

CEN ACE: Conference Abstracts

Bringing Nature Back to Our Cities: Urban Sustainability Through Community Greening

Stewart Chisolm, Evergreen Foundation

The presence of dynamic natural areas is critical to the health and sustainability of our cities. Across Canada, groups are taking action to restore degraded ecosystems and improve the health of their communities. Beyond the important ecological benefits, community greening contributes to the creation of sustainable communities both socially and economically. These projects empower citizens to make positive change, strengthen community ties and help create a sense of place. And increasingly, accessible green space is seen as a driving force for enhancing local economic development.

For the past 14 years, Evergreen's Common Grounds program has supported local efforts to protect and enhance local green space, ensuring that citizens have the knowledge and tools to develop successful projects. We also recognize that to succeed in the long run, urban greening must also be supported at the decision making and policy levels. To this end, our program strategy also includes support and training for planners, park manager and other land use professionals.

This presentation will profile the different ways that Common Grounds works with its community partners to develop and implement successful urban greening projects. Based on our experience, it will address the issues and challenges that underlie this work. It will also highlight the diverse benefits that result when community groups, local governments, service agencies, corporations and other partners work collaboratively towards the creation of green, sustainable communities.

Rooftop Gardening in Montreal

Alex Hill & Ismael (Garden Coordinator), Alternatives and Santropol Roulant

Alternatives and Santropol Roulant are cooperating on a project to promote rooftop gardening in Montreal (and around the world) by developing and disseminating new simplified hydroponics techniques. After developing the ideas, this year we have established a major demonstration garden on the roof of a University of Quebec building in the Plateau Mont Royal neighbourhood. The garden is supported and tended to by a group of committed volunteers and the produce is used to contribute to Santropol Roulant's meals on wheels service. Over the coming years this project will expand to include more community gardens and gardens on private residences, as well as including demonstrations in Cuba, Morocco and Senegal. For more information, a link to the project sight can be found at www.santropolroulant.org

Sustainability in a Globalized World: A Seductive Idea but is it Enough?

Bob Jickling, Lakehead University

Globalizing forces affect the way we see environmental issues and environmental issues, though, the nature of the effect is varied and, at times, hotly contested. One trend precipitated by these forces is a concerted effort to convert environmental concerns to matters of "sustainable development" and "sustainability," and to convert environmental education into "education for sustainable development" and "education for sustainability." Yet, in spite of support from powerful international organizations, there is resistance to these and other globalizing trends.

One of my concerns has been that these terms aren't inherently clear and hence susceptible to a wide range of meanings and definitions. While we often think of ourselves, in environmental or social justice communities, as the primary users of the terms, we aren't. It seems that there are more folks out there that use these terms to support the status quo than to challenge it. And, I think that can be a problem.

In light of this problem, environmental activists and educators need tools to help them examine current discussions, evaluate new initiatives, and find their own place within present debates. With this in mind I will examine education for sustainable development and sustainability as a case study in globalization. I will point to some of the anomalies associated with "sustainability

talk.” With this in mind, I will present a framework to help delegates explore their own understanding of relationships between sustainability and sustainable development, environmental thought, democracy, and education, and to begin thinking about possibilities beyond “sustainability.”

Sustainability Planning in Analco (Puebla), Mexico

Marie Lessard, Institut d'Urbanisme, Université de Montréal

While the concept of sustainable development is relatively new, there are old urban practices that are sustainable, and could serve as models to new approaches to urban planning, design, and management. We will look at such practices at the neighbourhood scale. More specifically, we intend to investigate, in an urban planning and design perspective, how the formal (physical) and social organizations of the neighbourhoods inherited from the past contribute to sustaining cities.

Indeed, we do not underestimate the importance of the environmental dimension nor do we claim that the physical and social characteristics could substitute for the environmental urban management. But there are many obstacles to the latter, especially in poor cities. Bolay, Pedrazzini and Rabinovich (2000) note that, while improvement of the environment is crucial for the future of third-world cities, public budgets can rarely integrate expenses associated to environmental improvement. This raises the importance of creating and reinforcing urban forms that promote environmental sustainability. Secondly, as recognized by Krizek and Power (1997) in a review of approaches to sustainability, the concept of urban sustainability has broadened in the past several years, from an almost exclusive focus on environmental concerns to include community-based issues such as urban form, housing and social structures.

This paper will discuss such concept at the neighbourhood scale through a case study, Analco, located in the historic center of Puebla, Mexico. First, it raises main problems due to the current practices of urban development. It then looks at the ways neighbourhoods can promote sustainability, as a physical entity but also from the point of view of their social structure. In the third part, it presents contextual data on Puebla's historic center and Analco. The fourth and fifth parts discuss the sustainability of this neighbourhood from parameters pertaining first to the environmental efficiency of its urban form, then to its ability to contribute to the quality of life of its inhabitants. The conclusion raises the conflicts and paradoxes resulting from the cohabitation of qualities and shortcomings encountered in the developing world's historic neighbourhoods (such as Analco). It then suggests some policy guidelines to improve these neighbourhoods while maintaining existing communities and affordable housing.