

ADVANCES IN URBAN SUSTAINABILITY SERIES

# Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice



*Circles of sustainability*

PAUL JAMES

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# URBAN SUSTAINABILITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

*Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice* responds to the crises of sustainability in the world today by going back to basics. It makes four major contributions to thinking about and acting upon cities. It provides a means of reflexively learning about urban sustainability in the process of working practically for positive social development and projected change. It challenges the usually taken-for-granted nature of sustainability practices while providing tools for modifying those practices. It emphasizes the necessity of a holistic and integrated understanding of urban life. Finally it rewrites existing dominant understandings of the social whole, such as the Triple Bottom Line approach, that reduce environmental questions to externalities and social questions to background issues. The book is a much-needed practical and conceptual guide for rethinking urban engagement.

Covering the full range of sustainability domains and bridging discourses aimed at academics and practitioners, this is an essential read for all those studying, researching and working in urban geography, sustainability assessment, urban planning, urban sociology and politics, sustainable development and environmental studies.

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# URBAN SUSTAINABILITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Circles of sustainability

*Paul James*

WITH LIAM MAGEE, ANDY SCERRI, MANFRED STEGER

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# Urban Profile Process

## ECONOMICS

Production & Resourcing  
Exchange & Transfer  
Accounting & Regulation  
Consumption & Use  
Labour & Welfare  
Technology & Infrastructure  
Wealth & Distribution

Organization & Governance  
Law & Justice  
Communication & Critique  
Representation & Negotiation  
Security & Accord  
Dialogue & Reconciliation  
Ethics & Accountability

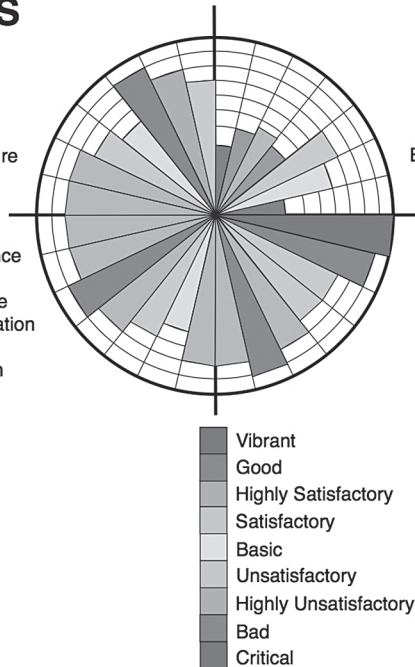
## POLITICS

## ECOLOGY

Materials & Energy  
Water & Air  
Flora & Fauna  
Habitat & Settlements  
Built Form & Transport  
Embodiment & Sustenance  
Emission & Waste

Identity & Engagement  
Creativity & Recreation  
Memory & Projection  
Belief & Meaning  
Gender & Generations  
Enquiry & Learning  
Well-Being & Health

## CULTURE



# Circles of Sustainability

FIGURE 0.1 *Circles of Sustainability*: Urban Profile Process

The *Circles of Sustainability* figure used throughout this book provides a relatively simple view of the sustainability of a particular city, urban settlement, or region. The circular figure is divided into four domains: ecology, economics, politics and culture. Each of these domains is divided in seven subdomains, with the names of each of these subdomains read from top to bottom in the lists under each domain name. Assessment is conducted on a nine-point scale. The scale ranges from ‘critical sustainability’, the first step, to ‘vibrant sustainability’, the ninth step. When the figure is presented in colour it is based on a traffic-light range with critical sustainability marked in red and vibrant sustainability marked in green. The centre step, basic sustainability, is coloured amber – with other steps ranging in between amber and red or amber and green. The grey-scale used here is intended to simulate the colour range.



# PREFACE: TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM

Cities have become unlikely but crucial zones for the survival of humanity. They are currently spaces for the most consequential attempts at human adaptation and sustainability. They provide a possible focus for the flourishing of future life on this planet. However, for this to take place in more than an *ad hoc* way, we need substantial rethinking, a new paradigm for urban development. Given the depth of the challenges, 'business as usual' or even business-with-a-new-rhetoric will not work. New thinking, including the re-integration of theory and practice, is imperative.

It sounds simple, but the task is considerable. We need a new paradigm that moves beyond the current narrow focus on growth-based productivity and high-technology 'solutions'. We need an alternative paradigm that can respond to the challenge of connecting globally debated principles and new ideas about sustainability with local engaged practices. This book responds directly to that challenge. It collates concepts and principles into an integrated approach for understanding cities in global and local contexts. It is intended both as a contribution to the theory of urban sustainability and as a practical guide to making better cities.

Criticizing the current emphasis on economic growth, for example, is not to suggest that producing economic prosperity is necessarily the problem. Rather, it is to suggest that we need to interrogate what is meant by 'prosperity'. Similarly, criticizing the current infatuation with high-technology solutions is not to turn away from technologies for living. It is to move the emphasis from technology as 'the answer' to technologies as tools for contributing to a positive way of life.

Why begin such a process now when some suggest that the term 'sustainability' has become problematic? Ironically, there is no better time to develop such a new approach to sustainability than now when, after a period of fashionable overuse (and abuse), the concept of sustainability is being called into question. This questioning suggests that there is now a certain openness to rethinking basic concepts. A time of crisis is precisely the time when a concept might best be given a deeper and redefined life.

The *Circles of Sustainability* method begins that redefinition process as part of a larger project. Here, sustainability intersects with other social conditions, such as resilience, liveability, adaptation, innovation and reconciliation, as basic conditions of positive *social life*. Hence, the encompassing framework is called Circles of Social Life. As will become obvious, treating sustainability in this larger context has the effect of challenging both the classic tendency for sustainability to become treated as an end in itself and the new fashionable search for another holy grail concept such as resilience to replace it.

Fashion produces its own enervation and the concept of resilience will soon find itself *outmoded*. Certainly, the concept of sustainability is used without sufficient precision, and it is often abused. But that is not a reason to move on like a travelling circus to another equally problematic concept. All concepts have strengths and limitations. Rather than engaging in the futile search for the perfect concept, we suggest that the interrelated concepts of social capacity such as sustainability, resilience and adaptation can be defined and used practically in relation to each other. The concept of sustainability is our central thematic focus here, but in this book, issues of sustainability are always seen in relation to other core conditions of human social life.

Overall, the book breaks with much mainstream thought and ways of acting on cities. First, the approach challenges many of the familiar assumptions of narrow sustainability practices, while providing tools for modifying those practices. Second, it provides a methodology for learning reflexively about sustainability. Third, it emphasizes the necessity of a holistic integrated understanding of urban life, while showing how this can be worked through into a transitional practice. Fourth, it rewrites existing dominant understandings of the social whole, arguing that they tend to reduce environmental questions to externalities and relegate social questions to background issues. It brings back 'the social' into the centre of contention, displacing economics as the focus of all understanding while still taking it seriously. And, finally, it broadens the terms of reference for fields of practice such as urban planning, urban design, geography, corporate responsibility, development studies, environmental studies, sociology and policy development.

Exemplifying this shift, this book challenges the unthinking use of that benign-sounding phrase 'economic, environmental and social sustainability'. How easily that triplet rolls off the tongue. It is a phrase embedded in the present global imaginary, used unreflectively by almost all practitioners and commentators – Left and Right alike. How positive it seems. It is a phrase that has a number of technical names – the Triple Bottom Line, the three pillars of sustainability, and so on – but has become so part of common-sense understanding that it no longer needs to be overtly named. The phrase can be used well despite itself, but it has been largely subsumed as part of a set of ideas called 'market globalism' or 'neoliberalism'. Market-based sustainability practices continue to proclaim their own practical enlightenment while, in most cases, changing relatively little except the language of development. This false promise does all active institutions a disservice, from municipalities and community-based organizations to ethically motivated

corporations seeking to act differently. Unfortunately, the concept of resilience is fast entering the same well-lit narrow space. By contrast, the *Circles of Sustainability* approach takes the positive intention of the ‘three pillars’ phrase and for the first time locates that well-intentioned spirit in an integrated and generalizing framework that provides more than high-sounding words.

The *Circles of Sustainability* approach is intended to be flexible, modular and systematic. Each part of the approach has been developed so that it operates as part of a toolbox for understanding different urban locales. In fact it is more like a toolshed than a toolbox – more expansive than a toolbox and more open to adding or moving tools around for different tasks. The metaphor of the toolshed also recognizes that the method has more messy corners and places for adding new tools. Each of the tools currently in the shed is developed as part of an integrated whole. The approach is intended to work across time and in different places as practitioners and researchers attempt to understand the complex layering of the local, the regional, the national and the global. This means that the various items in the shed – different concepts, methods, protocols and principles – can be taken out and used singularly. Each tool can be used in relation to any other tools. Or, most comprehensively, the shed can be used as the base from which to build an integrated planning approach useful for your city or urban settlement.

The book is schematic and relatively simple most of the time, although the more thoroughly the method is interrogated the deeper it is capable of going into complex areas of epistemology and theory. At that deeper level, the approach is part of a comprehensive and critical methodology called Engaged Theory. Developing that methodology with all its applied implications is an ongoing task that will become the basis of a series of writings into the future. Engaged Theory thus remains a work in progress.<sup>1</sup> Its aim is to give Critical Theory a new applied focus. Readers who want a guiding outline to whole approach will find it hidden away in Table 4.2 in Chapter 4. That table, along with the process pathway (Table 6.2), shows how each of the parts relates to whole. The first level of analysis is empirical, focused on understanding patterns of change across the domains of ecology, economics, politics and culture. Deeper levels of analysis are intended to break through current dominant (often neo-liberal) understandings of social change and to point out paradoxes, contradictions, continuities and discontinuities in the contemporary urban condition.

More immediately, the approach is based on the argument that we need useful tools for negotiating what kind of world we want to create and re-create. Over the coming period we will continue to refine and develop various dimensions of the approach. A website is being developed that will support cities in using the approach. Nonetheless, whatever developments of the method occur into the future, considerable care has already been given to making sure that the various definitions, descriptions of method, protocols, propositions and principles, all align and complement each other as part of an integrated approach. The task of writing and arguing about the interconnections has sensitized us to the difficulty of an integrated method and the book represents the outcome of a long struggle to work

through these difficulties. Working together across many cities and cultures, we have found it helpful to develop a common language, common definitions of key concepts and crossovers of methods.

The Engaged Theory approach and the *Circles of Sustainability* method presented in this study have been developed for the United Nations Global Compact Cities Programme, Metropolis (the World Association of Major Metropolises) led by Alain le Saux and UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), led by Josep Roig. This was done in collaboration with UN-Habitat, the Cultural Development Network, World Vision and a large number of researchers and practitioners around the world. Researchers in the Global Cities Institute and the Globalism Research Centre at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia, directly supported the approach. Urban experts including a Metropolis Task Force and members of the World Vision Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming contributed to developing some of its central tools. The context for its writing was partnerships with researchers from the Cities Group, King's College London, led by David Green; the Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Amsterdam directed by Jan Nijman; and the National Institute of Urban Affairs in New Delhi, directed by Jagan Shah. Most recently, the institutional home for organizing this work has become the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney led by Ien Ang.

There are many people that we need to thank. Much more than most books, this volume emerged slowly out a deeply collaborative process with considerable consultation over its various methods, principles and processes. Some authors will say modestly that they stand on the shoulders of others or that their writing is socially dependent. With *Urban Sustainability* this is more acutely the case than usual. The appropriate metaphor for our authorship is the medieval concept of *compilers* – writers slowly drawing the words and thoughts of others into a broad agreed framework, representing the method in various stages for further responses, and writing those responses into the developing approach. The names of the principle authors are therefore points of reference for those compilers who took responsibility for the writing over a seven-year period. Authority for the ideas rests broadly and consequentially on a cooperative team, but with all the weaknesses of the book attributable to the limits of the main author and the constraints of time. Concurrently, it should be said that any political views present in the book cannot necessarily be attributed various partners or advisors to this project.

The writing of the present volume goes beyond the named authors on the book's cover. Numerous other people contributed directly to writing this book. Lin Padgham, James Thom, Hepu Deng, Sarah Hickmott, and Felicity Cahill contributed to writing Chapter 6. Sunil Dubey is co-author of Chapter 7. Hans-Uve Schwelder, Michael Abraham and Barbara Berninger were co-authors of Chapter 9. Darryn McEvoy and Hartmut Fünfgeld were co-authors of Chapter 10. George Cairns and George Wright were co-authors of Chapter 11. Dominic Mendonca and Simon Vardy contributed fundamentally to Chapter 12. Malcolm Borg was co-author of the profile of Valetta and Paolo in Malta. Research on various parts of

the method was supported by the expert work of interns and associates, including Cynthia Lam, Adriana Partal and Ailish Ryan. Tim Strom was an astute editorial assistant. We learned a lot from seminal writers in the field such as Simon Bell, Mike Davis, Robert Gibson, Brendan Gleeson, Peter Hall, Stephen Morse, Lewis Mumford, Peter Newman, Richard Sennett, and Deborah Stevenson, *et alia*.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, beneath that extended process of collaborative writing was an extended global consultation process across the globe. The basic four-domain model was first developed across the period 2007 to 2009 through a consultation process hosted by the Cities Programme. Paul James and Andy Scerri convened the research team with advice from a Critical Reference Group comprising Caroline Bayliss (then with United Nations Global Compact Cities Programme), Sally Capp (then Director of the Committee for Melbourne), Alex Fearnside (City of Melbourne), Meg Holden (Simon Fraser University), Liz Johnstone (Municipal Association of Victoria, Melbourne), Mary Lewin (Metropolis), Stephanie McCarthy (UN Global Compact Cities Programme), Liam Magee (RMIT), Heikki Patomäki (University of Helsinki), Mike Salvaris (RMIT), Martin Mulligan (RMIT), Dom Tassone (State Government of Victoria), Wayne Wescott (then with the International Council for Local Environments Initiative, ICLEI), Andrew Wisdom (ARUP) and John Wiseman (University of Melbourne).

Refining and testing the approach in the field occurred across the second period of 2009 to 2012. In Australia, the working group which developed the sustainability matrix was comprised of Paul James, Liam Magee, Andy Scerri, John Smithies and Manfred Steger. Martin Mulligan was a crucial collaborator in developing the social mapping approach. With Yaso Nadarajah, he applied and tested the approach in their work on communities in Sri Lanka and India after the South-East Asian tsunami (Mulligan & Nadarajah 2012). Anni Rowland Campbell, Bill Cope, Amanda Keogh, Greg Stone and others at Fuji Xerox, Microsoft, Cambridge College and Common Ground collaborated with us on an Australian Research Council grant that was used to test the method.

A Metropolis Taskforce guided the process through a third global consultation period in 2012 through 2014. The Taskforce included Barbara Berninger (Berlin) and Paul James (Melbourne) as co-convenors, with Michael Abraham (Berlin), Tim Campbell (San Francisco), Emile Daho (Abidjan), Sunil Dubey (Sydney), Jan Erasmus (Johannesburg), Jane McCrae (Vancouver) and Om Prakesh Mathur and Usha Raghupathi (New Delhi). Relevant meetings were held in Barcelona, Guangzhou, Johannesburg and Berlin. Sunil Dubey was a constant inspiration for this engagement. We are beholden to Agnés Bickart, Alain Le Saux and Christine Piquemal for auspicing this process. We also thank the people of the New York Office of the Global Compact for their collegial support and initiation of the Process Pathway, in particular Carrie Hall, Georg Kell, Gavan Power and Kristina Wilson.

Across the second and third periods, pilot studies were conducted in a number of cities across the world using the various parts of the method in draft form. An early version of the method was the basis for a major project in Papua New Guinea (James, Nadarajah, Haive, & Stead 2012). In Porto Alegre, Vania Goncalves de Souza,

Cezar Busatto, and their colleagues remade their city while using the approach in a way that allowed basic rethinking. In Milwaukee, Dean Amhaus and his colleagues were inspirational across a project of sustained engagement beginning in 2009. In India our work began with an invitation in 2011 by Mary Lewin and Metropolis to work on one of their major initiatives. The *Circles of Sustainability* methodology became central to the approach used by the 'Integrated Strategic Planning Initiative' organized by Metropolis, in 2012–13, for Indian, Brazilian and Iranian cities. Workshops were held in New Delhi in July 2012 and July 2013. In each of these cases, and in a dozen other meetings in the Middle East and South Asia, Sunil Dubey was the key figure presenting and getting feedback on the approach. Senior planners from New Delhi, Hyderabad and Kolkata used assessment tools from the *Circles of Sustainability* approach to map the sustainability of their cities as part of developing their urban-regional plans. Representatives from Sao Paulo – Sania Baprista, Catarina Mastellaro and Ravena Negreiros – used the approach in relation to their city. In India we particularly acknowledge the contribution of ~~and~~ Om Prakash Mathur, Jagan Shah and Chetan Vaidya. In Melbourne, we thank ~~;~~ Halvard Dalheim, Neil Houghton, Mary Lewin and Christine Oakley from the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure in the Victorian government, who made important contributions to the project. Neil Houghton read the manuscript chapter by chapter and made many astute suggestions for its refinement.

Most recently, in Malta, Malcolm Borg and his colleagues have been using the method to develop a cultural heritage sustainability assessment process for 12 cities. Other cities to use the same tools have been Tehran (in relation to their mega-projects plan) and São Paulo (in relation to their macro-metropolitan plan). Our team in Curitiba, Brazil, led by Eduardo Manoel Araujo and Rosane de Souza, has done considerable work, and we are conducting studies of cities across the state of Parana and elsewhere as they roll out the *Circles of Sustainability* method across the state. In Dubai, Mahmood El Burai is central to a series of projects in the Middle East. In Melbourne, Nick Rose, Kathy McConell and their colleagues from the Food Alliance innovatively took the work into the area of food sustainability.

*Circles of Sustainability* was presented in joint sessions with UN-Habitat at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 and the World Urban Forum in Napoli in the same year. It was presented at the Caribbean Urban Forum in Port of Spain in March 2013 and was then used as the basis for an assessment for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's national spatial plan. There we worked in particular with Hebe Verrest from the University of Amsterdam and Steve Kemp and his team from Open Plan in the United Kingdom. In June 2013, UN-Habitat and Urbego hosted a training event in London led by Claudio Acioly and Giulia Maci integrating the *Circles of Sustainability* method. We followed up with a joint session at the International Federation of Housing and Planning Centenary Congress, also in London. In July 2013, Johannesburg hosted a major Metropolis forum through which the method was further developed. Hans-Uve Schwedler and Barbara Berninger were central to this process. Michael Abraham was the lead author on the Rea Vaya report that followed the forum. In October 2013, at another forum called 'No Regrets' hosted

by the City of Berlin, the method was used to frame the principles for climate change adaptation. In 2014, the Cities Programme joined with the International Real Estate Federation and the Dubai Real Estate Institute at forums in Dubai and Luxembourg to take the method forward in relation to property development.

There were numerous other consultants and critics involved in setting up this method. In Australia, apart from those already mentioned, we particularly need to thank Tony Fry and Eleni Kalantidou for introducing us to the concept of ontological design. Their inspiration, along with insightful responses by John Smithies and Kim Dunphy helped in taking the work to a new stage. In Brazil, particularly helpful responses came from Eduardo Araujo, Luiz Berlin, Marcia Maina, Luciano Planco and Paulo Cesar Rink. In the United States important suggestions for reworking the approach came from Jyoti Hosagrahar (Columbia University, New York) and Giovanni Circella (University of California, Davis). In Canada, Corrine Cash, Michel Fromovic and Meg Holden were important correspondents. In Spain, Jordi Pascual and Adrianna Partal provided inspiration for our work on the cultural dimension of sustainability. We also want to thank Frank Zhang, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, who supported our work on urban futures in China, and Chris Hudson who was central to running the Cities Programme urban forum in Shanghai in 2011.

Overseeing all of this, the working group, which worked to develop the matrix of tools, comprised Paul James, Liam Magee, Andy Scerri, and Manfred Steger with others including Felicity Cahill, Hepu Deng, Sarah Hickmott, Cynthia Lam, Lin Padgham and James Thom. Individuals who provided strong impetus for the development of the approach included, particularly, Sam Carroll-Bell, Damian Grenfell, Chris Hudson, Supriya Singh, and Frank Yardley. The editors and core writers of *Arena Journal* – particularly Alison Caddick, Simon Cooper, Lindsay Fitzclarence, John Hinkson, Geoff Sharp and Nonie Sharp – provided inspiration through their development of the constitutive abstraction method. We acknowledge their importance in providing an intellectual base for the engaged theory method presented here. Lindsay Fitzclarence read the manuscript and helped to clarify a number of issues.

Closer to home, Peter Christoff and Robyn Eckersley were wonderfully supportive. Stephanie Trigg was an amazing interlocutor and always a superb sounding board for ideas.

Finally, deep appreciation is extended all the people – interns, researchers, global advisors, administrators, in-country convenors, local secretariats and urban activists who trialled this method. Many of those individuals, only some of whom we have had the space to name in this Preface, have been inspirational to the *Circles of Sustainability* approach through the ways they have worked to change their local worlds.

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University of Western Sydney  
July 2014

## Notes

- 1 If as a reader of this essay you want to get a sense of the depth of work behind the discussion then articles and books written by the present authors and others are available in the public domain that take the discussion much further. The website [www.citiesprogramme.org](http://www.citiesprogramme.org) is a key source. See also for example Scerri (2013), Steger (2008) and James (2006).
- 2 For example see Bell and Morse (2003) and Gibson (2005).

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## **PART I**

# Setting the global–local scene

# 1

## CONFRONTING A WORLD IN CRISIS

The city, now the dominant form of human settlement, exemplifies and displays the fundamental concerns of the human condition. In a period of intensifying globalization, urban life draws people into zones of intense interconnectivity. Cities are places of passion, hopes and dreams. However, they are entering an epoch of protracted crisis. All urban settlements face a practical crisis of sustainability, just as human beings face a comprehensive crisis of social life on this planet.

At the same time, there is an unacknowledged theoretical crisis. Mid-range writing tends to be characterized by disconnected contentions, and false hopes abound. Even as urban living concentrates us in close proximity, the city engenders clichés and slogans, stereotypes and self-serving assurances. Seemingly self-evident claims come thick and fast. The world's most liveable cities are prosperous. It's the economy, stupid. Cities are the engine house of economic growth. Slums are places of wretched squalor. Slums are productive places too. Electric vehicles are the answer. Planning for density is good. Inclusion is an essential good.

These shibboleths all need to be substantially qualified as the basis for comprehensive understanding. Planning for density is good only when it is based on good planning *and* when the conditions for increased density are well designed. Electric vehicles are useful only when renewable resources are used and when the vehicles do not become part of a fetish of green consumption. Although slums are often places of wretched housing, they can also be places of vibrant life and livelihoods. However, defending them as being 'productive too' – just like 'normal cities' – is to concede that economic productivity is the pre-eminent quantifier of what is good. Inclusion is good only when the terms of positive exclusion are negotiated with care, transparency and so on.

Recognizing this complexity leads us to two fundamental questions that need to be addressed across the course of this book. First, what makes something good or positively sustainable? Second, why, if planners and sustainability experts seem

#### 4 Setting the global–local scene

able to identify the core problems and have many real answers to these problems, do many of our cities continue to slide into this series of interconnected crises? The first question is rarely even asked. What is *good* sustainability? That is, what is *positive* and strong sustainability, as opposed to that which will enable urban life to endure in a minimal sense through weak sustainability? This question is at its core a question about the human condition. It has its roots the ancient dialogues of Socrates and the question of what makes for a good polis. Without actively returning to such central considerations, we will continue to be confounded by the perplexing ideological tensions of the present.

One of the simple tensions carried by the usual arguments about the future of the world is that people advocate ‘social change for sustainability’. It almost sounds pedantic to point this out, but those who use this phrase never point to the tension involved in such a conjunction of terms. Changing the world is said to be an aspiration. Sustaining the world is said to be a necessity. Yet, without specifying what is good, what is to be changed and what is to be sustained, holding to both aspirations at the same time is completely contradictory. That is, sustainability means conditions of enduring continuity whereas social change generates discontinuities. They are not necessarily comfortable travelling companions. Despite this analytical discomfort, and without most practitioners and activists thinking about the tension, using both concepts concurrently has slipped into the dominant way of speaking. This simple exercise of showcasing the contradictions between common mantras suggests that our habitual ways of describing these issues need serious attention. Rhetoric needs to be connected to practice.

This book is thus directed towards understanding how practitioners can best go about changing urban centres for the better in the context of rushing global change and intensifying crises of sustainability. Here the concept of ‘practitioners’ is important – they are people who act. The book is addressed to that broad coalition of people across three fields of action – civil society (including universities and non-government organizations), governance organizations (including municipalities) and business – who want to get beyond ‘business as usual’ and think that more can be done than just mouthing platitudes.

#### **Cities are at the centre of these crises**

Across the world we are facing crises of sustainability, resilience, security, stability and adaptation. Many of our cities have become sprawling and bloated zones of unsustainability. In the meantime, too many politicians and commentators squabble over schedules, timetables, and buck-stops. From problems associated with climate change or sustainable water supply to those concerning increasing economic inequality or the break-up of communities, processes such as escalating resource use or increasing cultural anomie, problems that we once responded to as singular concerns are now bearing back on us in a swirl of compounding pressures. Cities are at the centre of this human-made maelstrom. For all their vibrancy and liveliness, cities face a growing challenge to provide secure and sustainable places to live. Even the world’s most

'liveable cities' – Melbourne, Munich, Vancouver and Vienna – are utterly unsustainable in global ecological terms. If all city residents across the globe consumed at the rate of the world's most liveable cities the planet would be in catastrophic trouble. Despite their inconsequential geographical footprint, cities are responsible for around 80 per cent of global energy consumption, and some of the world's most wonderful exciting cities contribute at a proportionally much higher rate.

Melbourne – the city where many of the people who worked on this book now live – is currently listed on *The Economist's* index as the world's most liveable city (2013).<sup>1</sup> The indicators are commercial-in-confidence, but we know that they are grouped around five domains: stability, health care, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. All are important considerations. However, the report accompanying the survey reveals that the highest-scoring cities tend to be mid-sized, wealthier cities with a relatively low population density. Seven of the top-ten scoring cities are located in Australia and Canada, with population densities between 2.88 and 3.40 people per square kilometre, respectively. This is telling. At a time when sustainability is increasingly associated with positive high density, it is glaringly apparent that liveability, as so measured, is parting company with sustainability. It is also clear that issues of how we are to live are difficult to research.

Shockingly, Melbourne has *per capita* an ecological footprint of twenty-eight times its direct physical footprint, one of the highest in the world. If everybody lived as the good people of Melbourne do, the planet would be doomed. For all the wonderful public sensitivity in Melbourne to ecological sustainability issues, the city continues to use more and more resources, to emit more and more carbon, and to bury more and more of its fertile hinterlands under asphalt and bricks. One of the few clear successes in the sustainability stakes in Melbourne has been a widely supported political campaign to place legal and cultural limits on water use. Nevertheless, an energy-intensive desalination plant, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, has been built to supply fresh water to the city, and the entrance to the bay on which the city sits has been dredged to allow 'supersized' freight ships to import global commodities through Australia's largest container port. The initiating government defended both projects in terms of environmental and economic sustainability.

This brings us to the first of a set of urban paradoxes.

Paradox 1. *The more the language of sustainability is used, the more it seems to be directed at rationalizing unsustainable development.*

Almost everybody is now attuned to sustainability talk, but despite this subjective awareness the world becomes objectively less and less sustainable. This makes the first question, 'What then makes for *positive* sustainability?' even more important. And it makes the second question, 'Why are we not acting effectively to achieve that sustainability?' increasingly perplexing.

## The new urban paradoxes

As many writers now tell us, our cities face a manifold crisis of sustainability: economic, ecological, political and cultural. For example in Mike Davis's words (2006), slums are increasingly part of our cities. Every day, 180,000 people join the global urban population; each year, the equivalent of two cities the size of Tokyo are built; one in six urban dwellers lives in slums; and we are heading towards that black figure of 2 degrees Celsius global warming. UN-Habitat research suggests that over the next decades virtually all of the world's population growth will occur in cities with massive consequences for infrastructure stress (2010, 2012). Why, under these circumstances, do we focus on symptomatic solutions – on white paint on roofs to increase the albedo of the city, on bulldozers to clear away unwanted and irregular urban dwellers and on cranes to build new high-rise apartments in the hinterland cities of the new world? Why do we vacillate between easy short-term solutions and complex deferral, when it is so obvious that something much more fundamental needs to be done?

Slum clearance appears to work for a while in specific locales, but displaced people, especially those who are shifted to the periphery, tend to move back to more central urban sites of continuing desperation, seeking to maintain livelihoods. White roofs deflect heat in the cities of the global North, while in the global South, intensifying weather shifts and rising sea levels bring the chaos of floods.<sup>2</sup> Thousands were killed in the Philippines in 2013. Typhoon Haiyan had wind speeds faster than Hurricane Katrina. Bangladesh has had a disastrous few years with a series of floods. Bangkok was under water for months in 2011 because of the flooding of the Chao Phraya River and its urban canals. A little earlier in the 2011 season, floods in Pakistan killed 270 people. And lest we forget, in the media-induced haze of recent extreme events, it is worth recalling that these were in addition to the floods of 2010 that inundated a fifth of Pakistan, leaving 11 million people homeless.

The urban planning focus on symptomatic solutions relates to a second urban paradox.

*Paradox 2. Cities are at the heart of the problems facing this planet, but developing a positive and sustainable mode of urban living is the only way that we will be able to sustain social life as we know it past the end of this century.*

In fact, given the world's current population growth, sustainably increasing the density of our urban settlements along with increasing energy efficiency and decreasing resource use is the only alternative. It is simply no longer the case that building rural idylls on small, self-contained plots of land can save the planet. If, without changing other considerations, we started dividing the non-urban world into rural allotments to cope with a burgeoning global population, we would only speed up the crisis. According to the World Bank (2014), the United States has only 0.5 hectares of

arable land per citizen, while China has 0.08 hectares. Unless there was a revolution in the way we live, neither would allow for allotment self-sufficiency.

Like the first paradox, this presents a new quandary. The newness relates to our current standing upon this planet. We live in what is now being called the Anthropocene Period, an era in which humans have had a recognizable impact on the earth's ecological systems. Although the concept goes back to the late nineteenth century when Antonio Stoppani coined the term the *anthropozoic*, and although those who argue for the anthropocene hypothesis contest the dating of the period (with its origins ranging from the industrial revolution to the beginning of systematic agriculture 8,000 years ago), something new is happening.

To comprehend this newness we need to use the term more precisely. We are now in the fourth phase of the anthropocene period. If Tribalism, Agraria, and Industria were earlier dominant and continuing ways of living, the most recent phase, still unnamed, began with our capacity to make our own lives on this planet unsustainable. From the possibility of nuclear winter ushered in by the words of J. Robert Oppenheimer – 'I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds', quoting the Bhagavad Gita – to the disruption of climate change, we now have the capacity to destroy ourselves (as well as the choice not to do so). Through the intersection of techno-science and capitalism, from bioengineering to hyper-commodification, we are now reconstituting the basic building blocks of nature, including our own bodies. We are the first human civilization with the technological and social capacity to override prior senses of planetary boundaries and limits – and we know it. If we continue on current trajectories, the phase could well be called Exterminia. It could become the phase during which humanity drives in hybrid vehicles towards its own extermination, talking all the way about sustainability and resilience.

This brings us to a third paradox.

Paradox 3. *The more we recognize that we face contradictory pressures, the more we give ourselves an excuse for not responding decisively or comprehensively.*

When Charles Dickens wrote the *Tale of Two Cities*, seventy years after the French Revolution, his words were telling:

it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

(1902, p. 3)

## 8 Setting the global–local scene

These words spoke of a new world of ambivalence in which the people of Paris and London, or at least their less-than-democratic planners and politicians, were confronted with choices to make about their future. However, over the next century neither of those cities changed course in the fundamental ways needed. These days, instead of debating and acting upon the complexities of urban life in a concerted collective way, we are all going in different directions. Some deny the challenges to the present ‘growth economy’. Some throw up their hands in despair. Others seize on singular technical solutions, deferring the consequences of a comprehensive politics. Many try in our localized ways to respond as best they can. Many good people are doing good things, but we have reached the stage where individuated good works are not enough. As evidenced by the issue of climate change, humanity has entered a phase in which the manifold crisis cannot be turned around by even the accumulating weight of individual actions or a single pieces of legislation. Responding to structures of power through collective engagement has become more important than ever.

### Why do our responses remain short term?

In this context why our responses to the manifold urban crisis remain piecemeal, isolated, and short term starts to become clear. It is not just vested interests, short-term thinking, global capitalism, global financial tumult, greed or the fetishism of growth that explains the crisis – although they are key ingredients of the mix.

Part of the problem is that too many people have convinced themselves that, given the complex challenges of the current circumstances, we are already doing the best that we can given the circumstances. In relation to the vexed issue of slums, the approach taken by the UN-Habitat report *State of the World’s Cities* is indicative of the third urban paradox. Under the heading ‘Good news on slum target’, it frames its report thus: ‘Since the year 2000, when the international community committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and associated targets, the global effort to narrow the starkest, slum-related form of urban divide has yielded some positive results’ (2012, p. 30). The target of improving the lives of 100 million, the report says, has been achieved ten years earlier than scheduled. In Southern and Eastern Asia, it documents an estimated 172 million slum dwellers moving out of the ‘slum-dweller’ category (UN-Habitat 2012, p. 30).

On the surface, these figures seem to give us reason to be optimistic, but the fine print tells another story. China and India may have shown the greatest improvement, but both tend to use the bulldozer method of slum clearance, and China has an authoritarian disregard for people’s lives when the party decides to level a slum area. Most disconcertingly, despite the improvement when the figures are read against MDG targets, the number of slum dwellers overall in the global South has actually gone up from 767 million in 2000 to 828 million in 2010. That is, although some of the statistics can be interpreted optimistically, overall, things are actually getting worse for more people.

For a large wealthy minority in some parts of the world, life in the city is materially good. The well-to-do, urban global North continues to export an increasing number of the urban problems associated with crude industrialism to the global South or to the peripheral zones of their own countries. The hardware supporting urban lifestyles is being manufactured under Dickensian conditions in places such as Shenzhen, China, and Dhaka, Bangladesh. This occurs while ‘post-industrial’ cities are dressed in the cosmetic glamour of urban renewal. Once dreary central business districts have been turned into entertainment zones. Any sense of face-to-face discomfort or community isolation is recoloured by the relentless imperatives of Facebook and media connectivity.

The world’s poster cities appear cleaner, brighter, and more vibrant than ever before. Put that together with critique fatigue exacerbated by melodramatic depictions of satanic mills, and it has become harder and harder to criticize urban conglomerations. *Don’t Call it Sprawl* says the title of a book by William Bogart. ‘How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier’ says the front cover of Edward Glaeser’s book *Triumph of the City*. If you do not have time to read the fine print, the life of the city seems hunky dory (Gleeson, 2012). Since W.H. Auden wrote the devastating ‘City Without Walls’ in 1967, novelists no longer write of our world as being stuck in ‘real structures of steel and glass’. Instead of Auden’s ‘Hermits . . . With numbered caves in enormous jails . . . Hobbesian Man is mass-produced’ (1991, p. 748), the dominant tendency is to celebrate autonomy and just-in-time production while expressing concern about carbon emissions. In the 2000s, Auden’s mass-produced Hobbesian Man has given way to the self-projecting urbanite who can choose amongst the amazing array of consumption opportunities on offer.

In many cities across the world, ongoing community relations have become secondary or residual, confined to discrete periods of people’s lives or to moments of celebratory focus. Urban dwellers increasingly come together in moments of screen time or as passing strangers in the street, moving in parallel and consuming parallel lifestyle possibilities. One lineage of academic and popular writers celebrates this development. Richard Florida’s book *Who’s Your City?* turns the important life-forming question of ‘Where do you want to live?’ into a commodity choice. Why have others missed the ‘where factor,’ he asks disingenuously: ‘Perhaps it’s because so few of us have the understanding or mental framework necessary to make informed decisions about location’ (Florida 2009, p. 5). He could not be more wrong – position, position, position is the constant refrain of every housing-advice program on television today. Consuming the street and buying into a prime urban locale are now globally prevalent as a way of understanding property.

Paradox 4. *As social life is mediated by technologies of communication and is reduced to consumption choices, the more the immediacy of face-to-face community life is romanticized.*



By contrast, writing a couple of generations ago, Lewis Mumford in an essay called ‘The Natural History of Urbanization’ argued more soberly that ‘[t]he blind forces of urbanization, flowing along the lines of least resistance, show no aptitude for creating an urban and industrial pattern that will be stable, self-sustaining, and self-renewing’ (cited in Brugman 2009, p. 16). This remains true today. But in the popular consciousness (and for Richard Florida) the individual’s freedom to choose sets the conditions for the greatest creativity and most exciting urban frisson. Serendipity, helped by genius or celebrity architects, is said to give us the most beautiful cities. And such a sensibility becomes self-confirming once iconic buildings are attributed the power to revivify decaying city precincts. Frank Geary’s Guggenheim Museum is an example of a single building being credited with bringing the whole city of Bilbao back to life.

There are many partial answers to the question of why we have become like frogs in inexorably warming water (James & Scerri, 2012). As citizens, we might be a little worried, but in the words of one advertiser ‘life is good’ for those who can choose – even despite the increasing heat. One more point of partial explanation can be added. Across the late twentieth century, generalized utopian alternatives have faded away. Not only have the projection of blueprints for change become unfashionable and the genre of utopian novel writing died; we have also come to distrust deeply the residual utopianism of our urban planners. The authoritarian tradition of Corbusian radiant cities, the liberal-socialist tradition of Ebenezer Howard’s beauteous garden-city concept and the architectural tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright’s broadacre city have all been lumped together as complete failures.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the command planning of China and the discipline-based planning of Singapore, all-of-city planning has tended to be reduced either to legislated building restrictions and zoning or to good ideas for possible implementation by the market. It is true that there are good developers and imaginative planners, but this tends to be restricted to innovative urban precincts.

During the same period that utopianism went into near-mortal decline, the concept of the future became linked to the techno-sciences. The word *future* now seems to conjure up either post-human scenarios of techno-science or greenfields ‘new cities’ that have given us the disasters of the technopolis, the multifunction polis and the less-than-satisfactory outcomes of zones that look best from the air. For a greenfield site, Canberra was beautifully designed as a garden city, but it largely failed to consider transport other than cars or to achieve cultural vibrancy. Brasília was designed to look like a butterfly from above but has been criticized as a futuristic fantasy. In Robert Hughes’s (1980) words, it is a ‘jerry-built platonic nowhere infested with Volkswagens’. In the global imagination Dubai is perhaps the ultimate futurist fantasy, with high-end residential zones that reach into the ocean, designed from the air to look like a palm tree or planet Earth. For a period, Dubai hovered on the edge of ecological and economic disaster. Futurism is not turning it around now but, rather, the careful planners of the Land Department and those solid developers who are now trying to make an extraordinary city in which ordinary people live sustainably.

The dominant way in which we currently imagine the future can perhaps best be seen in corporate advertising of the many companies that project the idea of a good city as a high-tech ‘smart city’. It can be seen in the global mega events in which a global imaginary of capitalism, techno-science and planetary romance come together. One recent example, ‘Expo Shanghai’ in 2011, was conceived through envisaging the city as the world on display. Its overarching theme was sustainability. At the same time, the nature of the display itself was temporary, energy intensive, status oriented and destined for the dump heap (the first urban paradox). The British pavilion, for instance, presented a Seed Cathedral with 60,000 transparent plastic rods swaying in the wind, containing seeds of different plants collected in the Millennium Seed Bank project. The message was clear. Instead of saying, ‘Let us stop the unsustainable development that is increasing species extinction’, it suggests that protecting biodiversity can be comfortably underwritten by scientific collection and storage.

Overall, behind the perfectly rendered correct-line presentations of sustainability, romantic projections of individual freedom and environmental sustainability prevail. Techno-scientific projections of connectivity and efficiency are brought together with global projections of material wealth and local projections of lifestyle choice. The ‘Smart City’ future is thus imagined as a contradictory mixture of controlled, regulated, inside, and as far from the messiness of uncultivated nature and organic chance as possible while contradictorily also being serendipitously exciting for all the individuals who inhabit that world.

Paradox 5. *Inappropriate and badly conceived planning has often produced worse outcomes than has leaving the process to serendipity, but in the context of global crisis we now need long-term planning more than ever before.*

## Towards flourishing sustainable cities

If our cities are to flourish, we need to go back to basics. Answering the animating question of this book is part of the process, although the overall answer that the book offers is not an easy one. Why are our cities in crisis? Because our cities *are us*. We have yet to come to terms with our place on this planet. We take for granted older conceptions of community, but the changing nature of social relations now requires engaged work to sustain community in a meaningful and practical way. We compartmentalize the parts of the manifold crisis and seek technical solutions to each problem severally.

Cities express our aspirations and hopes. They are local citadels of the evolving global urban system, built to protect us from our fears and insecurities. Family by family, person by person, the world’s population is gravitating towards the bright lights of urban intensity and high mass consumption. Across the globe,

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unevenly but inexorably, people have been entering the process that Raymond Williams (1974) calls ‘mobile privatization’ – making our lives increasingly private and linking to the public more than to each other by the mediation of television, the Internet and social media than by public engagement in the street or in community settings. Individual by individual, the denizens of cities turn on air conditioners to cope with the higher temperatures we all have produced and to meet our private ‘needs’ for increasing levels of comfort – thus paradoxically increasing the production of greenhouse gases which lead to higher temperatures. In other words, cities represent the best and worst of us. They are the home to the most crass and the very grandest things that we can achieve. Conversely, to improve them, we need to attend to our own weaknesses.

If part of the problem is that each of us thinks that we, individually, are doing something for the planet while we continue collectively to slide towards unsustainability, then, even though the idea might provoke unease, we need to return comprehensive *public* dialogue over urban futures. Auden’s words from ‘Memorial for the City’ (1947) still haunt such a proposition:

... the packed galleries roared  
And history marched to the drums of a clear idea,  
The aim of the Rational City, quick to admire,  
Quick to tire.

In other words, badly conceived utopian planning has in the past produced outcomes that are unsustainable, objectively and emotionally. But this does not mean that communities and municipalities, together with planning and architectural experts, should not get together to confer and argue over the future directions of the whole city, its priorities and directions – even if this means revisiting first principles.

Positive sustainable urban development needs alternative visions that take seriously the integral importance of economic, ecological, political and cultural factors. In particular, questions of culture need to be taken more seriously and directly. This is not to succumb to the culturalist view that the aesthetic visions of high-end architects should drive the remaking of cities. Rather, it is to argue for a city where cultural friction is returned to the streets and where cars give way to people, public spaces, basketball courts and urban food gardens.

It sounds simple, but current practices remain caught in inappropriate dominant understandings. Language is part of the problem, but it goes deeper to the relationship between knowledge, power and practice. As a way of going in a different direction we begin with the four social domains that we earlier posited as useful for understanding the human condition: the economic, ecological, political and cultural. The *Circles of Sustainability* metaphor cuts straight across the Triple Bottom Line approach. John Elkington extols the Triple Bottom Line ‘revolution’ as the act

of giving cannibals forks (1997). It supposedly works to civilize capitalism. However, when put in terms of ‘cannibals with forks’, the inherently rapacious nature of the process starts to be exposed. And once exposed, the critique comes quickly. Tempering self-eating cannot be a sustainable approach to economics, let alone to the human flourishing as a whole.

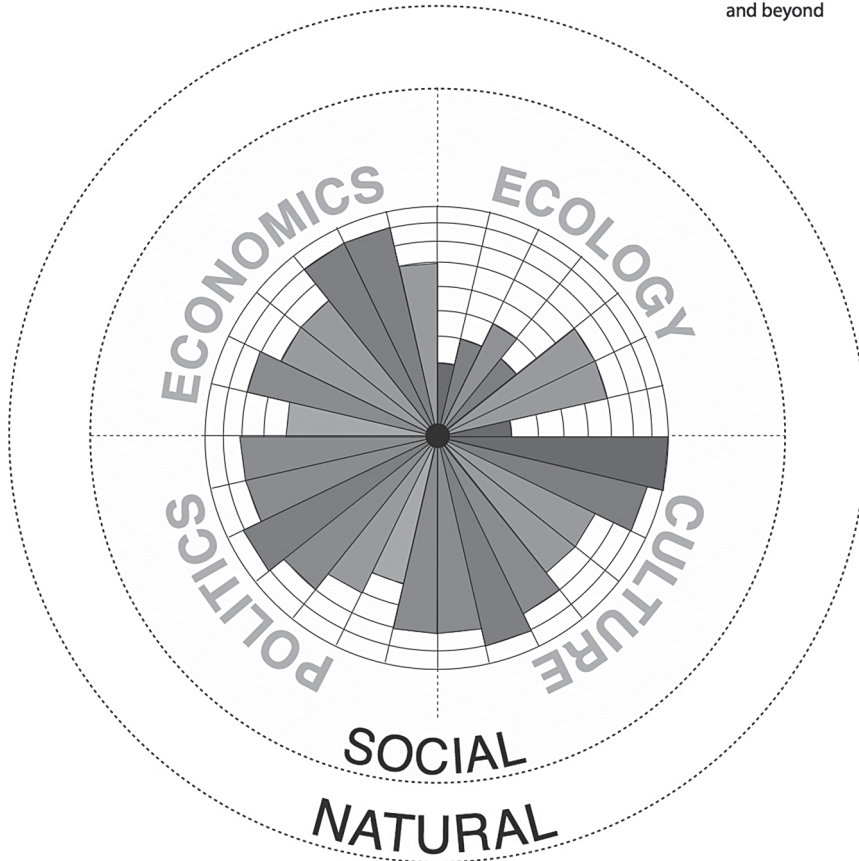
Whereas the Triple Bottom Line approach, even its latest variations of Integrated Reporting and One Reporting, treats financial accounting as *the* core discipline of economics, the Circles of Social Life approach treats each social domain as part of an integrated social whole. In contrast to the usual conception put forward in the triplet of economic, social, and environmental activities, economics is not considered a strangely independent master domain outside social relations. Economics is important, but when treated as primary it threatens to rip the heart out of prior cultural and ecological ways of life.

Whereas the Triple Bottom Line approach practically prioritizes economics – although rhetorically appearing to qualify it – the holistic view of social domains firmly put economics in its place as one of four equal social domains. Whereas ‘business as usual’ is predicated on treating nature as a residual zone to be saved, the Circles approach acknowledges that all social relations, including economics, is always already beholden to – built on – a fragile but irreducible natural world (see Figure 1.1). Whereas the usual approach treats the environment as a series of metrics, such as in carbon accounting, this alternative approach recognizes that as humans we are part of nature. Human activity is treated as located *in* the ecological domain, concerned with basic questions of needs and limits, which in turn now finds itself ‘scientifically’ fading at its edges into nature beyond the human. To be sure, over the last half century, human impact on the planet has been expanding into basic environmental systems that were once much bigger than us, but this does not involve the end of nature. It presents us with the final paradox: the more humans seek *instrumentally* to control the implications of nature and its fragility, the more we risk our own future. These paradoxes have become damaging contradictions that need to confront directly.

The Circles of Social Life approach shown in Figure 1.1 is foundational to the method used in the book. It shows, as best one can figuratively, that all of social life is grounded in natural life while simultaneously being lifted out of this ground through social practice and meaning formation. This remains a basic tension for all practice and meaning. Over the course of the anthropocene period, the circle of social life has been expanding to fill more and more of the ground of being. By being named Circles of Social Life, the figure also indicates that the *Circles of Sustainability* emphasis is only one way of approaching social life assessments and profiles. Other circles that we have been developing include the Circles of Resilience, the Circles of Climate Change Adaptation, the Circles of Property Development and then a series of cohort-specific profiles beginning with Circles of Social Life: Children.

# CIRCLES of SOCIAL LIFE

and beyond



## DOMAINS OF THE SOCIAL

### ECONOMICS

Production & Resourcing  
Exchange & Transfer  
Accounting & Regulation  
Consumption & Use  
Labour & Welfare  
Technology & Infrastructure  
Wealth & Distribution

### POLITICS

Organization & Governance  
Law & Justice  
Communication & Critique  
Representation & Negotiation  
Security & Accord  
Dialogue & Reconciliation  
Ethics & Accountability

### ECOLOGY

Materials & Energy  
Water & Air  
Flora & Fauna  
Habitat & Settlements  
Built Form & Transport  
Embodiment & Sustenance  
Emission & Waste

### CULTURE

Identity & Engagement  
Creativity & Recreation  
Memory & Projection  
Belief & Meaning  
Gender & Generations  
Enquiry & Learning  
Well-Being & Health

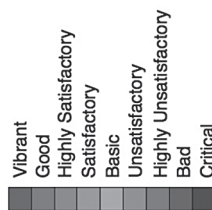


FIGURE 1.1 Circles of Social Life

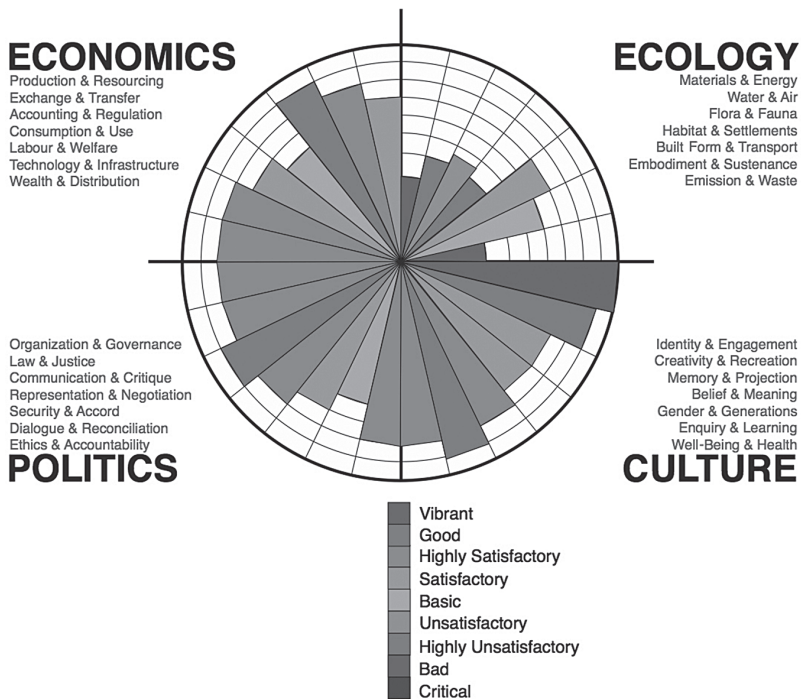
## CASE STUDY: MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Melbourne is a profoundly paradoxical city. It has a strikingly diverse multicultural population of about 4 million people,<sup>4</sup> but is founded on an Anglo-European heritage that, until the late 1960s, fiercely attacked multiculturalism as anathema to its cultural–political harmony. It is a densely urbanized and vibrant city of high-rise buildings, restaurants, parks and bluestone footpaths. But its metropolitan footprint radiates outwards into a region of ever-stretching car-dependent suburbs, mixed-use peri-urban zones and a hinterland of temperate dry-land farming, where most of the trees have been cut down. It is a trading city with a global port, though its manufacturing base for export has steadily declined since the 1970s. It is the administrative and service centre for the south-east corner of Australia, and yet 90 per cent of traded imports stay in the metropolitan area. It is a global city with a well-educated population who have a growing and sophisticated public consciousness about climate change, recycling, and water-consumption issues. However, Melbourne is becoming less sustainable, even as it maintains good liveability in certain dimensions of social life (see Figure 1.2).<sup>5</sup>

In summary, in the metropolis of Melbourne issues of liveability and sustainability cut across each other in complex ways. For example, for all the public sensitivity to ecological sustainability issues in the city, resource use and carbon emissions continue to grow, including land and energy consumption on a *per capita* basis. As mentioned earlier, one of the few clear successes in this area has been a widely supported political campaign to place legal restrictions on water use.

The Melbourne 2030 plan of 2002 designated twelve ‘Green Wedges’ for protection from inappropriate development. However, this was much less impressive than it sounded. The Green Wedges of the 1970s were set-aside green spaces that cut into the expansion of the greater urban boundary; now they merely designate non-urban areas beyond the existing built-up metropolitan zone. Seven years on, from the Melbourne 2030 plan, this became both rhetorically more elaborate and substantively even less impressive. In 2009, rethinking Melbourne 2030, the Brumby Labor government announced in a new document, *Melbourne@5Million*, that it would establish a 15,000-hectare grassland reservation to protect some of the world’s largest concentrations of volcanic-plains grasslands, as well as a range of other habitat types including wetlands, riparian habitats, and open grassy woodlands. While, on the face of it, this sounded good, the announcement was made in the context of a decision to significantly extend the urban-growth boundary previously reset in the first Melbourne 2030 plan. The urban expansion of Melbourne would now encompass the open areas that had earlier been designated part of the rural hinterland. It is estimated that less than one-third of native vegetation remains within the current boundaries of the metropolis, with approximately one-third of the balance situated on private property. More than eighty introduced plant species cause significant damage to waterways.

# MELBOURNE 2011



## CIRCLES OF SUSTAINABILITY

FIGURE 1.2 Urban Sustainability Profile of Melbourne, 2011

In response to these ecological challenges the state of Victoria has developed and implemented a range of programs to help Victorian communities, yet the substantive effects of these programs continue to be unproved. Even more problematic is the fact that there are larger structural issues linked to the strength of the economy that cut across whatever these programs do achieve. The electricity utilities in Melbourne, which were privatized in the mid-1990s, are reliant for energy generation on *critically* unsustainable brown coal-fired power plants in the nearby La Trobe Valley. These plants primarily serve Melbourne and form major contributions to Australia's status as one of the highest *per capita* greenhouse-gas emitters in the world.

The controversial Port Phillip Bay Channel Deepening Project, recently completed to enable entry of larger shipping vessels to Australia's largest working port, has further challenged the environmental sustainability of the



city. As have two other major and equally controversial water-infrastructure projects: the Wonthaggi desalination plant and the Sugarloaf Pipeline, a seventy-kilometre pipeline linking the Goulburn River near Yea to the Sugarloaf Reservoir in Melbourne's north-east at a cost of AU\$750 million. As with other Australian cities and towns, a key environmental constraint on the development of the city is the availability of fresh water. The experience of a long-term drought affecting south-eastern Australia over the last decade had prompted stringent water restrictions on commercial and residential water use, but this was not seen as sufficient for dealing with the long-term problem. The pipeline will transfer water from the Goulburn River to Melbourne Water's Sugarloaf Reservoir, thereby reducing natural flows to watercourses, while the desalination plant is intended to supply potable water to the city. These initiatives will generate an exorbitant cost in terms of the greenhouse emissions generated by the plant's demands on the electricity grid.

Major development projects with degrading environmental consequences, from the desalination plant to a new tollway tunnel for cars, paradoxically, are defended by the government in terms of environmental and, of course, economic sustainability.<sup>6</sup> At the same time as allowing these projects to go ahead with a minimal if heated critical response, Melbournians have become increasingly concerned to nurture lifestyle amenities, urban aesthetics, place-making activities, tourist-oriented events and cafés. Although such aspects of liveability are important, this complex mix of civic concern and complacency is symbolized by the way in which the city's politicians and media respond to being consistently listed as one of the world's most liveable cities.<sup>7</sup>

The city thrives on its reputation and, indeed, the reality of being extraordinarily liveable and prosperous. Meanwhile, the liveability standing of the city is being slowly but noticeably eroded. The social wealth of the city is being increasingly privatized or 'developed' through public-private partnerships that are wrapped in commercial-in-confidence contracts, while the unevenness of income distribution and the access to amenities are overlooked and allowed to increase.

## Notes

- 1 See the Economist Intelligence Unit (2013). As part of the new world of commodified knowledge thirty-day full-access subscription costs US\$5,250.
- 2 Here the distinction between how the global North and global South is treated as a socio-economic distinction based on a geographical tendency for poorer countries to be located in the Southern Hemisphere.
- 3 For a sympathetic history of the various approaches to planning, see Peter Hall's classic *Cities of Tomorrow* (1988).
- 4 There were 3,995,000 in the Melbourne metropolitan area according to 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. Of those persons, 31 per cent were born outside of Australia,



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- and 27.9 per cent speak a language other than English at home (2006 Census). Accessed 25 July 2014, <[www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home)>.
- 5 Here we are using broad criteria of social sustainability drawing on works such as Peter Newman, Timothy Beatley and Heather Boyer (2009); Phil Wood and Charles Landry (2008); and Matthew E. Kahn (2006).
- 6 PricewaterhouseCoopers is primarily a study of economic benefits, it notes ‘a reduction in local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions which would result from fewer total ships calls to the Port of Melbourne because larger ships could call at the port’ (2007, p. 9).
- 7 On the two main indices, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Melbourne was ranked first in 2003 and 2004, 2011, 2012, and 2013. On the Mercer Quality of Living Survey, Melbourne was eighteenth-ranked city globally in 2010, down from ranked twelfth in 2005. On the way in which this is interpreted instrumentally see, for example, the commissioned report by Gerrard Bown (2006).

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# 2

## DEFINING THE WORLD AROUND US

The world is in crisis and yet the argument here is that we need to slow down and go back to basics. Are we being overcautious. Doesn't this mean fiddling while Rome burns? Doesn't redefining terms and processes mean further deferring crucial action even further? There is that danger, of course, but there are so many issues that need challenging, from definitions to protocols and from principles to processes, that returning to basics has unfortunately become absolutely necessary. Rethinking why and how – in theory and in practice – we can make and remake cities does not need to be incompatible with continuing to do things in the world and adjusting our theories and principles accordingly. In fact, this is what we are proposing: a transitional practice for learning from experience, remaking theory, and attempting to construct now what we want for our futures. Reflexive learning is crucial.

The approach presented in this book is intended to be both critical and useful. Simple as that sounds, it is horribly difficult to achieve. It requires a different way of working. All the concepts and methods, protocols and principles are given a place within the *Circles of Sustainability* approach only insofar as they are developed within a number of analytical principles. Are they heuristically useful? Do they enable us to map the complexity of social life without those maps becoming too arcane or too complicated to use? Can they offer us the possibility of moving between analysing dominant patterns of practice and meaning (structures) and recognizing the contingency of any particular practice or idea? Can they contribute to a broader analysis that can move between empirical description and understanding the grounding of a particular pattern of practice and meaning?

One of the intentions of the book is to destabilize current dominant ways of understanding urban development, and to set up an alternative framework of analysis that allows globally supported local work to occur that actually makes a difference in improving social and natural life. The Circles approach brings the local and global

together, just as it draws heavily on engaged theory to bring theory down to earth. The first part of that double process of destabilizing dominant understandings and engaging theory in guiding practical outcomes entails redefining some basic concepts.

In this chapter, some definitions that are fundamental to making sense of the world of urbanization in global context are outlined. It redefines terms such as *development*, *sustainability*, *globalization* and *community*, paving the way for Chapter 3, which elaborates on the importance of the apparently simple recognition of different domains of social life. Despite the basic orientation of the discussion, beginning in this way has fundamental consequences for practice. Defining concepts is highly contested and foundational to making better cities and better lives. Defining the world around us, the title of this chapter, has a double inflection that suggests that just as we define the world, the world makes us through both our own definitions of it and its social force on us.

## Sustainable and good development

Sustainable urban development in many parts of the world continues to be a struggle. The lives of the people that such development is meant to enrich are often being made more difficult by these same developmental processes. Despite well-intentioned attempts to the contrary, the managers of most development projects do not know how to engage with the complexity of community life. Although a paradigm shift from ‘things’ to ‘people’ has been discussed and encouraged rhetorically in some local government and corporate settings, mostly this has been translated into practice badly. Something of a consensus has emerged amongst commentators in the fields of education, anthropology, community development, geography and political ecology that sustainable development is something that comes from within communities rather than something that can be imposed from the outside. This nevertheless leaves us with many questions about how to actually do it.

Let us first go back to the big picture. How is good development to be understood? Both history and current driving forces complicate the possibilities of non-exploitative development of any kind, let alone good development. In the past local landscapes have often been changed by colonial or imperial experiences, and they are now beset by intensifying forces of globalization – most pressingly by the rolling global fiscal pressures, the competing demands for natural resources and the intensifying movement of people including rural–urban migration. In this context, the term *development* itself is complex and difficult.

How are issues of social equity and communality, ecological sustainability, grassroots economic viability and respect for different ways of life to be negotiated in the practice of sustainable development? Some writers have suggested that the term *development* should be dropped or that the concept of sustainable development is an oxymoron. However, as is often the case, the problem is not the term but its dominant definition and the practices that build on its definition. In the business sphere, development is usually equated with generating physical infrastructure, political stability and workforce training – all of which are directed towards

enhancing corporate profit taking. In the state-led model of development, this commonly means building layers of civil administration and providing the legislative, infrastructural and educational framework for economic-based development – all understood in terms of a nation-building programme. In the area of community and civil-society studies, ideas of development often simply mean getting more goods and services to the people or building ‘social capital’. None of these emphases provides our starting point. Without diminishing the need for large-scale infrastructure planning, for example we begin with alternative notions that advocate the enhancement of social sustainability, resilience, security and adaptability, involving local people who make decisions about how this translates into practice for them.

How then can we define development so that there is no presumption in this definition that development entails either modernization or modern progress? How can we define development so that there is no presumption that all development is good? To answer this question we begin by recognizing that any value orientations automatically attached to the concept need to be stripped away. Development is a process – not an intrinsically good or bad thing. Deciding what is good or bad comes after the definition has been settled. Development needs to be defined in terms of social change and what is changing.

*Development is defined as social change – with all its intended or unintended outcomes, good and bad – that brings about a significant and patterned shift in the technologies, techniques, infrastructure, and/or associated life-forms of a place or people .*

This definition does not assure that all development, even ‘good development’, is necessarily sustainable. There are too many possibilities of unintended consequences, reversals and counterproductive outcomes. Nor, it should be added, is all ‘sustainable development’ good. This last point is one rarely made in the mainstream global North. The classic report *Our Common Future*, more commonly known as the Brundtland Report, defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 8). This definition still works for many purposes. However, its meaning turns on the undefined implications of the word *needs*. It leaves unspecified the assumed importance of specifying cultural, political and ecological needs as well as economic material needs. (This is developed later in Chapter 4 in relation to a series of social themes in tension, including the dialectic of needs and limits.) These are issues to be debated publicly rather than just glossed over.

## Negative and positive sustainability

Sustainability, for all the emotion and debate that the concept evokes, is a relatively flat term. Again whereas some writers have suggested that the concept is too empty

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to carry the current weight given to it, we would prefer to redefine and reinvigorate it rather than pass it over for some ‘new’ concept such as ‘resilience’. Resilience is itself fast collecting a massive baggage of problems. Indeed, sustainability remains a very important new concept, which initially became part of the discourse of the global justice movement and then was quickly appropriated by the dominant market globalist discourse of neoliberalism (Steger, Goodman & Wilson, 2013, pp. 42–3). Both of these concepts, and a number of related concepts such as liveability, can be reclaimed and used in relation to each other. (See Table 2.1.) This is the key – using different concepts that convey different core conditions of being human and that bring those ‘ways of engaging’ into productive relation to each other.

Each of these conditions of human engagement in the world bear back on the our core concern in this book. Sustainability is usually defined in terms of being able to carry on, endure, or have a future. This is what, in our terms, can be called ‘negative sustainability’ – not negative in the sense of being bad but negative in the sense of *just* keeping a system or process going through acts of negation: reducing pollution, mitigating the excesses of development and keeping law and order.

Negative sustainability keeps things going through reducing the bad effects of previous rounds of development. This can be understood across the four domains

**TABLE 2.1** Core Conditions for Engaging in Social Life

<i>Core conditions</i>	<i>Definitions of the positive side of these core conditions</i>
1. Adaptability	The ability to adapt to change, including adapting to changes brought about by external forces that threaten the sustainability of conditions of liveability and security.
2. Learning	The capacity to seek knowledge, learn and use that understanding for enhancing social life. When learning becomes reflexive understanding, the highest form of learning, it includes the possibility of acknowledging the profound limits of one’s knowledge.
3. Liveability	The life skills and milieu that allow for living in ways that enhance well-being. Liveability includes having the resources to secure social life for all across the various aspects of human security, both in an embodied sense and an existential sense. One of the capacities here is the possibility of debating and planning possible alternative ways of living.
4. Reconciliation	The capability to reconcile destructive or <i>negative</i> differences across the boundaries of continuing and flourishing <i>positive</i> social differences.
5. Relationality	The capacity to relate to others and to nature in a meaningful way. This includes the capacity to love, to feel compassion, to reconcile.
6. Resilience	The flexibility to recover and flourish in the face of social forces that threaten basic conditions of social life.
7. Sustainability	The capacity to endure over time, through enhancing the conditions of social and natural flourishing.

of social life. Negative ecological sustainability currently centres on reducing carbon emissions. For example, negative cultural sustainability is achieved by reducing the number of suicides or attempting to integrate youth back into community life. Negative political sustainability turns on processes such as reducing corruption, reducing excesses of power by checks and balances and reducing violence through reconciliation commissions. Under contemporary globalizing capitalism, processes of negation and risk management dominate economic sustainability. By contrast, positive sustainability requires defining the terms and conditions of what are positively good. It entails projecting practices for achieving the enduring future of those conditions.

This shift in the definition means, for example, that it is possible to argue for ‘positive’ *sustainable conservation*. That is, in a world in crisis, conservation requires active engagement about what from the past and the present is being projected into the future. Such a conception is distinct from that of *sustainable preservation*. In the sense that preservation seeks to reduce the impact of change, sustainable preservation becomes predominantly a negative ideal and practice – namely protecting heritage. Sustainable conservation by comparison projects a vibrant and living future for the natural and social heritage of the past. Rather than fixing a time segment or a physical representation of the past, sustainable preservation requires development, adaptation and reintegration of the past into the present and active planning for projection into the future.

The distinction between positive and negative sustainability recalls and modifies the well-known distinction between positive and negative liberty.<sup>1</sup> As with positive liberty, aiming for positive sustainability appears to be either utopian or dangerous. By contrast having the capacity to endure through reducing what is bad appears to be more comfortable. It has been normalized. However, because neither positive nor negative sustainability are end states, and because the dominant focus of the last three decades on mutually assured negative sustainability has not saved us from the current manifold crisis, then something more radical is needed. Positive sustainability in these terms is a negotiated process projected beyond the present about how we want to live.

*Positive sustainability can be defined as practices and meanings of human engagement that make for lifeworlds that project the ongoing probability of natural and social flourishing, vibrancy, resilience, and adaptation.*

The term *lifeworld* is used to encompass both the social/natural and global/local bases for human living. It emphasizes local settings with global relations. Hence, our focus here is on local urban settlements and community sustainability, always in global context. Second, the relationship between the social and the natural remains crucial, even if natural spaces beyond the social are being increasingly colonized. From the realms of nano-nature to the steppes of arctic wilderness and the depths

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of the ocean, ‘the natural’ beyond a human–intersecting ecology are being diminished. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion we are concerned with ecology as the enmeshment of the social and the natural (see Figure 0.1).

The emphasis on lifeworlds brings in the concept of ‘community sustainability’. It is a recent concept that is still undergoing development in the literature. Depending on how it is defined, it can be both a more specific and a more expansive concept than that of sustainable development. It is more specific in that it looks at the practices and actions that are needed in relation to existing communities to achieve sustainable development, yet it is more expansive in that it has the potential to move beyond schematic or instrumental accounts of sustainable development to encompass the various domains of the social, including cultural aspects of how communities cohere through time. Beyond such general accounts, however, there is little agreement on what it means or entails, particularly in integrated social terms. Although much research has been carried out on community sustainability from an economic or even an ecological standpoint, little work exists on the potential of cultural or political practices in strengthening communities. Some writers point to the vagueness of the concept, but it is possible to be quite clear about its meaning.

*Community sustainability is defined as the long-term durability of a community as it negotiates changing practices and meanings across all the domains of culture, politics, economics and ecology.*

Again it should be clear that communities could be (negatively) sustainable without necessarily being good places to live. Part of the significance of the present work, then, lies in its attempt to address the gaps in the current literature on community sustainability and to extend theoretical observations about a new qualitative conception of community sustainability informed by substantial and innovative empirical research in urban settings. In this context, sustainability is conceived in terms that include not just practices tied to development but also forms of well-being and social bonds, community building, social support and urban infrastructure renewal. Processes such as urbanization and globalization have been changing the nature of community

In summary thus far, the concern with sustainability here entails undertaking an analysis of how communities are sustained through time, how they cohere and change, rather than being constrained within discourses and models of development. From another angle, the present project presents an account of community sustainability somewhat detached from instrumental concerns with narrow economic development while recognizing how powerful such concerns continue to be. Although concerns about production and exchange continue to be imperative for community sustainability, this project will suggest that an approach driven by economic concerns will be reductive and will fail to account for the real complexity of interactions and effects produced by the matrix of ecological, economic,

political and cultural practices – the *Circles of Sustainability*. We need now to define what is meant by an urban settlement and to link this to processes of globalization and localization, but we will return to the question of forms of community relations before the end of the chapter.

## Cities and urban settlements

The challenge of conducting research or initiating social change in the contemporary world is complicated by what is often a rapid and radical reconfiguration of social space. Only in simple geographical or municipal political terms do urban settlements have singular boundaries. This has major consequences for acting sustainably. Among the many issues this raises are problems of definition. In relation to defining a phenomenon as apparently simple as an urban settlement, debates and practices in the fields of anthropology, sociology and ethnography confront us with one set of issues, while debates in the fields of human geography and demography present others.

One concern is that mainstream analyses of human settlements – whether they are by governments, intergovernmental organizations, economists or non-government organizations (NGOs) – tend overwhelmingly to use the urban–rural dichotomy as the dominant modality of categorizing locales and land use. The urban–rural distinction was first proposed in the early 1950s, and a few writers criticized it at the time for being overly simplistic. Nevertheless, it quickly entered into popular usage. It has persisted as the dominant classification system for studying human settlements and is used by virtually all countries. Beyond that there are a number of significant problems with the widespread usage of the various settlement categories. First, there is no uniform approach to defining rural and urban settlements. The United Nations Statistics Division (1998) concedes this difficulty: ‘Because of national differences in the characteristics which distinguish urban from rural areas, the distinction between urban and rural population is not yet amenable to a single definition that would be applicable in all countries’. Thus, it is said to be best for countries to decide for themselves whether particular settlements are urban or rural. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has adopted the same approach. However, while recognizing that it is a difficult task to create categories which are applicable to a diverse range of landscapes, contexts and regional settings, failing to define the terms being used simply means that there is an overabundance of opportunities for confusion and inconsistent use.

The usual urban–rural distinction also fails to account for the changing nature of human settlement across the globe. Cities have come to dominate landscapes far beyond the official metropolitan zone. Significant changes include the changing forms of urbanization such as urban sprawl and the decentralization of non-residential functions, for example retail parks close to intercity highway junctions, massively increased levels of commuting between urban and rural areas, the development of communication and transport technologies and the emergence of poly-centric urban configurations.



Although the urban–rural dichotomy was always over-simplistic, it is arguably more misleading today than it was half a century ago. In countries from Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea to Senegal and Tanzania, the relationship between the urban and the rural needs to be treated very carefully. Networks of customary exchange relations are entangled with modern market relations, intensively connecting different locales, including through marriage and retirement relations. Third, the generality of the terms overwhelms the significant variation in settlement forms that exist between the extremes of the most urban and the most rural. *Rural* is, in general use, a catch-all category for ‘not urban’.

This reductive binary has led to a number of intermediate categories being proposed, including suburban, peri-urban, ex-urban and peri-metropolitan. These new forms of categorization are intended to respond to the increasing complexity of settlement patterns and they partly do so. The difficulty is that marking the differences is sometimes reduced to a set of arbitrary metrics. One approach uses two criteria – population density and accessibility – to distinguish between three categories of rural areas: peri-urban rural; intermediate rural; and remote rural. In that approach rural areas are considered to be those with a population density lower than 150 inhabitants per square kilometre, while the three subcategories are defined according to the level of access to major services. This certainly marks actual differences. However, the technical precision is pseudoscientific rather than in keeping with the present social mapping approach that takes objective and subjective dimensions of social life equally seriously. Another approach identifies three dimensions through which human settlements can be addressed. As opposed to the one-dimensional nature of the urban–rural distinction it posits a set of settlement sizes, from hamlet to metropolitan centre; it measures concentration, from dense to sparse; and it evaluates accessibility, from central to remote.

Integrating material from different sources, however, helps us to build a basic framework for a general set of definitions that we will use as part of our toolshed. Although not fixed in stone, these definitions nonetheless form a steady part of the overall conceptual framework of this study.<sup>2</sup>

*A city or urban area can be defined as a human settlement characterized – economically, politically and culturally – by a significant infrastructural base; a high density of population, whether it be as denizens, working people, or transitory visitors; and what is perceived to be a large proportion of constructed surface area relative to the rest of the region.* Within that area there may also be smaller zones of non-built-up, green or brown sites used for agriculture, recreational, storage, waste disposal or other purposes.

*A suburban area can be defined as a relatively densely inhabited urban district characterized by predominance of housing land-use – as a residential zone in an urban area contiguous with a city centre, as a zone outside the politically defined limits of a city centre, or as a zone on the outer rim of an urban region (sometimes called a peri-urban area).* For example suburban areas in cities of the global South can be made up of village communities or squatter settlements, sometimes edged by bushland. This also includes ‘settlements’ or ‘squatter areas’. Thus, our definition of *suburb* does not made the usual distinction between formal suburbs and informal or squatter settlements – they are in our terms different forms of suburbanization.

*A peri-urban area is a zone of transition from the rural to urban.* These areas often form the immediate urban-rural interface and may eventually evolve into being fully urban. Peri-urban areas are lived-in environments. The majority of peri-urban areas are on the fringe of established urban areas, but they may also be clusters of residential development within rural landscapes and along transport routes. Peri-urban areas in the global North are most frequently an outcome of the continuing process of suburbanization or urban sprawl, although this is different in places where customary land relations continue to prevail.

*A hinterland area is a rural area that is located close enough to a major urban centre for its inhabitants to orient a significant proportion of their activities to the dominant urban area in their region.*

*A rural area is an area that is either sparsely settled or has a relatively dispersed population with no cities or major towns.* Although agriculture still plays an important part in numerous rural areas, other sources of income have developed such as rural tourism, small-scale manufacturing activities, residential economy (location of retirees), and energy production. A rural area can be characterized either by its constructed (though non-industrial) ecology or its relatively indigenous ecology.

All these zones bear on the formation and reproduction of cities or urban settlements. They are spatial domains. However, there is another way of understanding spatial domains that complements what has just been outlined. It concerns processes rather than zones – in particular, processes of globalization and localization

## Globalization and localization

Cities in the current world are faced with intensifying global interconnections: therefore, understanding processes of globalization and localization is crucial. Globalization is always enacted at the concrete local level. Even the global financial crisis was manifest in patterns of local practice, including how poor people bought houses in depressed urban neighbourhoods such in New York and Miami. At the same time, the viability of the local now largely depends on the global. In the lead up to the financial crisis, the act of buying a house on easy credit in the United States was swept up in a global system of credit swaps and derivatives as sets of subprime mortgages swirled through the financial world. Foreclosures followed. People lost their homes. The crisis compounded.

Notions of ‘glocalization’ or the ‘glocal’ have long been part of the vocabulary of the growing transdisciplinary field of global studies (e.g. see Robertson 1992; Steger 2013). Although they are ugly terms, this book explicitly acknowledges the crucial importance of this global–local nexus for urban development. Fortunately, there has been a growing awareness of the close interrelation between the local and global. Indeed, recent studies have used such insights to reconfigure democratic global governance around the urban by advocating a global association of cities or a global parliament of mayors (e.g. see Barber 2013).

To be sure, the challenges the world’s mayors face are nothing short of immense. Talk of global climate change or a global financial crisis gives a sense of the range of globalizing pressures on cities. These are very real pressures. However, despite this obviousness,

the process of globalization is still badly understood and poorly defined. Economic definitions still dominate people’s imaginations. For example the claim that only those cities that channel the global movement of finance can be called ‘global cities’ depends on an economically reductive understanding of globalization. Similarly, the claim that globalization *causes* resource depletion and environmental destruction, depends on the one-sided assumption that globalization equals the rapacious consumption of the planet. There is no doubt, across the world, that cities are consuming their hinterlands, and it is not just relevant for metropolitan New York or the double city of Tokyo/Yokohama, considered to be the largest conurbations in the world. Globalization contributes to that process of urban spread without being its overdetermining cause.

Peter Christoff and Robyn Eckersley’s book *Globalization and the Environment* manages to respond precisely to the second of these misunderstandings. Contemporary globalization, they argue, is ‘not the primary or only cause of global environmental change, although it has certainly intensified such change to the point where we are moving towards an environmental crisis of planetary proportions’ (2013, pp. 29–30).

One of the problems with much analysis is that globalization has been badly defined. Defining globalization in terms of extension and intensification of social relations across world-space provides a good way out of most of the definitional issues. The definition is intended to stop any presumptions about the inevitable effects of globalization, including on cities.

*Globalization is defined as a process of extension and intensification of social relations across world-space, where the nature of world-space is understood in terms of the temporal frame or of the social imaginary in which that space is lived – ecologically, economically, politically and culturally.*

The definition also has critical implications for sustainability analysis. By being clear that we are talking about a process – not an end point – and, in particular, a process ~~of~~ that extends social relations, the definition is intended to get away from the mainstream emphasis on economics as the *raison d’être* of global change. Globalization occurs across ecological, economic, political and cultural domains. This means for example that, despite eminent historians claiming the opposite, globalization did not go into decline during the Second World War. By the same definition, it is not the constant increase in financial engagement that defines globalization. If a city is feeling the pressure of a downturn in foreign direct investment this is not necessarily because globalization is decreasing.

The qualifying phrases need further elaboration. They turn on two concepts – world-space and social imaginary. In this sense, the changing global space, the space of the world, needs to be defined in terms of the historically variable ways in which it has been practised and socially understood. To give one illustration, the world as understood by Claudius Ptolemaeus 2,000 years ago was based on a Roman revival of the Hellenic belief in the Pythagorean theory of a spherical globe. This understanding

was a substantially different globe from that understood by George W. Bush when he initiated the Global War on Terror. Both conceptions take the world to be a spherical globe – hence globalization. However, the nature of that sphere and how a particular empire or a state reaches across that world-space is understood and practised in fundamentally different ways. By analytically defining globalization in this variable way, we can say that the phenomenon of globalization has been occurring across the world for centuries, but in changing ways, and massively intensifying across the mid-twentieth century to the present. Across history, globalization has involved the extension of uneven connections between people in far-distant places through such processes as the movement of people, the exchange of goods and the communication of ideas. (For an extended discussion of the concept of the social imaginary, see Chapter 5.)

There are a number of dimensions to an understanding of globalization as the extension of social relations across world-space. First, as many commentators now agree, the phenomenon of globalization is a relational process. That is globalization is not a state of being or a given condition. The notion of a ‘global condition’ is addressed by the concept of globality, but even this concept does not imply that everything has or will become global. In these terms, globalization is not a totalizing condition, nor is it an end point that will be achieved when everything that is local becomes global. Rather, a series of relations continue to be uneven and contingent, even as we can see dominant patterns emerging. *Globalisms*, in this sense, are the ideologies of globalization (again, see Chapter 5).

Second, globalization is a spatial process. It involves social connections across space – organized and unorganized, intended and unintended, patterned and messy. More than that, the spatiality of this phenomenon needs to be specified as global in some way. Those interrelated points might seem an unnecessary thing to say given their obviousness. However, for the concept to have any meaning, globalization needs to carry global spatial implications of some kind. Despite this, there has been a tendency for some writers to define globalization in terms of transcontinental or inter-regional relations, or in terms of the demise or end of the nation state. There is no good reason to make such relations or effects part of the definition.

Ironically, intensifying globalization has brought about a significant self-consciousness about local places. In this sense, although, *at one level*, we have always lived locally and continue to do so, contemporary forms of globalization have been changing what this means. This requires a different way of understanding spatiality and spatial layering. Old twentieth-century conceptions of vertical spatial scales running from the local to the global must give way to more complex understandings of overlapping spatial scales that can no longer be neatly separated and treated in isolation from each other.

Third, globalization is a variable, often uneven, process. Cities are crossed by different kinds of globalization processes. One possible way of refining our analytical understanding of different kinds of globalization to help with this overlaying spatial change involves the following set of distinctions:

- *Embodied globalization* – the movements of peoples across the world
- *Object-extended globalization* – the movements of objects across the world, in particular, traded commodities

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- *Agency-extended globalization* – the movements of agents of institutions such as corporations, NGOs and states
- *Symbolically extended globalization* – the movements of symbols across the world, often carried as objects, but also now overwhelmingly projected as electronic images
- *Disembodied globalization* – the movements of immaterial things and processes, electronic texts and encoded capital

Cities have choices – constrained choices – about how they deal with these different forms of globalization. Embodied globalization extends across the globe in networks of the movement of people, but it is also the most palpably localized in the way in which it is lived. Migrants usually come to particular places, increasingly urban places, through chains of connection that link localities, families and ethnic diasporas. Alternatively, at the most materially abstract end of the spectrum, disembodied globalization, although always localizing in some way or other, and with profound consequences for how people live locally, is the least embedded in local places. (To see how this fits into the larger schema see Table 4.2 in Chapter 4; note how the objects of analysis relate to the ways of relating.) It bears back on cities in profound ways that make all cities increasingly global whether they like it or not.

All of this means that the current approach to global cities, to the extent that it emphasizes global financial connectivity, is reductive and skewed. Here we confront a shibboleth in scholarly writing – not only has the urbanization of the world been a long term if massively accelerating process, but it should also be said that cities have long been the locus of globalization processes. Against those writers who, by emphasizing the importance of financial exchange systems, distinguish a few special cities as global cities – commonly London, Paris, New York and Tokyo – we recognize the uneven global dimensions of all the cities that we study. Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood, is a globalizing city, although perhaps more significantly in cultural than economic terms. And so is Dili globalizing, the small and ‘insignificant’ capital of Timor Leste – except this time it is predominantly in political terms. Dili was established as an administrative town by the Portuguese in October 1769, a year before the English explorer Captain Cook ‘discovered’ Australia, seven years before the American Revolution and two decades before the French Revolution. It has been the subject of globalizing political intersections for all of its existence, from the intersection of the Portuguese, Dutch, English and, later, Indonesian empires to the recent United Nations experiment in ruling a national territory with a multinational force.

### Community and sustainability

Ever since Ferdinand Tönnies (1963) introduced the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to describe a shift from a society dominated by relatively stable, mainly non-urban, communities that emphasized mutual obligation and trust (*Gemeinschaften*)

to more mobile, highly urbanized societies in which individual self-interest comes to the fore (*Gesellschaften*), commentators have been interested in the ever-changing nature of community. Until recently, belonging to a community was usually seen as unqualifiedly positive. Although community is now seen in more circumspect terms, the erosion of community is still predominantly interpreted as being the cause of social problems.

In the West, the term *community* is often used interchangeably with *neighbourhood* to refer to the bonds that come with living alongside others in a shared space. Alternatively, it is used to refer to people bound by a particular identity defined by nation, language group, ethnicity, clan, race, religion or sexual orientation. Or, again, it refers to groupings of mutual self-interest such as a profession or association. Cutting across all of these, community can also be defined by a particular mode of interaction, such as virtual or online communities. Community often seems to be whatever people say it is, potentially incorporating every conceivable form of human grouping, even those that might otherwise strike one as contradictory.

In the context of the supposed new 'fluidity' of global interchange, community has come in for sustained critique in relation to its effects on social well-being. For example Zygmunt Bauman has argued that communitarianism creates an ideal of community that is like the 'home writ large' in which there is no room for the homeless and which can also turn into an unexpected 'prison' for many of the residents. Bauman believes that a new kind of unity is possible – 'a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation, not the denial, stifling or smothering out of difference' (2000, pp. 171–2). However, under conditions of what he problematically calls globalizing 'liquid modernity', he sees community as entirely a matter of individual choice – a desire to redress the growing imbalance between individual freedom and security. This is clearly not the case in many of the cities across the world or all the spaces within them. It is our contention that the theorists of this supposedly 'postmodern fluid world' fail to understand the enduring, if changing and variable, possibilities of existing communities as they exist in a complex matrix of relations from the local to the global.

In the contemporary world – whether it is Port Moresby or Paris – an emerging sense that one's sense of community is changing and that it is no longer lived as given is in tension with powerful subjective continuities. That is community is no longer a relationship that a person might be drawn into, or even born into, without being forced at some time to think about its meaning, but for the most part we take such social relations for granted. Given all the variations, continuities, and transformations, the distinction made by Tönnies between 'the social' cast in the predominance of stable, traditional *Gemeinschaften* and the more fluid and displaced *Gesellschaften* is too dichotomous to be useful. However, the metaphor of flows just reverses the previous misplaced emphasis on customary and traditional societies as fixed. What is becoming more obviously necessary is to look at the ways in which forms of community identity are being created and re-created in relation to continuities under changing circumstances, both objectively and subjectively. The definition of community thus needs to be generalized across quite different settings

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but without simply being a matter of subjective and changing self-definition and without including all forms of association or sociality that happen to be important such as the family.

*Community is defined very broadly as a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice.*

A definition that recognizes variable objective and subjective dimensions allows us to recognize that communities do not have natural or singular boundaries. The nature of all locales is that they are crossed by different and overlapping social relations. The following discussion offers four ways of characterizing community relations defined in terms of how they relate to categories such as time, space and embodiment: (1) *grounded community relations*, in which the salient feature of community life is taken to be people coming together in particular tangible localized settings based on face-to-face engagement; (2) *cosmological community relations*, binding people together through a universalizing connection such as that to God or to gods; (3) *lifestyle community relations*, in which the key feature bringing together a community is adherence to particular attitudes and practices; and (4) *projected community relations*, in which neither particularistic relations nor adherence to a particular way of life are pre-eminent but, rather, the active establishment of a social space in which individuals engage in an open-ended processes of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing identities and ethics for living. (See Table 2.2.)

Before elaborating these categories further, we should sound a couple of notes of caution about how these different accounts of community relate to each other.

**TABLE 2.2** Community Formations

<i>Forms of community relations</i>	<i>Dominant ontological formations</i>
• Grounded community relations	Customary
• Cosmological community relations	Traditional
• Lifestyle community relations	Traditional to modern
1. Community life as interest based	
2. Community life as proximately related	
• Projected community relations	Modern to postmodern
1. Community life as thin projection	
2. Community life as reflexively but uncritically projected	
3. Community life as reflexively and critically projected	

First, we are in the first instance distinguishing between forms of community relations, not types of communities. In other words, the distinctions between the community relations as embodied, as a lifestyle, or as projected are intended as analytical distinctions *and* shorthand designations.

Second, in these terms, it is not being claimed that the bundle of relations in a given community exists in practice as one or other of those pure variations. Rather, the terms are intended as offering a way into an analytical framework across which the dominant, coexistent and/or subordinate manifestations of different community relations (and therefore different communities) can be mapped. Cities are full of overlapping forms of communities and community relations. Though one dimension of community relations can certainly predominate in a given community – and a community can thus be designated as such – the temptation to pigeonhole this or that community into a single way of constituting community should be resisted.

Third, in proposing this framework, the terms *grounded community*, *cosmological community*, *lifestyle community* and *projected community* are used here not as normatively charged descriptions but as shorthand terms to refer to the dominant forms of social relations that constitute a given community. They refer to the way in which social relations are framed and enacted without making any implicit judgement about whether they are good or bad. The purpose here is to offer a way of thinking about how communities are constituted across different ways of living and relating to others and to see how communities are constituted through the intersection of different forms of social integration.

Why is all of this important? It has profound practical considerations. Without understanding the kinds of community relations that characterize social relations in the locale or urban region in which a project or process is to be enacted it is impossible to managed good community relations or to conduct meaningful community consultations. Engendering positive sustainability depends upon knowing what kinds of community relations are important to the people who live in a particular locale.

### ***Grounded community relations***

Attachment to *particular* places and *particular* people are the salient features of what we are calling ‘grounded community relations’. In other words, relations of mutual presence and placement are central to structuring the connections between people. Except for periods of stress or political intensification – usually in response to unwanted interventions from the outside – questions about active social projection are subordinate in accounts and practices of grounded community. Such projection is usually seen in terms of what is already given and in place. In such a setting, questions about the nature of one’s lifestyle are assumed to take care of themselves so long as a given social and physical environment is in place with appropriate infrastructure such as community-defined dwellings and amenities.

Grounded community relations can sometimes be extended over spatial distances, stretched for example between the city and the country. Urban–rural



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diasporas often continue to be connected by abiding embodied relations, such as through regular powerful ceremonies of birth, marriage and death. For example during the working week for people living in the City of Rhodes in Greece, modern open-community relations are important at one level, but customary and traditional relations form the web of social life at another. These underlying relations are carried to the city from the rural villages, to where many people return ‘home’ on the weekends.

Thus, adherence to particular ways of life tends to spring from a sense of commonality and continuity. It arises from face-to-face bonds with other persons in one’s locale rather than from thinking about the lifestyle itself. People do not have to read from community-development tomes, self-help books or religious tracts to learn how to act with one another. Norms of behaviour emerge from people in meaningful relations as the *habitus* of their being. Here the term *habitus* is used in the sense of an immediate and present lifeworld. Even when the religious observances of such communities break out of the confines of mythical time – in the sense that it transcendently looks forward to a world to come and goes back to the beginning of time – the sense of community is strongly conditioned by local settings and is carried on through rituals and ways of living that are rooted in categories of embodiment and presence.

#### ***Cosmological community relations***

The basis of cosmologically framed community relations is something held as existing beyond the community: God, Being, Nature. Such relations can be localized or stretched across a globalizing space, as in Christendom or the Ummah. At a local level such relations tend to reinforce relationships of trust and mutual obligation between people who agree to abide by certain morally charged ways of life. Local communities are formed around a specified normative boundary – certain norms of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. This is the form taken by many *traditional* religious communities. Community here is essentially a regulative space, a means of binding people into particular ways of living. In the contemporary world, grounded community relations tend to be drawn into cosmological community relations. Village and church or mosque become wedded if uneasy partners.

#### ***Lifestyle community relations***

In contrast with grounded community relations where the emphasis is on the particularities of people and place as the salient features of community, there are accounts and practices of community that give primacy to particular ways of living. In practice, this tends to take one of two major forms: interest-based and proximity-based relations. *Interest-based* community relations form around an interest or aesthetic inclination, where lifestyle or activity, however superficial, is evoked as the

basis of the relationship. In Papua New Guinea this includes sporting and leisure-based communities that come together for regular moments of engagement, and expatriate or diaspora communities who share commonalities of lifestyle or interest. *Proximate* community relations come together where neighbourhood or commonality of association forms a community of convenience. This is not the same as a grounded community, even though both are based in spatial proximity. As distinct from conceptions of grounded community, the cultural embeddedness of persons in this or that place does not define the coherence of community, nor does the continual embodied involvement of its members with each other. This is the predominate form of community in Australian and North American suburbs or of communities lifted into the media-sphere.

Because the salience of lifestyle community relations lies in their morally framed, interest-based or proximate coherence, such communities can be de-linked from particular groups of people and particular places. In other words, they can be deterritorialized and globalized. A sense of place can be made and remade in ways that communities formed in grounded communities find anathema. Face-to-face embodied relations may be subjectively important to such communities, but they might equally be constituted through virtual or technologically mediated relations where people agree to abide by certain conventions and bonds. In this regard, it is a *potentially* more open and mobile form of community. This is its strength but also its weakness. It tends to generate culturally thinner communities than grounded relations. On the other hand, lifestyle relations tend to allow for more adaptability to change.

### ***Projected community relations***

Unlike the two other conceptions of community relations, this notion is not defined by attachment to a particular place or to a particular group of people. Neither is it primarily defined by adherence to a shared set of moral norms, traditions or mutual interests. The salient feature of projected community relations is that a community is self-consciously treated as a created entity. Because of this primacy accorded to the created, creative, active and projected dimension of community, the word *projected* is used. This is perhaps the most difficult idea of community to grasp, partly because it is so apparently nebulous. For the advocates of projected community, such relations are less about the particularities of place and bonds with particular others or adherence to a particular normative frame, and more an ongoing process of self-formation and transformation. It is a means by which people create and re-create their lives with others.

Communities characterized by the dominance of projected relations can be conservative or radical, modern or postmodern. And they can be hybrid and uneven in their forms of projection. At one end of the spectrum this process can be deeply political and grass-roots-based projected communities, at least in their more self-reflexive political form, can take the form of ongoing associations of people

who seek politically expressed integration, communities of practice based on professional projects and associative communities which seek to enhance and support individual creativity, autonomy and mutuality.

At the other end of the spectrum, projected communities can also be trivial or transitory, manipulative or misleading. They can be overgeneralized and more akin to advertising collations. They can live off the modern search for meaning rather than respond adequately to it. Realized in this way, notions of ‘community’ might be projected by a corporate advertiser or state spin doctor around a succession of engagements in the so-called third place of a Starbucks café or a self-named ‘creative city’ or ‘creative community’. Here older forms of community relations dissolve into postmodern fluidity in which notions of settled, stable and abiding bonds between people recede into the background.

Setting up definitions of these kinds enables a different approach to research and practical action. Communities cease to be understood as fixed entities with singular characteristics and clear spatial edges. For example, engaged research intends to restore the distinctive roles of insiders and outsiders, providing perhaps a more open and fruitful dialogue between the research partners as well. Of course, such dialogue needs time, and it requires considerable negotiation, skill and goodwill from both sides to move across cultural and epistemological boundaries. This whole process of building relationships involves a process of dealing with ‘the cultural other’, whether from another ontological setting or even just another region or place. This occurs most productively in face-to-face dialogue. This dialogue is about acquiring deeper understanding and new perspectives through listening *and* talking – not just listening and gathering data.

To come into conversation with a diverse group of people with different cultural and epistemological backgrounds and locations can be a disturbing thing, exposing and altering, but it is also imaginatively charging and positively transforming. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), talks of the importance of the ‘seen face’, turning up at cultural events, returning again and again to the community and being aware of the indigenous and local protocols for being present. Smith’s notion of the ‘seen face’ has inspired us with one important layer of our engaged social theory, and relates strongly to our distinction between modes of social integration ranging from face-to-face relations to the disembodied relations at a distance. While as researchers or practitioners it is a mistake to aspire to be *integrated* into communities at the level of the face-to-face – for example as fictive kin or through ritual rites of passage – it is important to seek meaningful face-to-face interaction such that a researcher or practitioner always returns as a *significant* outsider. In this context, all else is empty pseudo-consultation.

Taking all of this together, sustainability thus relates not only to questions of environmental crisis or to the nexus between economy and ecology. It also concerns the human condition from the local to the global, including both the nature of urban settlements and the forms that community life takes. It concerns the basis question of how we are to live.

## CASE STUDY: NEW DELHI, INDIA

Located in the north-west of India, the metropolis of Delhi is part of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, adjacent to the Punjab region. The greater sprawl of metropolitan Delhi consumes an area of 1,438 square kilometres, an expanse flanked by the rocky hills of the Aravalli Range and the Yamuna River. Neighboured by the territories of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, Delhi is a largely dry zone, with significantly hot summers, transitioning into a monsoon season with the most of the city’s annual rainfall recorded before winter begins. With climate change, seasonal change seems to be becoming more variable. For example in 2013, the monsoon rains came early, causing flooding problems in the city and agricultural crises in rural India (see Figure 2.1).

Delhi was ranked the tenth-largest city in the world in 2011 with about 17 million residents. A spike in population growth occurred during the 1940s because

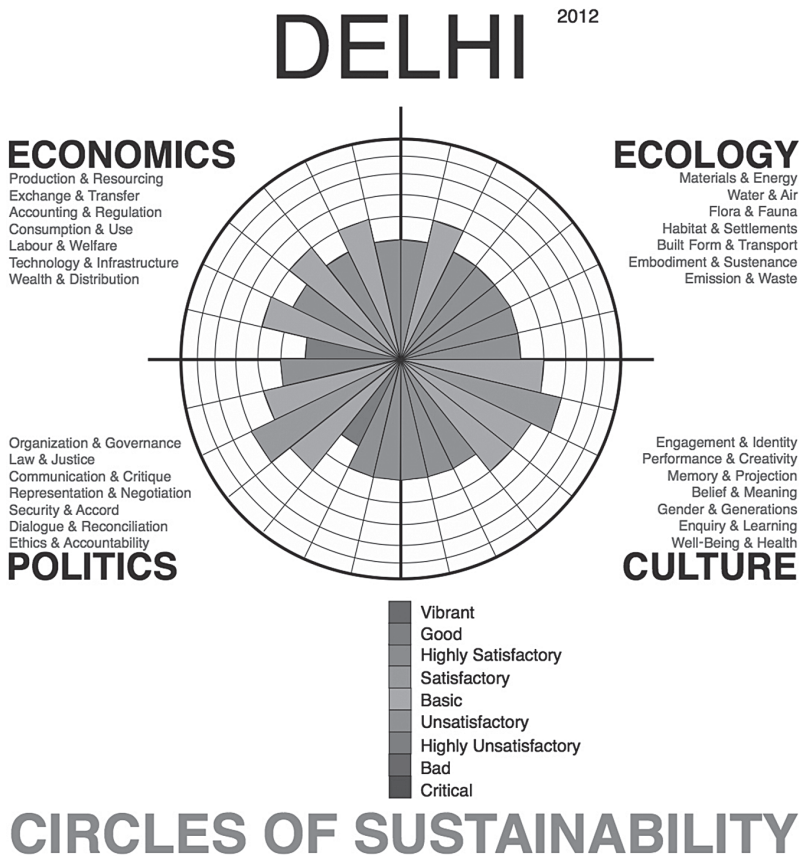


FIGURE 2.1 Urban Sustainability Profile of Delhi, 2012

of the migration of displaced Sikhs, Hindu Punjabis and Sindhis. It was one of the largest forced resettlements in human history, and the movement continued into the following decades. The intensification of Delhi's population has continued to be notably high in the last few decades with a decadal rate in population growth across the 1990s of 47 per cent. Most recent figures show that population growth from 2001 and 2011 was 21 per cent. Whilst this was a significant drop from the decade before, population growth is still unsustainably on the rise.

The number of people projected to be living in Delhi by 2026 is around 30 million. Rapid urbanization has in conjunction with the intensified challenges of environmental degradation, placed pressure on infrastructure, housing availability and the spread of slums. Another major impact of rapid population increase is change in the way that land is used. Once fertile grounds and water bodies, along with agricultural lands now have been covered over by built-up urban sprawl. Statistics show that in 1951, the total area of agricultural land in the Delhi region was 97,067 hectares. Today, it is less than 25,000 hectares.

Replacing agriculture as the primary economic driver has been a mixed capitalist economy. The establishment of high-tech industries in the late twentieth century, particularly information technology and telecommunications, has overlaid older commodities trading in such goods as spices, and made Delhi an important commercial capital. In turn this process of globalizing economically, has generated an increasing division of rich and poor, and put tremendous pressure on the access of the poor to land and housing.

Currently, Delhi has a carbon footprint of 0.70 metric tons per person. In comparison to other megacities around the world including Mexico City and London, Delhi's carbon footprint is notably lower. Although this may seem positive, it is the uneven development of Delhi that underlies such data and therefore its carbon footprint still remains a critical issue, particularly because it is well above the national average of India. One only has to look as far as census data on housing to see that although the majority of houses in Delhi have either stone, slate or concrete as their roofs, 86 per cent of households in Delhi are constructed with burnt-brick walls. The processes involved with burnt-brick production are not environmentally friendly. And so the conundrum is highlighted: How can today's populations achieve better health and overall life-quality outcomes whilst ensuring environmental prosperity in the future?

Ecological issues of Delhi are widespread, covering many different facets of daily life. In relation to air quality, transport regulations remain inadequate to the task of limiting pollution. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of motor vehicles in Delhi almost doubled and it remains the major factor contributing to Delhi's increasingly poor air quality. Whilst in 1998, the Supreme Court of India passed orders to attempt to control pollution due to vehicles throughout

Delhi, this has not initiated any greater capacity to respond to air-pollution problems. Delhi accounts for 2 per cent of the national population, contributes 5 per cent of the total national emissions. Of this figure, transportation accounts for two-thirds of the city's total emissions.

The Central Pollution Control Board has established stations to monitor the levels of pollutants in the air. It is through numerous studies that links between air pollutants and morbidity due to respiratory issues have been established. The World Bank estimates that a 10 per cent reduction in particulate matter levels (PM10) would reduce mortality by 1,000 deaths each year. This further highlights the seriousness of Delhi's air quality. Although rulings by the Supreme Court have aided this and the presence of monitoring stations have initiated improvements since 2002, air pollution still remains a critical topic.

Half a kilogram of waste is created per capita in Delhi, with 70 per cent of this being collected and disposed of through formal means. This therefore implies that 30 per cent of waste is disposed of through the streets or in illegal dumping places. This has led to piles of garbage and other litter across the city being increasingly common. This creates not only environmental and health issues, but dramatically affects the city's aesthetic value. Although receptacles are put in place to collect community wastes, no formal policy dictates the areas that these should be in and their accessibility. Furthermore, it is well known that not all of the waste is collected, and because of a combination of lack of political attention and general education, many households dispose of their rubbish unsustainably, such as in waterways. Disposal of waste collected by the government is largely unsystematic and outdated, being dumped at low-lying areas which poses further risks of contamination. Presently there are three major sanitary sites for the city of Delhi: Ghazipur, Bhalswa and Okhla. The use of these sites as landfill locations is rapidly moving towards operational completion, which means there is an increased demand for the government to initiate new and safe alternatives. There is also a growing demand for better operational practices in waste management, with acts such as street sweeping being rarely conducted on roads other than those used commercially as well as an evident lack in appropriate supervision of staff responsible for the waste disposal.

Why then, given all of this, does *ecological* sustainability for New Delhi look better than for Melbourne with all its aesthetic beauty; green, leafy suburbs; and efficient recycling? When Figure 2.1 for New Delhi is compared with Figure 1.1 for Melbourne, discussed in the previous chapter, the reason that New Delhi is still more ecologically sustainable turns predominantly on the massive *per capita* consumption, car dependency, waste and emissions of Melbourne. If New Delhi continues to develop in a conventional sense, this will change for the worse.

## Notes

- 1 Negative liberty is freedom from external constraint or ‘freedom from’ (see Berlin 1969), whereas positive liberty turns to ‘freedom to’ – namely what persons or communities aspire to through freedom. It should be noted that our definition of positive liberty is thus different from Berlin’s and his emphasis on the autonomy of the individual.
- 2 Here we have drawn on the European Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (2006).

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