

A new conceptual framework for sustainable development

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Abstract A critical review of the multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development reveals a lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding sustainable development and its complexities. A critical review shows that the definitions of sustainable development are vague; there is a lack of operative definitions and disagreement over what should be sustained; the concept is unclear in terms of emotional commitment; and it “remains a confused topic”, “fraught with contradictions”. This article aims to theoretically synthesize the interdisciplinary literature on sustainable development, and then identify the results by broad categories. Therefore, this article uses conceptual analysis, which reviews multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development, which recognizes patterns and similarities within the literature, then it synthesizes the patterns to different categories and independent concepts, where each concept has distinctive meanings and represents close ideas on sustainability. The analytical process elaborates seven concepts that together assemble the theoretical framework of ‘sustainable development’ and each concept represents distinctive meanings of the theoretical framework.

Keywords Conceptual Framework · Eco-form · Equity · Integrative Management · Global Agenda · Sustainable Development · Utopianism

Introduction

A review of the multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development (SD) reveals a lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding sustainable development and its complexities (Jabareen, 2004). The review shows that the definitions of sustainable development are vague (Gow, 1992; Mozaffar, 2001); that there is a lack of operative definitions (Villanueva, 1997, p. 154); that there is

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disagreement over what should be sustained (Redclift, 1993; Sachs, 1999, p. 25; Satterthwaite, 1996, p. 32); that the concept is unclear in terms of emotional commitment (Solow, 1992); and that it “remains a confused topic” (Redclift, 1994, p. 17), “fraught with contradictions” (Redclift, 1987). Yet, there is no general agreement on how the concept should be translated into practice (Berke and Conroy, 2000). Andrews (1997) further observes that “sustainable development is primarily symbolic rhetoric, with competing interests each redefining it to suit their own political agendas, rather than serving as an influential basis for policy development” (p. 19). Beatley and Manning (1998, p. 3) argue that there is a general sense that sustainability is a good thing, but that it still requires definition and elaboration.

This article aims to synthesize a theoretical framework for sustainable development using the fragmented multidisciplinary literature and different bodies of knowledge focusing on sustainable development. Therefore, the article will elaborate the different concepts of sustainable development, which together constitute its theoretical world, and to address the possible interactions or relationships among them. Accordingly, the article is composed of three sections. The first introduces the methodology, the second presents the concepts of sustainability, and the third section summarizes and discusses the new theoretical world of sustainability and its contents.

Conceptual analysis

This article aims to theorize the interdisciplinary world of sustainable development, rather than merely describe it. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 29) identify two main points related to the difference between “theory” and “descriptions”: “First, theory uses concepts. Similar data are grouped and given conceptual labels. This means placing interpretations on the data. Second, the concepts are related by means of statements of relationships. In description, data may be organized according to themes. These themes may be conceptualizations of data, but are more likely to be a precise or summaries of words taken directly from the data. There is little, if any, interpretation of data. Nor is there any attempt to relate the themes to form a conceptual scheme”. In a broad sense, “qualitative studies ultimately aim to describe and explain a pattern of relationships, which can be done only with a set of conceptually specified categories” (Mishler, 1990).

This article uses conceptual analysis to synthesize a theory of sustainable development. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest a set of qualitative “tactics” that help in generating meanings from different texts and documents. The conceptual analysis was designed to trace the major concepts of sustainable development, which together build the theoretical framework of sustainable development. At the heart of this methodology lies the interplay of making inductions, deriving concepts from the data, and making deductions directed at hypothesizing the relationships between concepts (Patton, 2002, p. 454). The methodology employed in this article is composed of the following main phases:

Phase 1: review of the multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development. The multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development that the study reviews belongs to various bodies of knowledge across social sciences such as sociology, economy, politics, geography, architecture and urban studies, government and public policy. In addition, the review includes philosophy and ethics, environmental studies, ecology, and transportation. In brief, this study reviews all fields that concern and

study sustainable development. Therefore, the study reviews journals and books in fields that cover sustainable development. Most of the reviewed books and articles were published in English mainly after 1987 the year of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987).

For each text—article or book—the review analyzes the content that strives to answer some questions regarding the following themes: the general theme of the text, its discipline or field of knowledge, the use of existing theory, methods and approaches, and the concepts and meaning that it produces. Eventually, the outcomes of this process of reviewing are numerous competing and contradictory themes, meanings, and concepts.

Phase 2: recognition of patterns in seemingly random information (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 7). The aim is to note patterns within the results of the first step. This step looks for similarities or patterns within the sample and codes the results according to categories of meaning.

Phase 3: synthesization of categories with similar meanings and themes and creating independent concepts, where each concept has distinctive meanings and represents close ideas. It is important to mention that the mechanism of concept-making is an *iterative* process and repetitive. When the concept is identified inductively, the researcher then moves into a verification mode, trying to confirm or qualify the finding. This then sets off a new inductive cycle.

Phase 4: Conceptualizing a theoretical framework of sustainable development and describing the relationship among the derived concepts.

The concepts of sustainable development

The conceptual analysis identified seven distinct concepts, which composed the theoretical world of sustainability. These concepts are:

The concept of ethical paradox

This concept represents the ethical paradox within ‘sustainable development’. On one hand, ‘sustainability’ is seen as a characteristic of a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely. On the other hand, however, development is environmental modification, which requires deep intervention in nature and exhausts natural resources.

The term sustainability belongs originally to the field of ecology, referring to an ecosystem’s potential for subsisting over time, with almost no alteration. When the idea of development was added, the concept would no longer be looked at from the point of view of the environment, but from that of society (Reboratti, 1999, pp. 207–209) and the capital economy. This paradox is represented in the most frequently used definition of SD: that of Brundtland Report, which deemphasizes the environment while underlining human needs to be realized through development. Accordingly, sustainability is seen as an environmental ‘logo’ and development as an economic one. The concept of SD aims to mitigate and moderate between the paradox between the two.

Sachs (1993) argues that SD has attracted such a large following because it seems to hold out the promise of bringing about a rapprochement between ecological (sustainability) and economic (development) interests. SD is accordingly deemed

able to cope with the ecological crisis without affecting the existing economic relationships of power. Capitalism and ecology are no longer contradictory when brought together under the banner of SD (Baeten, 2000). The 'limits to growth' have become negotiable and manageable.

The concept of SD is also articulated as a discourse of ethics, which specifies human conduct with regard to good and evil (Acsehrad, 1999, p. 54). *Our Common Future* concludes that, "human survival and well-being could depend on success in elevating sustainable development to a global ethics" (WCED, 1987, p. 308). The Earth Charter (2001) states that, "We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed."

Although there is no single agreed-upon definition of SD, virtually all definitions conceive of the principal in terms of a tension between the goals of economic development and environmental protection, with a preference for the goals of economic growth (Geisinger, 1999). The language of the principal itself, as defined by the Brundtland Commission, is instructive: "Development involves a progressive transformation of economy and society".

Many scholars question the ethics behind the concept. Rajni Kothari (1992, pp. 27–28) argues, "Sustainability is an empty term, because the current model of development destroys nature's wealth and hence is non-sustainable. And it is ecologically destructive because it is ethically vacuous—not impelled by basic values, and not anchored in concepts of rights and responsibilities."

As a result, many approaches were developed around ethical concerns. The paradoxical and dialectical relations between sustainability and development are related to a varied spectrum of ideologies, which ranges between two extreme ethical concepts: the 'domination of nature' and the 'intrinsic right of nature.' The former is represented by doctrines of 'light ecology' and the latter by doctrines of 'deep ecology'. Between these concepts lie many approaches, which attempt to reconcile this paradox and to address the dialectical relations between development and sustainability.

The concept of natural capital stock

This concept represents the natural material assets of development. The term 'natural capital' was popularized by Pearce and Turner (1990) and by Pearce, Barbier and Markandya (1990), who define natural capital stock as "the stock of all environmental and natural resource assets, from oil in the ground to the quality of soil and groundwater, from the stock of fish in the ocean to the capacity of the globe to recycle and absorb carbon" (p. 1).

Natural capital includes all natural assets: humans can modify it, and humans can enhance its reproduction, but it cannot be created by humans. Natural capital stock is usually divided into three categories: non-renewable resources, such as mineral resources; the finite capacity of the natural system to produce 'renewable resources' such as food crops and water supplies; and the capacity of natural systems to absorb the emissions and pollutants which arise from human actions without suffering from side effects which imply heavy costs to be passed onto future generations (Roseland,

2000, p. 78). Within the discourse on sustainable development, constant natural capital is frequently referred to as a criterion for sustainability. Pearce and Turner (1990, p. 44) point out that “the resource stock should be held constant over time.” They elaborated their concept by applying standard economic arrangements of man-made capital to the stock of ‘natural capital’. In this sense, sustainability means that the stock of capital should not decrease in order not to endanger the opportunities of future generations to generate wealth and well-being. The condition of constant natural capital is normally termed ‘strong sustainability’.

The concept of natural capital has to a large extent dominated the discourse on ecological economics. Ecological economics has highlighted the importance of the non-substitutability of natural capital and its complementary role in further development, while seeking to keep the scale of human society within sustainable bounds. Its contributions have been significant in clarifying concepts and linking the economic system with the environment (Collados and Duane, 1999, p. 442).

Hinterberger, Luks, Schmidt-Bleek (1997, p. 5) argue that the concept of natural capital is helpful to illustrate the problems that arise when society consumes capital rather than income.

How, then, to measure depreciation of the natural capital stock? This is not an easy question to answer given that there is no universally agreed-upon method for doing this. Several efforts at measuring the planet’s stock of natural capital have recently been undertaken (e.g. Costanza et al., 1997; England, 1998; Geldrop and Withagen, 2000; Neumayer, 2001). Many scholars argue that natural capital is a powerful concept worthy of retention by ecological economists. However, its precise measurement should not be at the top of our collective research agenda (see: England, 1998). Kohn and Gowdy (2001, p. 3) argue that sustaining something that exists in an environment of permanent change is both conceptually and operationally challenging. For them, ‘sustainability’ is a principle of life about both sustaining a particular resilient state and adjusting to changing internal and external conditions. Moreover, there is no ‘universally sustainable’ state, as is maintained by the many authors who offer sets of indicators to measure it.

The concept of equity

The concept of equity represents the social aspects of SD. Haughton (1999, p. 64) argues that, “the social dimension is critical since the unjust society is unlikely to be sustainable in environment or economic terms in the long run”. In this sense, SD might be seen as a criterion for environmental justice. The concept of equity itself encompasses various concepts such as environmental, social and economic justice, social equity, equal rights for development, quality of life, equal economic distribution, freedom, democracy, public participation and empowerment. Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2002, p. 77) argue that, “Wherever in the world environmental despoliation and degradation are happening, they are almost always linked to questions of social justice, equity, rights and people’s quality of life in the widest sense”. They believe that a truly sustainable society is one in which wider questions of social needs, equity, welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems.

Many scholars, environmentalists and governments agree that sustainability could be achieved through the effective balancing of social, environmental and economical objectives (Berke and Kartez, 1995; Healey and Shaw, 1993; Meadows, Meadows, &

Randers, 1992; Robinson & Tinker, 1998; Scruggs, 1993). The most frequently quoted definition of SD—which comes from WCED (1987), emphasizes the equity issue between generations. The UNDP's definition of 'sustainable human development' is also broad in that it encompasses values such as equity, freedom and participation (Qizilbash, 1996; UNDP, 2002). Meadows and Randers (1992, p. 209) defined a sustainable society as "one that has in place informational, social, and institutional mechanisms that keep check on ... feedback loops". Some define sustainability as a strategy of development that results in the enhancement of human quality of life and the simultaneous minimization of negative environmental impacts. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992), which convened in Rio de Janeiro, reaffirmed the decisions of the UN Declaration on the Environment from Stockholm 1972, and sought to build upon it with the goal of establishing a new and equitable global partnership and new joint international initiatives among states, key sectors of societies and people recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth [this is not clear—how is the Earth integral and interdependent? Maybe take it down a level and talk about the ecosystems and other systems of the Earth?]. The Declaration states that all people should have equal rights to development.

There are two types of equity according to the literature on sustainability: intergenerational and intragenerational. Intergenerational equity refers to the fairness in allocation of resources between current and future generations. The most frequently used definition of SD emphasizes this type of equity: "Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43). An early formulation by Robert Repetto (1985, p. 10) proposed that, "at the core of the idea of sustainability, then, is the concept that current decisions should not damage the prospects for maintaining or improving living standards in the future...This implies that our economic systems should be managed so that we live off the dividend of our resources, maintaining and improving the asset base so that the generations that follow will be able to live equally well or better." For Robert Solow (1991, p. 3), sustainability is simply a matter of distributional equity, about sharing the capacity for well-being between present people and future people. Intragenerational equity refers to fairness in allocation of resources between competing interests at the present time. The concept of intragenerational equity has received less attention in the literature on sustainable development, and particularly that on ecological economics (Stymne and Jackson, 2000, p. 219). Boyce (1994) argued that a more equitable distribution of power would contribute to improvement in environmental quality. His definition of a power function is based on a combination of an income inequality index, a literacy variable, political rights and civil liberties, and certain other (mainly geographical) factors. Boyce, Klemmer, Templet, and Willis (1999) provide empirical support for the hypothesis that greater power inequality leads to greater environmental degradation. Disparities of power appear to affect not only the distribution of the net costs and benefits of environmentally degrading activities, but also the overall magnitude of environmental degradation.

The concept of eco-form

This concept represents the ecologically desired form and design of the human habitat such as urban spaces, buildings, and houses. A key strand of research into

sustainability strategies has focused on ecological design and on defining the urban forms that enable built environments and buildings to function in more sustainable ways than at present.

The debate over the ideal or desired urban form dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, since the appearance of Howard's Garden City. It appears that the literature on sustainable development revives the previous debate about urban form, supports existing approaches, and enhances them with environmental rationalization, further precision, and with principles of sustainable development and ecological design. Since the rise of 'sustainable development' in the 1980s, a handful of important theoretical works related to ecological design have emerged (e.g. Edwards and Turrent, 2000; Hawken, 1993; Lyle, 1985, 1994; Thayer, 1994; Van der Ryn and Calthorpe, 1991; Van der Ryn and Cowan, 1995). These approaches have adopted many of the technologies and ideas related to ecology and sustainability, such as alternative building materials, renewable energy, organic foods, conservation, and recycling.

One of the predominant views among scholars, planners and policy makers is that 'energy efficiency' is a key to achieving ecological form through design on the building, community, city and regional levels. It is assumed that better design contributes both to reducing air pollution and increased energy efficiency. Edwards (1999, p. xv) argues that, "architects have a larger share of responsibility for the world's consumption of fossil fuel and global warming gas production than any other professional group". He states that half of all energy used in the UK and the world at large is consumed by or in buildings.

Review of the urban literature suggests that sustainability could be achieved where planning takes place at the local and regional levels. One of the most important contributions of the global discourse on sustainability is the rise of an international movement for sustainable habitats, which is working to create a new agenda for re-designing and managing habitats in order to achieve sustainability, since it is viewed that environmental problems also result from a city's design (Haughton, 1999, p. 69).

The concept of integrative management

This concept represents SD's integrative view of aspects of social development, economic growth and environmental protection. Integrating social, economic and environmental concerns in planning and management for sustainable development has received considerable attention in recent years (CSD – Commission on Sustainable Development, 2001; Robinson and Tinker, 1998; The European Council, 1993; UNCED, 1992; UNFCCC, 1992). It is believed that in order to achieve sustainability and ecological integrity, i.e. to preserve the natural capital stock, we need integrative and holistic management approaches.

Our Common Future (WCED, 1987) challenged the prevailing view that economic objectives, such as poverty alleviation and economic growth, should take precedence over environmental concerns, arguing instead that environmental health is a precondition of social and economic success. More importantly, it is argued that poverty and environmental degradation are interlocking global crises, and that we do not face the choice between 'environment' or 'development', but rather the challenge to find ways of integrating these to achieve 'sustainable development' (Dodds, 2000, pp. 28–29). From a policy perspective, the concept of integrative management draws

attention to the importance of maintaining a safe minimum standard for all living and non-living assets necessary to maintain ecosystem functions and life support systems, along with at least representative forms of all other living natural assets.

The Rio-Declaration (UNCED, 1992) states that the protection of nature should form an integral part of the development process. Chapter 8 of Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) notes that the prevailing systems for decision-making in many countries tend to separate economic, social and environmental factors at the policy, planning and management levels, influencing the actions of all groups in society and affecting the efficiency and sustainability of development. Therefore, it proposed integrated systems of management to ensure that environmental, social and economic factors are considered together in a framework for SD. Four broad areas of work are identified: integrating environmental concerns and development at the policy, planning and management levels; providing an effective legal and regulatory framework; making effective use of economic instruments and market and other incentives; and establishing systems for integrated environmental and economic accounting. It argues that an adjustment or even a fundamental reshaping of decision-making may be necessary in order to put the environment and development at the centre of economic and political decision-making. The integrative approach for achieving sustainability, according to Agenda 21, seeks to bring together all stakeholders. It argues that the responsibility for bringing about changes lies with governments in partnership with the private sector and local authorities, and in collaboration with national, regional and international organizations. In addition, national plans, goals and objectives, national rules, regulations and law, and the specific situations in which different countries are placed are the overall framework in which such integration takes place.

The concept of utopianism

The utopian concept envisages human habitats (community, city, region and the globe) based generally on the concept of sustainable development. Commonly, utopias related to SD imagine a perfect society, where justice prevails, people are perfectly content, people live and flourish in harmony with nature, and life moves along smoothly, without abuses or shortages. The power of utopian thinking, properly conceived as a vision of a new society that questions all the presuppositions of present-day society, is its inherent ability to see the future in terms of radically new forms and values.

Marius de Geus (1999), in his *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society*, presents some environmental utopias, from ‘the sufficient utopia’ of Thomas More (1478–1535) to modern-day utopias. His central thesis is that utopian thought is important in the search for an ecologically responsible society. In *Green Political Thought*, Andrew Dobson (1990) argues that utopian vision provides an indispensable well of inspiration from which green activists need continually to draw. Dobson (1990, pp. 206–207) maintains that, “Green reformers need a radically alternative picture of post-industrial society, they need deep ecological visionaries, they need the phantom studies of the sustainable society, and they need, paradoxically, occasionally, to be brought down to earth and to be reminded about limits to growth.”

Interestingly, classical utopians, such as of Thomas More (1478–1535), Charles Fourier’s (1772–1837), William Morris (1834–1896) and Peter Kropotkin (1842–

1921) contributed to the establishment of new ethics toward nature, and to the new concept and current environmental utopias of SD.

Ernest Callenbach in his *Ecotopia* (1975) portrays a society based on the principle of a completely stable ecological state. He proposes a deliberate reduction in the population size, a drastic rise in energy prices, the production of more standardized, durable and repairable goods, and allowing only re-usable materials in this new society. Murray Bookchin (1980, 1982, 1989) proposes an alternative society based on ecological principles such as self-regulation, diversity, variety, natural spontaneity, balance, and harmony. His ecological society is based on liberty and participatory democracy. It could be developed if the hierarchical organization of human society and the capitalist economy that aims to control and exploit nature are eradicated. Donella Meadows (1999) introduces his theory for achieving human-desired Ultimate Ends: happiness, harmony, identity, self-respect, self-sufficiency and wisdom.

De Geus (1999, p. 260) argues that we cannot dispense with the inspiration and innovative power of the utopian ecological imagination. He adds “let us re-appraise the significance of the utopian literary genre, in order to lay the foundations for a truly fundamental social debate on sustainable development.” On the contrary, Jacobs (1991, p. xviii) in *The Green Economy* criticized the utopian approach from an economic point view: “Some green writing seems implicitly to assume that in a green society environmental sustainability will be achieved because people’s attitudes and motivations will have changed: they will be non-competitive and non-materialistic and win harmony with nature’. Some writers have gone so far as to say that sustainability cannot be achieved until such a transformation has occurred.”

The concept of political global agenda

This concept represents a new global discourse that has been reconstructed and inspired by the ideas of ‘sustainable development’. Until the 1980s, Western environmentalists were usually concerned with local and national space (Sachs, 1999, p. 42). However, since the early 1990s, SD has become the central adage of environmental policies around the globe, and the environmental discourse has been globalized and transcended national boundaries. Sustainable development arose as a political statement of an ethical position with practical and theoretical implications (Dodds, 2000). This discourse conceives the earth as one unified globe and aims to address global environmental and development problems at their root causes and to provide the developing world with the tools and resources needed to level the playing field and to enable them to address pressing problems of deforestation, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, in addition to issues of basic survival such as population growth, disease and other poverty-related problems.

The Rio Summit in 1992 was a significant milestone that set a new global agenda for SD, and reconstructed a new global environmental discourse. Since the Rio Summit, sustainability has increasingly been conceived of as a challenge for global management, with intelligent, scientific, and instrumental management of the earth perceived as one of the great challenges facing humanity.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of the Rio spirit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg (2002) reflected deep disputes between Northern and Southern countries. The two main documents to be produced by the summit—the political statement of the WSSD, called the ‘Johannesburg

Declaration on Sustainable Development’, and a Plan of Implementation stated that, “The deep fault line that divides human society between rich and poor and the over-increasing gap between the developed and developing worlds pose a major threat to global prosperity, security and stability” (WSSD, 2002, p. 2). It is significant that the political declaration of the WSSD, while dealing with sustainable development, focused on poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns, and managing the natural base for economic and social development rather than purely on ecological matters.

Discussion: the theoretical framework of sustainable development

The conceptual analysis identifies seven concepts which together synthesize and assemble the theoretical framework of ‘sustainable development’. Each concept represents distinctive meanings and aspects of the theoretical foundations of sustainability. In addition, they have interwoven relations as Fig. 1 shows. The concept of ethical paradox rests at the heart of this framework. The paradox between ‘sustainability’ and ‘development’ is articulated in terms of ethics. In other words, the epistemological foundation of the theoretical framework of sustainable development is based on the unresolved and fluid paradox of sustainability, which as such can simultaneously inhabit different and contradictory environmental ideologies and practices. Consequently, SD tolerates diverse interpretations and practices that range between ‘light ecology’, which allows intensive interventions, and ‘deep ecology’, which allows minor interventions in nature.

The concept of natural capital represents the material aspect of the theoretical world of sustainability. Natural capital represents the environmental and natural resource assets of development and preservation. The theoretical framework of sustainability advocates keeping the natural capital constant for the benefit of future generations.

The concept of equity represents the social aspects of SD. It encompasses different concepts such as environmental, social and economic justice, social equity, quality of life, freedom, democracy, participation and empowerment. Broadly, sustainability is seen as a matter of distributional equity, about sharing the capacity for well-being between current and future generations of people.

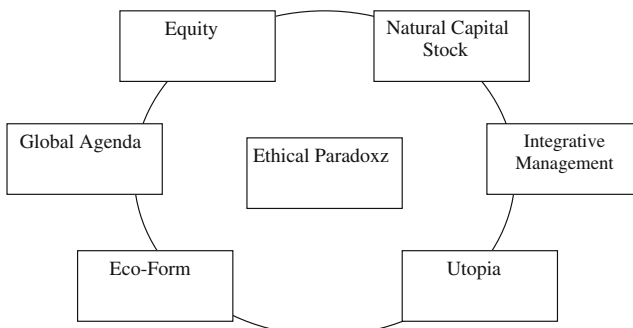


Fig. 1 A Conceptual framework for sustainable development

The concept of eco-form represents the ecologically-desired form of urban spaces and communities. This concept represents the desired spatial form of human habitats: cities, villages and neighborhood. ‘Sustainable’ design aims to create eco-forms, which are energy efficient and designed for long life. Its common principles could be explained through the concept of ‘time-space-energy compression’, which requires reductions in time and space in order to reduce energy usage.

The concept of integrative management represents the integrative and holistic view of the aspects of social development, economic growth and environmental protection. According to the theoretical world of sustainability, the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns in planning and management for SD is essential. It is believed that in order to achieve ecological integrity, i.e. to preserve the natural capital stock, we need integrative and holistic approaches to management.

The concept political global agenda represents a new worldwide political environmental discourse reconstituted around the ideas of sustainability. Since the Rio Summit, this discourse has extended beyond purely ecological concepts to include various international issues, such as security, peace, trade, heritage, hunger, shelter, and other basic services. However, the concept reflects deep political disputes between Northern and Southern countries, where the North demands ‘no development without sustainability’ and the South demands ‘no sustainability without development’.

The concept of utopianism represents visions for the human habitats based on SD. Generally, such utopias envision a perfect society in which justice prevails, the people are perfectly content, the people live and flourish in harmony with nature, and life moves along smoothly, without abuses or shortages. This utopia transcends the primary ecological concerns of sustainability to incorporate political and social concepts such as solidarity, spirituality, and the equal allocation of resources.

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