

Environmental sustainability study group sponsored session

Sustainable cities: oxymoron no more

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Cities hold the key to the sustainability of the world. More than 50% of world population now lives in cities. Cities are major consumers and distributors of goods and services--draining resources out of far-flung regions that they depend on. It is no more a matter of debate that the ecological impact of cities extends far beyond their geographic locations--putting the sustainability of human race at risk. Despite the enormous amount of research that has been undertaken already on the subject around the world, the concept of sustainable development is still evolving. There is no consensus on what it is or how it can be defined. It is perceived by different people in different geographical regions differently. However the following description that emerged during the Urban 21 conference in Berlin in 2000 seems to capture the essence of sustainable urban development:

“Improving the quality of life in a city, including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social and economic components without leaving a burden on the future generations. A burden which is the result of a reduced natural capital and an excessive local debt”.

It captures the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and highlights the issues of equity, and balance between natural and anthropogenic elements. While professionals and administrators in Australia grapple with the issue like others around the world this session aims to bring the good news-- it is indeed possible plan, design and manage cities that are sustainable. The objective is to bring together geographers, planners, academics and urban administrators from all Australia and learn from their experience what is being done and can be done to attain a culture of sustainable urban development.

Papers on the following issues are welcome in this session

- The concept of sustainable urban development
- The emergence of a sustainable development philosophy in Australia
- Sustainable urban policy
- Prospects for sustainable urban development in Australia
- Sustainable urban transport and land use
- Demographic shifts, population health, and climate change
- Assessment of urban sustainability