EB: Hello, I'm Ella Brady and you're listening to the UEPodcast. On this week's episode, I spoke with UAPs new full-time lecturer and sustainability, Kate Davies. We explored her work navigating equitable transformations to sustainability. And also what she hopes to bring to UEP in the fall.

EB: Could you introduce yourself briefly and tell us where you are right now?

KD: Sure. Thanks very much for having me, Ella. It's really nice to get this opportunity to talk with you today. Um, I grew up in Concord, New Hampshire, actually. So not too far from Tufts and, um, you know, spent a lot of time. Kind of swimming in the Merrimack river and the Atlantic ocean. And, um, ever since then, I've, uh, I've kind of been making money way around the world. So I just started moving West and went as far as outro New Zealand, where I lived for 12 years. Um, uh, before I started the return journey slowly coming back. So, um, I am today in salt Lake city, Utah. Um, and I am really excited to be headed back to the East coast, um, which is where my family still lives most of my family. And so it's, it's kind of like a, a homecoming for me. Um, getting a job at Tufts is just, uh, it feels like I'm coming full circle and getting to come back to the, to the place where. You know, a lot of my interest in the environment and sustainability issues really was, was born. So it's, um, it's a real thrill.

EB: Absolutely. That's really exciting. Um, so how did that journey start? What made you want to start moving West when you began.

KD: Um, well, for those of you that might have grown up on, on the East coast, maybe in a small town sort of semi-rural area, I think, um, for me, the call to go West was just to kind of get out and see something different. So I went to college in Oberlin, Ohio, and after that, I, after graduating from there, I moved to the West coast and, um, ripped out on orcas Island for a couple of years. And so, you know, it's kind of been a journey for me to just a journey of discovering and trying to, um, getting to live in different environments and meet different people. And I've always been really just interested in, in working on. Kind of a range of different environmental topics. I did environmental studies at Oberlin and I've kind of been doing environmental stuff. Um, ever since it's just always been kind of the, the core driver and interest for me. Um, so when I got to New Zealand, um, I actually started off my first job. There was working as, um, Uh, a rural, um, compliance officer, inspecting dairy farms and, um, and making sure that there wasn't a lot of pollution coming off the dairy farms or going into the freshwater systems there. And, um, I kind of. Went from that to working with growers, vegetable growers in the area, um, and doing a master's working with the growers on sustainability and resilience issues. So, you know, it's kind of just all been always a common thread for me of wanting to improve, um, the environment and, um, and the sort of relationships that humans have with it in whatever place I, I find myself.

EB: Yeah, that makes sense. Um, so you're in salt Lake city right now. What is the work that you currently are pursuing or wrapping up? If you're planning to move.

KD: Yeah. So at the moment I work as a long range, um, urban planner for, uh, the greater salt Lake municipal services district, which is a really cool job. Um, that is a lot of it's really a planning position. And I get, I've been working on some general plans with a couple of different communities around the salt Lake Valley and, um, helping them to think about implementation at this stage. We've just got a couple of our general plans passed, and now we're looking at how do we actually get some of these incredible community visions kind of into action on the ground for those communities? Um, And that's been a real, it's been a real joy for me to actually get to do implementation with these communities.

You know, as, uh, I've been, I'm trained as a social scientist, I've done a lot of work as a researcher for many years, but getting to do kind of, um, nuts and bolts, implementation stuff and figure out how do we pay for this? How do we get these policies written and in place and passed into ordinances and codes has been, um, a really, really valuable learning experience. Um, so that's one of the things I'm doing at the moment, but I also work, um, for the university of Utah as a, as a research assistant professor. So I've kind of balanced the dual roles. So I do, I do research, um, there as well. I'm working on some air quality issues, um, in the salt Lake Valley. So, you know, I get my hands into just about anything that comes my way.

EB: Awesome. And you're obviously doing sustainability when you come to UEP.

KD: Yup. Very excited to kind of get that back as a, as a primary focus for me. Um, because that's always been really, I'm really passionate about sustainability and environmental issues.

EB: So your work focuses on navigating equitable transformations to sustainability in your own words, could you elaborate on what this means to you? What are the core values that guide your work?

KD: That's a really great question. And I think it is a really important one. Um, for me, sustainable transformations or transformations to sustainability is really about acknowledging the fact that although, um, you know, sustainability as a concept has certainly been around for a long time. I mean really generations and generations. In fact, um, there were people living sustainably, um, you know, long before, uh, sort of Western culture, um, started to take over and, and, uh, get involved in, um, sort of our, uh, more, um, uh, you know, before we started sort of using and abusing our natural resources. Um, I think.

KD: The thing to keep in mind about, um, transformations to sustainability is that, um, we need to embrace the fact that sustainability is not happening at the moment on a large scale. And, um, if we're going to have future generations be able to, um, you know, live. Safely and securely, um, on this planet, then we need to make some pretty dramatic changes in how we're living today. Many of us, especially in kind of the Western and more developed world. Um, and so, you know, that means that we have to do things differently. It means we have to think about how we're doing things differently. Um, we have to really enable some. Some alternative practices. Um, it's going to meet a lot of different kinds of transformations, transformations that involve technology, but also very much that involves society and how we interact, um, with one another and with our relationship with the world around us. So, you know, I think for me, There's a lot of, um, a lot of my work focuses on, um, trying to intervene in, um, in the, in the way that systems are functioning at the moment on a couple of different scales. So, um, a lot of my work is on participatory processes, making sure that, um, When were making decisions, um, they might be planning decisions. It might be policy decisions. Um, those are those decisions are actually including all of the people or the actors who are going to be affected by those decisions. And not just to kind of the current people who are in positions of power, um, to make decisions. So, um, it's, it's really about kind of cracking open those. The way that we currently do, um, decision-making and, and enabling and supporting, um, other, other voices to participate in other needs to be heard, um, in those spaces so that when we're, we're embracing this idea of transformation and really doing things differently, um, we're not just kind of recreating the same things, but we're actually acknowledging that we, we, um, There've been a lot of people left out and sometimes it's not even people.

KD: I mean, it's sometimes it's about representing, um, non-human, um, entities in, in decision-making in a, in a more real way. Um, and, and the needs of say, for example, a watershed, um, in order to be able to be sustainable, a watershed needs to be able to replenish itself. And so, you know, thinking through what are all of the different diverse forms of life that rely on that watershed, not just. You know, the human needs in terms of taking water from that area for, for human use, but also acknowledging that there's, you know, there's trees, there's, um, insects, there's birds, there's all these other diverse forms of life that need to rely on that space in order to, um, In order to survive and in order for us to have a sustainable relationship with the world around us. Um, so that's, that's kind of a lot of where, where my work focuses its energies. And it's really not just about thinking at that one scale either. It's really about, um, trying to work, um, across scales. So a lot of my work, for example, on, um, some of the work I've done on, on cumulative effects, um, in coastal and Marine areas, which is. Try to manage all the different, um, you know, affects that might have, um, might interact with an environment. So, you know, you're looking at, um, your storm water, that's coming in to a Marine area. You're looking at your sewage, that's being dumped into that area. You're looking at treated sewage, but you know, you're looking at your, your treatment areas.

KD: Um, you're looking at all the different people in that, in communities that live around that area who might want to use, um, The the Marine life and for, for, uh, livelihoods and for their own, um, you know, identity purposes, you know, there are all these different people who are and interactions that are going on in that space. Um, and. In order for us to kind of transform how we manage, uh, the Marine environment like that. We have to actually look at all of those different kinds of interactions across scales, you know, in New Zealand, which is where I've done that done this work. There's actually. 14 different statutes that manage a single, um, you know, a single Harbor. And when you have that kind of cross scale, those kind of cross scale interactions going on, you really have to think pretty creatively. And, um, Uh, and, and differently, but how you're going to manage all of those different actions, interactions, so that you can really do a better job in the future and make sure that those resources aren't aren't dramatically depleted over time.

EB: Yeah, absolutely. That's really interesting.

KD: Very long answer to a pretty discrete question.

EB: It was right at us with some context. So you talked about one of your projects. Um, could you talk a little bit more about some of the recent projects you've worked on?

KD: Yeah. Um, I have, uh, I've got a lot of projects that I've been working on over the years.

KD: Um, some of my favorites and some of the recent ones at the moment I'm working on, um, some I've done a lot of work on something called serious games, um, which are basically using, um, you know, the kind of concept of games or gaming, uh, to address. Kind of serious problems. Um, and, but without I liked, I really, uh, the term is kind of an odd one because I still think that an important element of serious games is still fun and enabling people to have fun.

KD: Um, because a lot of the work that I do tries to engage people in kind of thinking differently and thinking creatively about problems that are very serious, um, But, you know, you have to give people that opportunity to be creative and have fun sometimes in order for them to kind of open up, um, there, the way that we've been doing things for a long time and think, Oh, well, I could actually, we could actually do this really, really differently.

KD: It's, you know, creating those imaginary opportunities. Is sometimes the most important step for people to be actually able to do things differently in the future, which is what we need for in order to really transform and, uh, to a more sustainable society. Um, you know, I think so serious games is a really cool method because basically it, it, um, It creates, we've done a bunch of different kinds of games.

KD: You know, you can have kind of board game style games that address climate change. We've done some for sea level rise, and then we've also done some for flooding on farmlands. Um, you can do games that aim to that are more like a digital game, um, that are we've. We've developed a serious game called adaptive futures that looks at, um, Coastal flooding and climate change and sea level rise in, um, Alto, New Zealand.

KD: Um, and that one is sort of targeted at more kind of students or, um, maybe like a regional council decision maker. Um, you know, people who need to think about these really tricky things around, um, sea level rise, but half it can be hard to acknowledge sometimes are hard to make decisions. Um, When you, you know, you have so much pressure on you to actually make that decision and do something. Right here and now. Um, so the game actually operates over like a 10 year cycle and you know, at some point, yeah, in those 10 year cycles of flooding and weather and storm events happening, you know, your town might be totally flooded or your pet town might be totally destroyed, but it's okay. Cause it's just a game and people can try and they can experiment with different things and, you know, they can practice.

KD: In kind of a less stressful environment and it gets them in that mindset of experimentation. Um, and, and at the same time, it also makes them realize, Ooh, if we don't do something now in today, um, to try and address climate change, we are going to suffer major consequences. You know, we are going to lose towns to flooding. Um, and so it kind of, it does both, uh, takes the pressure off. And makes people realize the urgency of the situation kind of at the same time. And that learning, that kind of learning process is a big part of, um, why the serious games are a really a cool method and a lot of fun to work with people on, um, I'm doing some work on serious games here in salt Lake Valley as well.

KD: And that's an air quality and climate change game. That's still kind of under development. Um, so, you know, and that one's going to be actually a role-play game. So it's designed more for kind of classroom use or use with a group and it would be kind of a facilitated game. So you can see there, you know, there's basically as many different kinds of games that you can develop, um, as there are.

KD: You know, games that you play just for fun. Um, you know, with family and friends. So it's a, it's a really fun method. Um, I, I'm having a lot of fun with that and we're looking to develop an NSF national science foundation fund, um, you know, a grant that would actually fund some more work on that going forward in the future. So hopefully fingers crossed. That's really cool. Did you have any experience making games before this. Yeah. So we did a lot. I've done a lot of it in New Zealand before I came here. I'm, I'm working with a new group at the university of Utah, um, on, on this particular game, the air quality game, but, um, it's, uh, yeah, it's, it's, we've used them quite extensively in a bunch of different, um, Kind of with a bunch of different audiences in New Zealand.

KD: Um, and so, and I think students tend to really like them. Um, it's a really fun technique to use with students, but actually any we've we've worked with, um, like some of the local kind of government. Folks on serious gaming and they also get a lot out of it. Um, we've also done some work with, uh, there's a group in New Zealand. That's, um, an indigenous group at a Muray. So actually it just, uh, like a tribe, um, who has done quite a lot of work on serious games. And in that space, It was like a tailor made game just for that community so that they could work through some of the really specific problems that they were experiencing to do with flooding, to kind of help, um, the community, make some decisions about what they wanted to do with the land that they owned.

KD: So, you know, you can really tailor them to the different needs of different groups. And I think that's one of the things I really enjoy about, about working on it is that you can spend a lot of time trying to understand, like interview people, um, understand the kinds of ins and outs of the problem that that particular group is experiencing.

KD: And that's a lot of what the work is actually in developing these games is. Going out doing the interviews, um, with all the different actors who kind of have some knowledge about the problem that you're experiencing. And then you kind of take all that information and try and create some, um, and try and kind of game game-ify it, um, in a way that will enable people to.

KD: Interact and think differently about the problem they're experiencing and the role plays is a good example because basically you kind of have to get into the mindset of some of the different actors.

EB: I wanted to ask about the courses that you're teaching, but I'm not quite sure where you all are, are in that process.

KD: Sure. Yeah, we've got, um, I know what I'm teaching in the fall. It's going to be the, um, systems thinking course, which I think, um, the full name of that is social ecological systems thinking for sustainability. Um, so that's going to be the sort of one, one course that I kick off in the fall. And then I think in the spring, I'll either I've got to, um, develop some material for the spring.

KD: And so, um, if anybody wants to send me. Thoughts on that? I have two that I'm considering. One is sustainable coastal and Marine management, which is kind of like my, my passion and the other one is a, um, community planning for resilience, which is. Really urgently needed. So, you know, I think those two are the, um, the courses that I'm thinking about for the spring and I'm just not sure which one I'm going to prioritize. We'll have to see. Hmm.

EB: This is a question that I just like to ask, but, um, what are, have you read anything good recently? Do you have any recommendations?

KD: I love, I love this question. It's such a great question. Um, I love to read, um, novels in particular. I'm um, I, I. Uh, I read stupid novels as well as smart novels. I guess I'm only gonna, I, will they going to tell you? Um, I, uh, I recently read a girl, woman other by Bernardin. Um, every STO. And that was really fabulous. It's, um, kind of a British centered, uh, novel primarily. And it's, um, just all about a diverse group of kind of women, um, in various stages of their career and development and kind of their stories and just really centered on their voices. Um, and I just. Very very fun and engaging. So that was, that was great. Um, and then, um, also, um, at the moment I'm about three quarters away through something called the overstory, which is by Richard Powers. And that is about, uh, it's actually about nonhuman relationships of humans and non-humans um, and how trees talk. That's awesome. It's really good. It's really good. And then for my, uh, you know, like intellectual read at the moment I'm working on know your price, which is by Andre Perry, Dr. Andre Perry. Um, and it's just a really, it's a book I've. Was recommended. Um, because I went to the smart growth. America is equity summit a little while ago, maybe a month or so ago. And, um, and it's just all about, um, sort of black lives and poverty in America to cities. And it's just really important, important book.

EB: Well, thank you for those recommendations. Is there anything else that you would like to include, um, for students to maybe get to know you.

KD: I think that's it. I'm, I'm just really excited to be there and get to interact with folks and, um, get to learn from the students and themselves, because I know, um, you know, there's a lot of really amazing ideas that come out of just working with students or working with different people in different spaces. You know, that's a lot of what my work is about is kind of, um, the fact that. Through collaboration. We can often create new ways of thinking and doing things and create new possibilities, um, that weren't imagined before. And so I just can't wait to do that with students.

EB: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much.

KD: Thank you.

EB: I'm Ella Brady and this has been the UIE podcast. Contact us@tuftsyouipodcastatgmail.com to get involved. Thanks for listening and see you in two weeks.