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Sustainable Cities: Myths and Truths

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The XXI Century Society and the Challenges of Sustainability

José Henrique Conti
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Chapter 1

The XXI century society and the challenges of sustainability

José Henrique Conti

Introduction

The objective of this book is to promote the discussion about several challenges we face to implement a sustainable society, not just for its development but also to improve necessary processes and procedures. The possibility of implementing a sustainable society has been vigorously debated in the literature.

The expression “Sustainability” is treated here as: the responsible administration of basic resources for human survivor with the environment preservation and the guarantee the same resources will be available for future generations. In this sense, it is necessary a secure supply of water, food, basic sanitation, health, education, security, access to information and leisure, to ensure an ecological healthy environment for everyone.

Another factor to be taken into account about sustainability is the globalization. We can refer to some examples: there are countries that reached satisfactory levels of Human Development Index (HDI) but are suffering the population pressure from neighbor countries. In the western cultures, one of the examples is the United States of America (USA) where millions of Mexicans cross the borders and compromise the sustainable capacity of USA. The same is happening in Europe which suffers the population pressure from members of the European Union (EU), where people search for better economies inside the EU such as England and Germany.

Russia and Mongolia, for example, suffer of the potential “population bomb” from the neighbor China. Today Chinese people who immigrate to Russia experience some constraint about reproduction. It became a serious issue in Russia and can compromise its economic sustainability. The economic growth of China is pressuring neighbor countries towards a coordinated and sustainable regional growth.

Also, the non-inclusion of neighbors into a broad industrial developing project can cause global consequences, such as the air pollution in China found in Canada, the pollution from China precipitates over Canada in the form of a dried cloud.

These facts support environmentalists which argue that a socioeconomic sustainable development is not possible in a static and isolated structure; it is rather possible only in a dynamic and inclusive way.

To discuss about a sustainable development in Brazil, for example, we should consider neighbor countries in Latin America, as well as countries with Portuguese language, since the immigration from such countries would increase with the Brazilian economic progress.

Examples of considerable immigration from other countries can be illustrated by the significant amount of Portuguese and Haitians to Brazil. It could compromise the way Brazil is moving towards a sustainable society, at the same time, several Brazilians are still under the acceptable values of HDI (based on the United Nations’ Development Program of 2002).

Another important topic about sustainability in the XXI century is the access to information; subject also addressed by the authors of this book given its extreme importance for a functioning contemporary sustainable society.

The access to information is of vital importance in order to build an equilibrated and fair sustainable society, where democracy gains a new interpretation through the social Internet media. In this new democratic scenario the social media, civil society and government representatives can together design new laws efficiently to attend the public expectations.

In this context, we can highlight two facets of sustainability, they are:

- Sustainability should always be taken into account in a local-regional and global-inclusive way.
- The access to information is of fundamental importance to fight against socioeconomic inequality.

For example, when we study the transbordering environmental pollution, it means, the pollution produced in one country which precipitates in a neighbor country, such as the German pollution precipitating in The Netherlands; Chinese pollution precipitating in the USA and Canada and even worse Chernobyl contaminating the entire north
hemisphere; it is clear whatever we do causes consequences to others.

Another example is the effect of taxes cut among nations in order to build a common market; several productive sectors are transferred from USA to China. As China is the fastest growing economy of the (BRICS) Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa; China is then receiving massive investments from all over the planet, but the consequences are dramatic.

To illustrate the drama in USA, in a macro or global view of sustainability, the effect of Chinese power of receiving investments from abroad has caused a huge economic chaos in Detroit, once the 18th biggest city in the USA, Detroit went bankruptcy, with a huge social problem of unemployment and security.

Still in a macro analysis of sustainability, the contemporary productive dynamics come from the adaptation to the new requirements of a world ever more inclusive. The migration of people from the countryside areas into big cities increases the demand for goods and food consumption. Because of this new urban dynamics, a global logistics becomes of vital importance for a sustainable society in the XXI century.

The sustainable society of the XXI century is characterized by a new logistics of production and distribution of goods and food, together with the broad access to information, creating a rapid and efficient society.

With the growing of human development, more and more people will be included in the consumption spectrum and new cities will have to be designed in order to cope with such new dynamics. A new concept of “smart cities” comes as a result of the “speed up” phenomenon. In this book the concepts of “smart cities” and “speed up” are well explained.

The micro view of sustainability can be illustrated by local/regional projects, where it is easy to pin point the participation of citizens. Projects are created and executed by neighbor’s mobilization, civil organizations and non-profitable organizations (NGOs).

The municipality representatives participate with projects of mobility and recover of degraded urban areas. In Brazil, the city of Curitiba located in the State of Paraná, became a global reference for urban sustainability and it frequently receives the visit of several public representatives from all over the world.

In India, for example, the vision of sustainability “vasudhaiva kutumbakam” sees the Earth as a Family. It can be understood as the interdependence of various systems in our planet, as well as the construction of bigger complexity from less complex and smaller systems; from micro to macro sustainability, where sustainable units, such as houses, buildings, villages and cities are of great importance in the development of an even more complex sustainable model of development.

The reader will see that sustainability is a very complex subject, but in this book, sustainability is seeing as a broad concept and the use of simplified vocabulary was introduced as much as possible. Complicated scientific concepts are illustrated through practical examples in order to make things easy for the reader.

This book incorporates the diversity of ideas through the participation of several authors from different countries. The authors also have distinct cultural backgrounds, and hopefully, it will facilitate the comprehension of sustainability, and together we will be able to highlight the myths and truth of a sustainable world.

With a transdisciplinary and multicultural vision about sustainability, it was included a total of nine authors from seven different countries under my supervision, we are:

Author from Saudi Arabia
- Qassim Al Khamees.

Authors from Brazil:
- José Henrique Conti;
- Fernando Focesi Pinheiro;
- Ana Adelina de Oliveira Afonso.

Author from Canada:
- Renato Alas Martins.

Author from India:
- Anirban Som.

Author from Italy:
- Roberta Moroni.

Author from Jordan:
- Burhan Amarah.

Author from The Republic of Cameroon:
- Eric Fru Zama.