

What is a Sustainable City?

The term *sustainable development* goes beyond the boundaries of science and business development and trade to include human development, values, and differences in cultures. In fact, many organizations are referring to *sustainable human development* as opposed to sustainable development in order to emphasize issues such as the importance of gender equality, participation in decision-making processes, and access to education and health.

Cities have become the focal points of these components as major consumers and distributors of goods and services. However, many cities tend to be large consumers of goods and services, while draining resources out of external regions that they depend on. As a result of increasing consumption of resources, and growing dependencies on trade, the ecological impact of cities extends beyond their geographic locations. It has been recognized that the concept of sustainable development is an evolving, debatable term. This section gives you an overview of how sustainable (urban) development was defined by the Brundtland Commission and how it is defined by different [organizations](#) in different geographical regions.

The most widely known definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Commission, which defined sustainable development as **"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."**

Rees, William E. and Roseland, Mark. 1991. Sustainable Communities: Planning for the 21st Century. Plan Canada. 31: 3. 15.

During the preparatory meetings for the [URBAN21](#) Conference (Berlin, July 2000) the following definition was developed to define sustainable urban development:

"Improving the quality of life in a city, including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social and economic components without leaving a burden on the future generations. A burden which is the result of a reduced natural capital and an excessive local debt. Our aim is that the flow principle, that is based on an equilibrium of material and energy and also financial input/output, plays a crucial role in all future decisions upon the development of urban areas."

However, there are many more definitions out there. Let's look at a few:

"Sustainable community development is the ability to make development choices which respect the relationship between the three "E"s"-economy, ecology, and equity:

- **Economy** - Economic activity should serve the common good, be self-renewing, and build local assets and self-reliance.
- **Ecology** - Human are part of nature, nature has limits, and communities are responsible for protecting and building natural assets.
- **Equity** - The opportunity for full participation in all activities, benefits, and decision-making of a society."

- *Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED):* Hart Environmental Data (<http://www.subjectmatters.com/indicators/Sustainability/DefinitionsCommunity.html>)

"A sustainable community is one in which improvement in the quality of human life is achieved in harmony with improving and maintaining the health of ecological systems; and where a healthy economy's industrial base supports the quality of both human and ecological systems."

- *Indigo Development*, (<http://www.indigodev.com/Sustain.html>)

"A sustainable community uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations. It seeks improved public health and a better quality of life for all its residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation and promoting efficiency, and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy."

- *Concern, Inc. (1993)*

"Sustainable communities are defined as towns and cities that have taken steps to remain healthy over the long term. Sustainable communities have a strong sense of place. They have a vision that is embraced and actively promoted by all of the key sectors of society, including businesses, disadvantaged groups, environmentalists, civic associations, government agencies, and religious organizations. They are places that build on their assets and dare to be innovative. These communities value healthy ecosystems, use resources efficiently, and actively seek to retain and enhance a locally based economy. There is a pervasive volunteer spirit that is rewarded by concrete results. Partnerships between and among government, the business sector, and nonprofit organizations are common. Public debate in these communities is engaging, inclusive, and constructive. Unlike traditional community development approaches, sustainability strategies emphasize: the whole community (instead of just disadvantaged neighborhoods); ecosystem protection; meaningful and broad-based citizen participation; and economic self-reliance."

- *Institute for Sustainable Communities* (<http://www.iscvt.org/FAQscdef.html>)

"A community that believes today's growth must not be achieved at tomorrow's expense."

- *Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, initial report, October 1995*

"... the deliberate effort to ensure that community development not only enhances the local economy, but also the local environment and quality of life."

- *Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development* (<http://fcn.state.fl.us/fdi/>)

Trn: <http://archive.rec.org/REC/Programs/Sustainablecities/what.html>