

Sustainable Development: Now More Than Ever



John Dernbach
Widener University Law School
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Widener University

Where we are heading

- *Problems:*
 - *Widespread poverty/enormous unmet basic needs*
 - *Growing environmental degradation, including climate change*
 - *Points of “no return” or irreversible damage are uncertain*
- *Systematic causes:*
 - *Increasing consumption of resources (e.g., energy, materials, water, land, biodiversity)*
 - *Population growth*

Development

PROGRESS:

- Peace & security***
- Economic Development***
- Social Development/ Human Rights/ Healthy Communities***

PRICE OF PROGRESS:

- Environment & Natural Resources***
- Living people who are harmed***
- Future generations that are harmed***

Sustainable Development

PROGRESS:

- Peace & security*
- Economic development*
- Social development/human rights/healthy communities*
- Environmental protection/restoration*

Thus, sustainable development is:

- *Development that--*
 - *Protects and restores the environment.*
 - *Eliminates and prevents large-scale poverty.*
- *Or: Ecologically sustainable human development*
- *Or: U.S. environmental and conservation law and practice applied to a wider range of resources and problems (e.g., climate change/biodiversity)*
- *Sustainable development is not the same as:*
 - *"Traditional environmentalism"*
 - *Sustainable growth*

Purposes

- *Development—*

- Freedom

- Opportunity

- Quality of Life

- *Sustainable Development—*

- Freedom

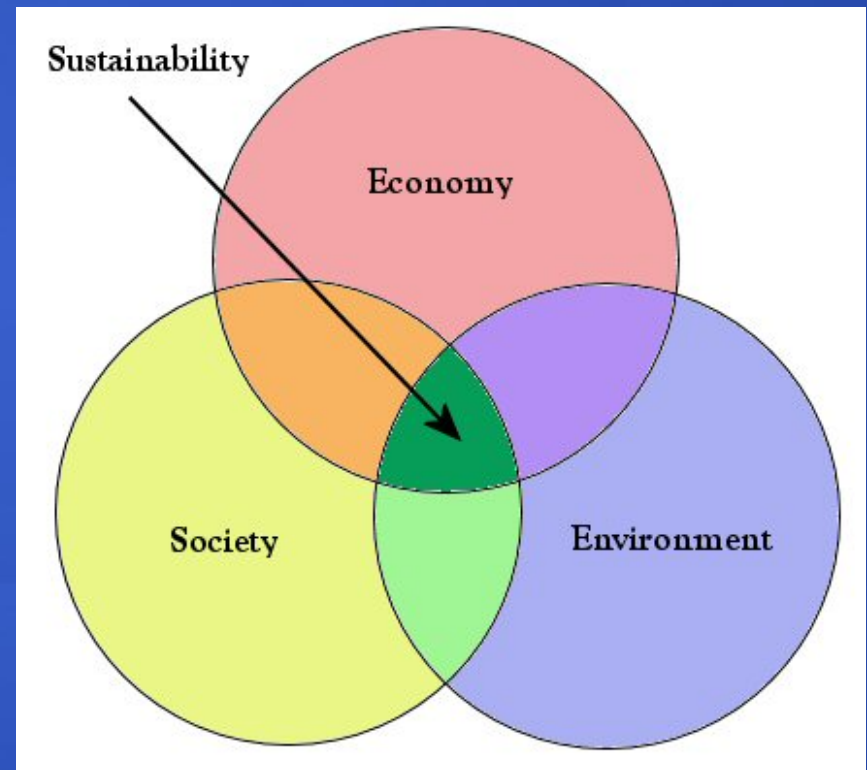
- Opportunity

- Quality of Life

For everyone in this and future generations

Sustainable development as understood by most sustainability practitioners:

- Decision-making framework
- Core principle: integrated decision-making (environmental, economic, social)
- Also a long-term process/journey



Sustainability:

- Is based on equity—intragenerational and intergenerational
- Would have decision makers establish and implement environmental, social, and economic goals, based on context, available knowledge, and other factors
- Is flexible enough to adapt to new information.
- Requires adaptive management, learning by doing, and constant learning and feedback.
- Is deeper and more challenging than is often believed.

International and U.S. response to climate change based on this sustainability framework

- Climate Change Convention was opened for signature at U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, where nations committed to achieving sustainable development.
- All countries agree to integrate climate change considerations into their “relevant social, economic and environmental policies and actions....” Art. 4.1(f)
- These considerations specifically include:
 - Mitigation
 - Adaptation (including resilience)
- U.S. climate law and policy (including state and local law) tracks this approach.

Growing number of players and activities -- examples

- Sustainable Agriculture Network
- Business Council for Sustainable Development
- Global Reporting Initiative
- Forest Stewardship Council/Sustainable Forestry Initiative
- U.S. Green Building Council
- American Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
- Sustainable Communities Network
- American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

Growing role of public and private law

- Increasingly applied in public law (*e.g.*, EPA and/or DOT regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, including Clean Power Plan)
- Increasingly applied in private law (Vandenbergh 2013)
- Under EU treaty, sustainable development is governing principle for internal economic policy, international relations, and environmental protection
- Included in growing number (about three dozen) of national and subnational constitutions.

For a sustainable America...

- *1. The United States should systematically reduce its ecological footprint.*
- *2. The United States government must adopt, as soon as possible, greenhouse gas emission reduction programs that will reduce U.S. emissions to our fair share of safe global emissions.*
- *3. The United States should create more employment opportunities in environmental protection and restoration, and make it easier for unskilled and low-income persons to enter and remain in the workforce.*

--Agenda for a Sustainable America (2009)

Discontents

- Sustainability is too boring.
- Sustainability is too meaningless
- Sustainability is too late

In a time of rapid, nonlinear climate change:

- The core problems being addressed by sustainability—widespread environmental degradation and poverty—still need to be addressed.
- Resilience will need to be integrated into public and private decision-making, as sustainability provides.
- Issues other than climate change will need to be addressed.
- We must intensify the effort to achieve sustainability, not end it.

Resilience is insufficient to address climate change

- Does not address mitigation.
 - Higher atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases will make life much harder.
 - International negotiations--Paris 2015
 - U.S. law and policy
- Does not fully address equity/justice.

Summing up

- Sustainable development—or sustainability—is not only useful; it is essential.
- Sustainable development and resilience are mutually reinforcing, not contradictory.
- Resilience is not an adequate substitute for sustainable development as a decision-making framework.
- The challenge is *accelerating* the transition to sustainability.

Prof. John C. Dernbach

Widener University Law School

3800 Vartan Way

Harrisburg, PA 17106-9382

(717) 541-1933

(717) 541-3966 (fax)

jcdernbach@widener.edu

<http://ssrn.com/author=411559>

<http://www.johndernbach.com/>



Widener University