

February 26, 2010

Dear Board Member,

As follow-up to our recent Board meeting, let me re-introduce one of our speakers, Assistant Professor Arnim Wiek, to provide more information about how he engages communities to build capacity for urban sustainability. His interview follows a brief list of select news and activities, below.

Highlights of ASU's sustainability activities

- The Smithsonian Institution and ASU have created a sustainability education and research exchange. The program will provide opportunities for ASU students and faculty to participate in Smithsonian fieldwork and research in Panama, while Smithsonian scientists participate in ASU degree programs. Ann Kinzig, professor in the School of Life Sciences and affiliated faculty member in the School of Sustainability, will lead the first program funded by the venture, which will focus on the importance of Panama's tropical ecosystems to global commerce. [Read more.](#)
- Transformational approaches to teaching that influence sustainability research in Senegal, Kenya, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Tibet, and China, as well as Yellowstone National Park in the U.S., led to Andrew T. Smith, professor in the School of Life Sciences, being named an ASU President's Professor for 2009. A specialist in conservation, mammology, and the complexity of ecological systems, Smith is chair of the Lagomorph Specialist Group for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission. [Read more.](#)
- Phoenix metropolitan area's Urban Heat Island has intensified over the past 10 years according to a recent report from ASU's Arizona Indicators Project, managed by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy. This effect occurs when urbanization covers natural surfaces with materials that retain heat, changing local climate. In the report, *Decades: What the Trends Tell Us*, research analyst Sally Wittinger from ASU's Decision Center for a Desert City writes that summer nighttime temperatures in the past decade averaged 2.85 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than during the 1990s. [Read more.](#)
- ASU's Polytechnic campus has created its first community garden, one of several planned across ASU's four campuses. The garden is part of an effort to improve sustainable practices being coordinated by the Global Institute of Sustainability that encourage students, faculty, and staff to learn about permaculture and sustainable food practices. Plans are underway to enable ASU's community gardeners to donate excess produce to needy families via the Mesa United Food Bank. [Read more.](#)
- The Arbor Day Foundation honored ASU as a 'Tree Campus USA' for the second year in a row. The Foundation recognized the university for promoting healthy urban forest management and engaging its campus community in environmental stewardship. Last year, ASU was chosen as one of nine winning sites to receive trees and host a Campus Tree Tour. [Read more.](#)

You can reach me at [rob.melnick@asu.edu](mailto:rob.melnick@asu.edu) or 480-965-5233 with any questions or comments about this briefing. The interview with Dr. Wiek follows on page two.

Best regards,



Rob Melnick  
Executive Dean

cc: Jim Buizer

# Q&A with Dr. Arnim Wiek

## *Building capacity for urban sustainability*

Dr. Wiek is an assistant professor in the School of Sustainability. Over the last 10 years, he has conducted sustainability research in Europe, Canada, Sri Lanka, and the U.S. addressing topics such as emerging technologies, urban and regional development, land use conflicts, resource governance, and climate change. His research is carried out in collaboration with partners from government, business, and civil society. He is currently directing research in conjunction with ASU's Center for Nanotechnology in Society, Decision Center for a Desert City, and Central Arizona—Phoenix Long-Term Ecological Research project.

### **What event triggered your focus on sustainability?**

As a graduate student in philosophy at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, I attended an event that featured a replay of 12-year-old Severn Suzuki's courageous speech to the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In that speech she said, "I have no hidden agenda. I am fighting for my future." Right then I decided it was time to get involved in addressing the challenges of sustainability, and since that time I have devoted my career to sustainability research and education.

### **What is your most important sustainability-related research project?**

I am co-leading a long-term project to craft coordinated strategies for urban sustainability in Phoenix from the city to the neighborhood level. To reach this goal, we are developing "sustainable anticipatory governance," a new concept that applies visioning, complex system analysis, and future scenario construction to create adaptive governance strategies that will lead to transformative change.

Our project team works interactively with the Phoenix Planning Department, as well as with stakeholders from government, administration, business, and civil society across the city. The research engages numerous faculty and student collaborators from diverse academic fields and includes running a studio-like workshop course for ASU students from public affairs, urban planning, sustainability, and other programs.

### **How does your research affect decisions in the "real world"?**

My research engages decision-makers in high levels of interactivity when it comes to conducting research, challenging basic assumptions, and analyzing claims and value positions. We have been able to clearly demonstrate that such interactive research on sustainability issues improves institutional and civil capacity and decision-making for sustainability.

### **What world sustainability challenge concerns you most?**

We must address the "triangle of collective failure": complexity, capacity, and change. The gap is widening between the increasing complexity of our society and our limited cognitive, emotional, and organizational capacity. To bridge this gap, we need to fundamentally change our ways of consumption, production, trade, mobility, education, and cooperation and become the responsible leaders, engaged citizens, and change agents we promise to future generations.



*Dr. Wiek and graduate students discussing sustainable anticipatory governance*



*Participants in a stakeholder workshop helping to develop a sustainable vision for the city of Phoenix*



*Dr. Wiek exploring a sustainable wine production system in Sonoma County, CA*