

Sustainable cities are accessible, green–blue and fair

Professor David Simon

Lecture Summary

This lecture explains key features of sustainable urban areas and the prospects and challenges of achieving them.

The lecture comprises three elements, beginning with a discussion of the origins and diverse meanings of sustainability in different contexts and at the various scales to which it is often applied. Some of the inevitable complexities and ambiguities are explained. A crucial point is that only a comprehensive approach to sustainability that integrates the key economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions is likely to have good prospects for success.

The second element outlines the current global sustainable development agenda adopted by the UN and member states in a landmark series of five agreements and agendas in 2015-16. For the first time, these commit all members, South and North, to implementing a comprehensive, multidimensional and integrated, goal-oriented approach to sustainability. These five components are the:

- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
 - includes 17 SDGs
- COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change (Dec 2015)
- Addis Ababa Agenda on Financing for Development
- New Urban Agenda (Quito, Oct 2016)

The crucial position and role of sustainable towns and cities within this agenda – with a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 11) and the New Urban Agenda – are highlighted. This reflects the reality of *Homo sapiens* now being a predominantly urban species.

The final element of the lecture outlines a conceptual urban sustainability framework, which uses the key sustainability characteristics of accessibility, green-blueness and fairness to symbolise the economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions. Moreover, urban areas are not islands of bricks, concrete, steel and glass but part of wider spatial and functional systems. Hence, urban sustainability is ultimately most meaningful as part of overall national or societal sustainability.

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