

TOPC: Approaches to sustainable community development.

Introduction:

Environmentalists have long warned that our current patterns of economic growth and resource consumption so severely threaten the earth's carrying capacity that ecological collapse is likely, if not inevitable. Traditionally, arguments against this view have fallen mainly into two categories. First, there are those who deny that we are at a crisis point and claim that the alarmist rhetoric used by the environmental movement is not based on "scientific facts. The second criticism, decidedly economic in tone, holds that calls for environmental protection place too heavy a burden on business and industry. According to this line of thought, the high costs of cleaning up the environment would stifle the economic growth necessary to feed, clothe, and shelter the masses.

Sustainable development: two views:

Most definitions of sustainable development are based on intergenerational equity. This concept is well captured by the idea that the current generation must not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their material needs and enjoy a healthy environment'. Most advocates of sustainable development generally agree that the present use of natural resources should not result in a diminished standard of living for future generations.

Sustainable development:

For clarity, we have described the constrained growth approach and the resource maintenance approach as if there were little common ground between them; in practice the distinctions are less clear. For one thing, most proponents of both positions agree that intergenerational equity is central to any reasonable discussion of sustainability. Moreover, those who hold to the constrained growth approach recognize the need for the affluent countries of the north to reduce their consumption of natural resources and consumer goods, and they agree that efforts to achieve sustainability & must recognize ecological interdependence as well as the interdependence of humans and the natural environment'. While the differences between these perspectives are neither trivial nor completely reconcilable, common themes can be discerned. Batie for instance, suggests that both definitions can be subsumed under an alternative world view characterized by the following components: A perception that the biosphere imposes limits on economic growth.

- An expressed lack of faith in science or technology as the primary means by which human betterment can be achieved.
- Extreme aversion to environmental risks.
- Support for redistributive justice and egalitarian ethics and policies.
- Concern over population growth and faith in the wisdom of human capital development.
- Survival of species, and protection of the environment and minority cultures are goals that are at least as important as economic growth.

From sustainable development to sustainable communities:

The political and cultural difficulties associated with attempts to achieve sustainability on a global level provide one of the key justifications for sustainable communities. Proponents of sustainable communities argue that strategies which are developed at global or national scales tend to prevent 'meaningful and concerted political action'. A community-level approach allows for the design of policies and practices that are sensitive to the opportunities and constraints inherent to particular places.

The sustainable community: what is it?

For the most part, definition of sustainable community development parallels the definitions of sustainable development discussed above. The main difference involves the obvious reduction in geographic scope * sustainable community development is local. Broadly speaking, definitions of sustainable community development stress the importance of striking a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives while simultaneously enhancing local social relationships. Sustainable communities meet the economic needs of their residents, enhance and protect the environment, and promote more humane local societies. Consider, for example, the following definitions of sustainable community development: Environmentally sustainable urban economic development can be defined as local economic change which contributes to global environmental sustainability, while also enhance in the local natural and constructed urban environment. Sustainable development favors increased local control over development decisions, and such 'bottom up' development strategies would require evolution of decision-making authority to the local level. Obviously each of the above definitions are quite general. In more specific terms, the ideal typical sustainable community can be defined along five dimensions. First, as is the case with standard economic development strategies, there is an emphasis on increasing local economic diversity. Self-reliance, the second dimension, is closely related to economic diversity. This is not to be confused with economic self-sufficiency. Self-reliance entails the development of local markets, local production, local processing of previously imported goods, greater cooperation among local economic entities, and the like. Self-reliant communities would still be linked to larger economic structures, but they would have vibrant local economies which would better protect them from the whims of capital than is currently the case. The third dimension involves a reduction in the use of energy coupled to the careful management and recycling of waste products. Ideally, this means that the use of energy and materials is in balance with the earth's ability to absorb waste. The fourth dimension focuses on the protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources. As Berry puts it, a sustainable community can be described as 'a neighborhood of humans in a place, plus the place itself: its soil, its water, its air, and all the families and tribes of nonhuman creatures that belong to it we are speaking of a complex connection not only among human beings and their homeland but also between the human economy and nature, between forest and field or orchard, and between troublesome creatures and pleasant ones. All neighbors are Include.

An interactional approach to sustainable community development:

From the interactional perspective, community is a natural and ubiquitous phenomenon among people who share a common territory and interact with one another on place relevant matters: It is natural in that it is 'real', not 'nominal' and it is not contrived. This is to say that social interaction is authentic, not that it follows sub social or biotic principles of organization as claimed by some human ecologists. It is natural because people, by the nature of being human, engage in social relationships with others on a continuing basis and they derive their social being and identities from social interaction. Community, likewise, is ubiquitous by virtue of the fact that all people engage in it almost all of the time, whether or not they recognize that fact. From the natural flow of the interaction processes, community emerges². Community, therefore, is a natural disposition among people who interact with one another on various matters that comprise a common life. It is important to emphasize that although community depends upon interaction, this does not mean that interaction must be rooted only in positive sentiments. People interact with one another in all sorts of ways. 'Community implies all types of relations² among people, and if interaction is suppressed, community is limited'. In practice, community is always limited because there are inevitable barriers to social interaction such as cleavages along racial, ethnic, class, and gender lines. And of course groups are constantly forming, disbanding, and reforming along diverse interest lines. All of these factors act patterns of local interaction.

The pulp mill and the local environmental group were brought to the point of collaboration because both of them had a stake in what happened to a particular place. They had different stakes, and had they been left to themselves, they would have done different things with the place, but in the end it was the same place. Neither party wanted to leave the place, and both recognized that what Lester Throw says of territoriality in such a case is true: neither side could gain a decisive or lasting victory over the other² No matter how diverse and complex the patterns of livelihood may be that arise within the river system, no matter how many perspectives from which people view the basin, no matter how diversely they value it, it is, finally, one and the same river for everyone. This example also illustrates more clearly how the community field arises among people who share a common territory.⁴ Emergence of the community field depends upon the recognition that although different social fields are characterized by different interests, areas of overlap exist by virtue of the fact that living in the same place creates an interdependence among all parties. The recognition and understanding of this interdependence * an interdependence which transcends the narrower interests people have in particular use and exchange values, is what is meant by the term 'community interest'. The community field emerges when this interest is asserted through linking and coordinating actions & that identify and reinforce the commonality that permeates the differentiated special interest fields²'. This is precisely what happened during negotiations between the pulp mill and the environmental group. As each party came to realize that they were bound to one another by their common connection to the river, this bond became an explicit part of the negotiation process.