

Social Sustainability

March 2, 2011

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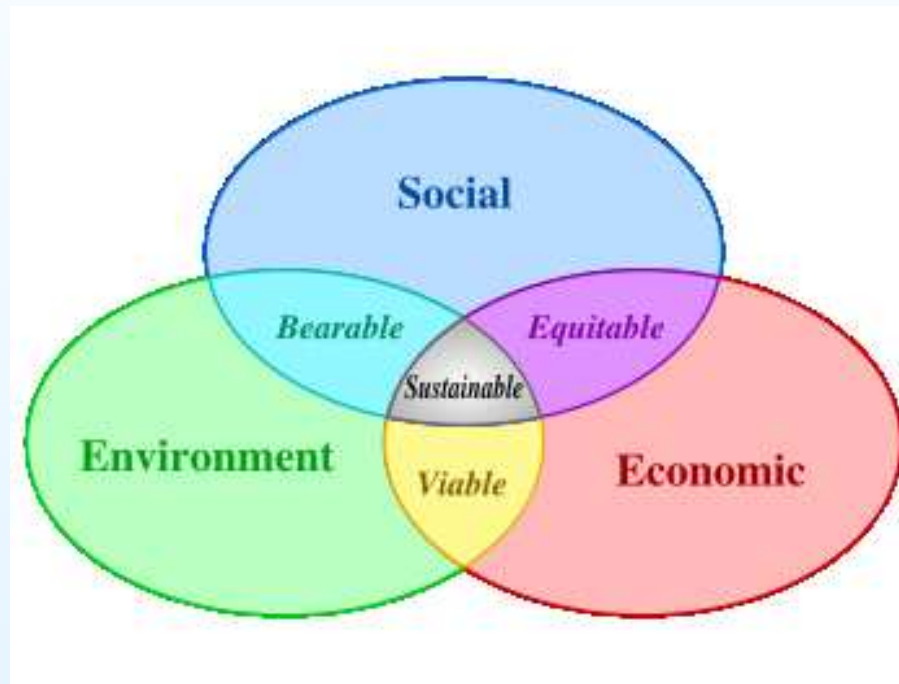
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Three Factor Model of Sustainability

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Another common approach to sustainability was first proposed by Robert Goodland¹ in which he argues that sustainability is based on the interactions of three key realms: Environmental (or ecologic), Social, and Economic.



¹Goodland, Robert. 1995. "The Concept of Environmental Sustainability." Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics 26: 1-24.

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Social sustainability considers how individuals, communities and societies live with each other, and societal provisions and expectations for

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Social sustainability considers how individuals, communities and societies live with each other, and societal provisions and expectations for

- a) individual autonomy and realization of personal potential,
- b) participation in governance and rule making,
- c) citizenship and service to others,
- d) justice,
- e) the propagation of knowledge,
- f) and resource distributions that affect the ability of that society to flourish over time.

Sustainability is a Social Process

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Sustainability of human flourishing is inherently a social process. The natural, built, and cultural environment in which humans live and thrive is the outcome of generations of human interaction with the environment.

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For example, norms that are used by any group to assign relative values to such things as technological change, scientific inquiry, economic activity including profits and costs, risk, the natural world, and human and nonhuman life dramatically affect the decisions those groups take and thereby the opportunities they allow to future generations.

Capacity of Current and Future Generations

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Social sustainability occurs when the formal and informal processes; systems; structures; and relationships *actively support the capacity of current and future generations* to create healthy and liveable communities. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life².

²Stephen McKenzie, "Social Sustainability: Towards Some Definitions", Hawke Research Institute, Working Paper Series No 27, University of South Australia. Magill, South Australia , 2004

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Environmental, Economic, and Social Sustainability

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- **Economic Sustainability:** Occurs when development, which moves towards social and environmental sustainability, is financially feasible
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- **Environmental Sustainability:** Practices to ensure that the natural resource capital remains intact; i.e., that the “source” and “sink’ functions of the environment should not be degraded. Therefore, the extraction of renewable resource should not exceed the rate at which they are renewed, and the absorptive capacity of the environment to assimilate wastes should not be exceeded. Furthermore, the extraction of non-renewable resources should be minimized and should not exceed agreed minimum strategic levels.

³Gilbert, R., Stevenson, R., Girardet, H. & Stren, R. 1996. Making Cities Work. Earthscan Publications, United Kingdom

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But do I like this definition?

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What do we really want people to have?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
4. ...

The Elephant(s) in the Room

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Has the sustainability movement been hijacked by the radical left and the Apollo Alliance?

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Has the sustainability movement been hijacked by the radical left and the Apollo Alliance?

Has the sustainability movement been co-opted by the values and purposes of corporate and multinational interests.

Standard of Living

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The duty imposed by sustainability is to bequeath to posterity not any particular thing — with rare exceptions such as Yosemite, for example — but rather to endow them with whatever it takes to achieve a standard of living at least as good as our own and to look after their next generation similarly. We are not to consume humanity's capital, in the broadest sense⁴.

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[It is] an obligation to conduct ourselves so that we leave to the future the option or the capacity to be as well off as we are. It is not clear [to me] that one can be more precise than that. Sustainability is an injunction not to satisfy ourselves by impoverishing our successors⁵

⁴Solow, Robert M., “An almost practical step toward sustainability” Invited Lecture on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of Resources for the Future, Washington, DC. ,1992

⁵ Solow, Robert M., “Sustainability: An economist's perspective”. The Eighteenth J. Seward Johnson Lecture. Woods Hole, MA: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution., 1991

Excessively Generous Ancestors

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You could make a good case that our ancestors, who were considerably poorer than we are, whose standard of living was considerably less than our own, were probably excessively generous in providing for us. They cut down a lot of trees, but they saved a lot and they built a lot of railroad rights-of-way. Both privately and publicly they probably did better by us than a sort of fair minded judge in thinking about the equity (whether they got their share and we got our share or whether we proted at their expense) would have required. It would have been okay for them to save a little less, to enjoy a little more and give us a little less of a start than our generation has had.

Discounting the Future

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... there is wide agreement that the State should protect *the interests of the future* in some degree against the effects of our irrational discounting and of our preference for ourselves over our descendants. The whole movement for 'conservation' in the United States is based on this conviction. It is the clear duty of Government, which is the trustee for unborn generations as well as for its present citizens, to watch over, and, if need be, by legislative enactment, to defend, the exhaustible natural resources of the country from rash and reckless spoliation⁶.

⁶Pigou, A. C. *The economics of welfare* (4th ed.). London: Macmillan, 1932

Basic Capability Approach I

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The particular approach to equality that I have explored involves judging individual advantage by the freedom to achieve, incorporating (but going beyond) actual achievements. In many contexts, particularly in the assessment of individual well-being, these conditions can, I have argued, be fruitfully seen in terms of the capability to function, incorporating (but going beyond) the actual functionings that a person can achieve⁷.

⁷Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992

Basic Capability Approach II

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... there is a strong case for judging individual advantage in terms of the capabilities that a person has, that is the substantive freedoms he or she has reason to value. In this perspective, poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as low incomes, which is the standard criterion of poverty⁸.

⁸Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

Morality of Making Choices for Others

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- Is it morally permissible to judge whether a person not yet born would prefer a world with the same “richness” we experience as compared to a world that might not be possible if we preserve the current richness?

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- Is it morally permissible to imply that there are no tradeoffs in preserving a world with the same richness of possibilities that we now have when any choice we make changes the future of possibilities?