

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Introduction

Although many sustainability issues are global or national in scope, we relate most directly to what is happening where we live.

In Canada, almost 80 per cent of the population is urban. Therefore, a shift to more sustainability must take place at the local level, in the places where we live, work, and shop. In this way, a community - whether it is a small town in Saskatchewan or one of Canada's sprawling metropolitan areas - has an important role to play in making sustainable development a reality.

What is a sustainable community?

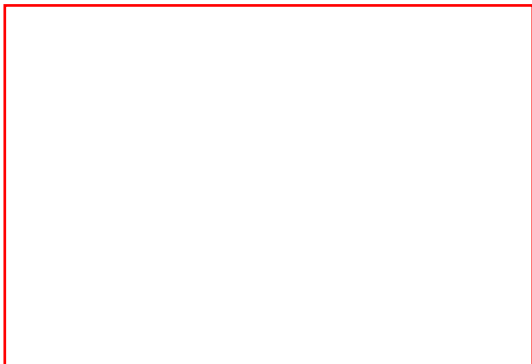
Many definitions of a sustainable community have been put forward, but they all revolve around the interconnectedness of society, economy and environment. According to Maureen Hart, a sustainable community is one in which

people

... the economic, social and environmental systems that make up the community provide a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, present and future. Sustainable communities acknowledge that there are limits to the natural, social and built systems upon which we depend.



A view of community as three separate, unrelated parts: an economic part, a social part and an environmental part. Traditional quality of life indicators tend to measure these 3 parts separately.



A view of community as three concentric circles: the economy exists within society, and both the economy and society exist within the environment. Sustainability indicators attempt to measure the extent to which these boundaries are respected.

Source: [Hart Environmental Data](#)

In addition to social, economic, and environmental health, sustainable communities are about the participation of all elements of society in decision-making processes. Local governments can help their communities to become more sustainable, but they cannot

[Home](#)

[Sustainability Issues](#)

[Measuring sustainability at the community level](#)

[How sustainable are Canadian communities?](#)

do it without a mandate from, and the participation of the local community. According to the [National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy](#)

Sustainability must be community-led and consensus-based because the central issue is will, not expertise; only a community-based process can overcome the political, bureaucratic and psychological barriers to change. But citizen-led processes must be complemented by top-down government support because it is still only governments that have the regulatory powers to secure the transition to sustainable development.

The following twelve principles, proposed by the [Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy](#), encompass the social, economic, environmental and decision-making aspects of sustainable communities:

Model Principles for Sustainable Communities

Source: [Ontario Round Table on Environment and Economy](#)

A sustainable community is one which:

1. Recognizes that growth occurs within some limits and is ultimately limited by the carrying capacity of the environment
2. Values cultural diversity
3. Has respect for other life forms and supports biodiversity
4. Has shared values amongst the members of the community (promoted through sustainability education)
5. Employs ecological decision-making (e.g., integration of environmental criteria into all municipal government, business and personal decision-making processes)
6. Makes decisions and plans in a balanced, open and flexible manner that includes the perspectives from the social, health, economic and environmental sectors of the community
7. Makes best use of local efforts and resources (nurtures solutions at the local level)
8. Uses renewable and reliable sources of energy
9. Minimizes harm to the natural environment
10. Fosters activities which use materials in continuous cycles.
And, as a result, a sustainable community:
11. Does not compromise the sustainability of other communities (a geographic perspective)
12. Does not compromise the sustainability of future generations by its activities (a temporal perspective).

[Measuring sustainability at the community level](#)

[How sustainable are Canadian communities?](#)

[Background](#) | [Sustainability Issues](#) | [Options & Ideas](#) | [Sustainable Business Indicators](#) | [National Reporting Survey](#) | [News & Views](#) | [Resources](#)

Copyright © 2004. Sustainability Reporting Program. All rights reserved.