermann F (2021) In whose name are you speaking? The marginalisation of the poor in the global civil society. *Global Policy* 12(5):581–591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12997>
- Sheffer G (2003) *Diaspora politics: at home abroad*. Cambridge University Press
- Singh NK (2017) Diaspora could become vehicle of India's soft power. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/diaspora-could-become-vehicle-of-india-s-soft-power/story-8hdAohe2gz eDPhdVb2mx0M.html>
- Soini K, Birkeland I (2014) Exploring the scientific discourses on cultural sustainability. *Geoforum* 51:213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.12.001>
- Struckmann C (2018) A postcolonial feminist critique of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A South African application. *Agenda* 32(1):12–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2018.1433362>
- Thompson PB, Norris PE (2021) *Sustainability: what everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press
- Tulloch L (2014) The neoliberalisation of sustainability. *Citizsh Soc Econ Educ* 13(1):26–38
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2022) Classification update - April 2022. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Classifications.html>
- United Nations (2023) The sustainable development goals report; special edition. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>
- Vahed G (2007) Adaptation and integration of Indian migrants in Brisbane, Australia. *Anthropologist* 2:37–51
- Varghese PN (2018) *An India economic strategy to 2035*. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/ies/index.html>
- Ward H, Fox T (2002) Moving the corporate citizenship agenda to the South. I. P. Library. International Institute for Environment and Development. <https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/16018 IIED.pdf>
- WCED (1987) *Our Common Future*. Press, O. U
- Yariv L (2002) I'll see it when I believe it? A simple model of cognitive consistency. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=300696>
- Yazdani S, Dola K (2013) Sustainable City Priorities in Global North Versus Global South. *Sustain City Priorities Global North Versus Global South* 6(7):38. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v6n7p38>
- Zikmund W, D'Alessandro S, Winzer H, Lowe B, Babin B (2014) *Marketing research*, 3rd edn. Cengage Learning

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.