

e-DIALOGUE

Sustainable Communities in Canada: Does One Exist?

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Day 1. What does it mean for Canadians?

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 01:24 PM:

Welcome everyone to the first day of our three-day e-dialogue on sustainable communities. We have a dynamic panel and audience bringing a wonderful diversity of perspectives to this critical issue. We will have a dialogue among the panelists for the first hour, and then we will start drawing upon audience questions.

Over the next three days, we will be exploring critical questions facing communities as they struggle with a rapidly changing landscape of tensions: diversifying from dependence on single resource economies; the changing role of cities; of governance in this new landscape. And of course, questions will "emerge" from the dialogue itself.

Today, we will be discussing what does the term "sustainable community" mean for each of you? Louise Comeau and Al Cormier, why don't you start, and everyone else follow?

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 01:39 PM:

A sustainable community is a community that provides a high quality of life to its citizens while using resources efficiently and generating the least amount of waste.

By category:

Economy: vibrant, innovative, diversified

Environment: healthy and exposed to low levels of pollution and waste.

Social: socially stable, equitable access to resources, healthy and educated population and strong citizen participation in decision making and governance

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 01:29 PM:

What is a sustainable community?

There are three pillars to sustainability or to sustainable development: the environment, the economy and society. Therefore any definition has to encompass all three.

I offer the following short definition as a starting point:

A sustainable community is one where its residents give back as much as they take.

This short definition has all sorts of implications and possible shortcomings including:

- Who measures and monitors?
- Does the giving back have to be in the same community? Could it be say planting trees elsewhere?
- Residents can be individuals or corporations.

A community could have different geographical areas for various purposes. Example, a sustainable community could be small in terms of primary education facilities but larger for post secondary education.

The Centre for Sustainable Transportation has the following definition for sustainable transportation that is widely accepted:

A sustainable transportation system is one that:

- Allows the basic access needs of individuals and societies to be met safely and in a manner consistent with human and ecosystem health, and with equity within and between generations.
- Is affordable, operates efficiently, offers choice of transport mode, and supports a vibrant economy.
- Limits emissions and waste within the planet's ability to absorb them, minimizes consumption of non-renewable resources, limits consumption of renewable resources to the sustainable yield level, reuses and recycles its components, and minimizes the use of land and the production of noise.

The above definition could be modified to deal with sustainable communities as follows:

A sustainable community is one that:

- Allows the basic needs of individuals and corporations to be met safely and in a manner consistent with human and ecosystem health, and with equity within and between generations.
- Is affordable to all its citizens, operates efficiently, offers choices and supports a vibrant economy.
- Limits emissions and waste within the community's ability to absorb them, minimizes consumption of non-renewable resources, limits consumption of renewable resources to the sustainable yield level, reuses and recycles its components, and minimizes the use of land.

Above is not too different from the definition by Steven Peck offered on the e-dialogue site today.

I also found the following definition of sustainable community:

"Sustainable communities are cities and towns that prosper because people work together to produce a high quality of life that they want to sustain and constantly improve."

--Sustainable America: A new consensus.

President's Council on Sustainable Development:

Any definition adopted has to be measurable, for "what cannot be measured cannot be managed." Therefore, we have to think of how we can measure trends towards or away from sustainability when dealing with communities.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 01:34 PM:

I have thought a lot about the concept of sustainable community over the past six months. The communities in which I work are mainly small rural communities and all of them would be considered unsustainable according to most definitions. I am now using the concept of vulnerability-adaptation-

resilience to understand the cycle of environmental degradation and the capacity of smaller communities to adapt and continue to have a livelihood in the area in which they live.

Perhaps it is possible to use the term "sustainable livelihood" but again this has a different meaning than in urban/small town environments. Work is not a 9 to 5 job but the ability to make enough money to survive in the area in which they choose to live. This is a combination of seasonal and at home "paid" work activity in combination with assistance either government or "buy-out"(e.g. buyout of fishing licenses) that permits residents and families to continue in an area. In combination with income many of the people in these communities still live a subsistence life through hunting, fishing species other than cod, wood cutting, berry picking and most have a vegetable garden. In fact the amount of money they need on an annual basis is very low. An annual income of \$20,000 would be considered high. Most own their own home and municipal taxes are low. The only ongoing costs are phone, cable and a supplementary heat source such as electrical.

The vulnerability in most rural coastal Newfoundland communities is the closure of the cod fishery and the subsequent moratorium. Adapting to the change at the community level has led to a variety of strategies. Some of these worked and others did not. Understanding the factors leading to a sustainable livelihood or adaptation in small coastal communities is part of what I try to do.

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 01:36 PM:

I am very lucky that I live in an area of Toronto, the Beaches, which features a host of sustainability features, even though these were probably not planned intentionally. For example, I can find most of my daily needs within walking distance yet I can be downtown by public transport in a half hour. It offers a great multi-modal transportation network and there are plenty of local job opportunities, including a large population working from home offices. It's a safe neighborhood with plenty of green spaces and playgrounds where I can take the kids to the beach and which is fabulous for walking or biking in any kind of weather. There has been an increase in the amount of naturalized areas. That said, it does include some unsustainable elements: the Ashbridges Bay sewage plant still needs to be cleaned up and while Lake Ontario is getting cleaner, there's still scope for improvement.

I guess what makes it a sustainable community for the most part is a strong local economy, good interaction among people, surrounded by a good environment.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:38 PM:

In my case, I would add the aspect of balance and integrity between the sustainable use of resources, social activities and the environment. A sustainable community can only thrive when all the elements of the ecosystems are healthy including the human component.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 01:39 PM:

I live in north west Mississauga, which is not sustainable in itself for many needs but with GO Train access to Toronto, it meets most of my needs.

Alastair Moore on December 02, 2002, 01:43 PM:

I think a sustainable community is a place where people can reach their full potential while living, working and participating in a vibrant and diverse community of communities. In this community, members are given the opportunity to have the value of both market and non-market goods compared on the same scale. Moreover, a fundamental balance should be achieved between natural systems, the economy and physical and social infrastructures. Local and global resource issues need to be linked and resources

need to be managed in a manner that ensures that the needs of current and future generations are met.

Michael Masson on December 02, 2002, 01:50 PM:

Some other aspects of sustainable communities include the following:

-A recognition of the fact that definitions will often be uniquely defined by each community based on their needs, culture and individual interests.

-An approach to sustainability that focuses on a long term integrated systems approach, healthy living and quality of life issues.

-Fostering a sense of community through activities that attempt to enhance individuals and organizations feelings of attachment, value and connection to the community.

-Finally, a recognition that in order to evolve towards becoming more sustainable, community stakeholders must be prepared to learn together through a process of collaboration that considers the potential needs and aspirations of future generations.

Katsitsaronkwaw Jacobs on December 02, 2002, 02:05 PM:

My definition of a sustainable community would be a community which accepts the responsibility for the generations to come. It always seems to be a battle between "needs" for today versus needs of our future generations is always.

The traditional values in my culture (Mohawk - Kanien'kehaka) encompass a responsibility given to us by the Creator to care for all of creation in a kinship relationship. We need to be mindful of our actions on a daily basis and think about how they will impact the physical, spiritual, social, and economic structures of our communities... now and in the future. Because of the various influences around us, this concept is becoming lost in the shuffle of a focus on "making a living"... instead of "sustainable livelihoods".

We're currently working on the development of a neighbourhood in my community to act as a model of "sustainable community". Our first home has strawbale insulation, radiant floor heating, passive solar design, solar hot water etc. The neighbourhood will bring back the concepts of extended family living, working together with the natural cycles of the environment, and bringing back the concept of "responsibility" for our actions and choices.

Lindsay Cole on December 02, 2002, 01:59 PM:

I am interested to know how people define 'community'. Must it have defined geographic boundaries?

In my experience over the last few years, one of my 'communities' has become virtual, and has no geographical limits (beyond this planet, anyway!). Can a global virtual community be sustainable?

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:02 PM:

Excellent point, Lindsay! 'Community' is indeed a very slippery term. In my view, community is a very non-geographical concept (i.e., it is not demarcated in physical space). I often use the term 'settlement' to avoid confusion...

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 01:45 PM:

I think part of the problem with this kind of definition is that it presupposes a state of being that is defined in terms of a set of sustainability principles. The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) did this

some years ago: "A place where human activities enhance rather than degrade the natural environment, where the quality of the built environment approaches that of the natural setting, where the diversity of origins and religions is a source of social strength rather than strife, where people control the destiny of their community, and where the basics of food, clothing, shelter, security and useful activity are accessible to all." I prefer to use the term "a community of sustainable practices".

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:44 PM:

I'd like to start by saying that 'sustainability' should be understood as a state that cannot really ever be achieved; we can only approach it. It's a kind of meta-goal, if you like, not unlike the graph of a function that approaches zero, but never actually touches the axis. So while we can get very close, we'll never actually achieve this state of being. This is especially true for settlement patterns, since strictly speaking, towns and cities are not sustainable – having people living at such high concentrations is far more than any local ecosystem can handle.

At the same time, we can bring ourselves a lot closer. Urban places offer many opportunities for resource conservation, ranging from economies of scale in infrastructure provision (e.g. public transit especially viable where population densities are high, or district heating where live/work spaces are very close together...) to the cycling of refuse (e.g. industrial ecology practices, where refuse from one industrial process can be used as a resource by another process...). And given that the vast majority of Canadians live in urban areas (75 to 90 per cent, depending on the definition of 'urban'), this is what we've got to work with if we're to move closer to sustainability.

That said, my working definition of a 'sustainable community' is also based on the widely-used balance among environmental, economic, and social concerns. I would echo what others have already suggested. I am glad to see that quality of life has been included in several instances!

I think it's important to articulate other goals for the meta-goal of sustainability. Conservation (e.g. of natural capital), integration (of new growth into existing systems – knitting them together), and diversification (seeking to maximize useful redundancies) are three important ones that I have been discussing for several years now.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:41 PM:

I would like to know if a community lives at the expense of another one, even if it looks relatively nice from the outside, is it really a sustainable community?

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 01:41 PM:

There seem to be some common themes 'emerging', Maureen raises the critical need to earn sustainable livelihoods, Al brings in the question of reciprocity and Jiri raises the important issue of choice, the ability to make informed sustainable choices because the critical infrastructure exists. But what if one community prospers, because it 'exports' its wastes to another community that needs the economic revenue? So, Liette, what do you think?

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:42 PM:

I agree with you Ann... hence my question... is it really sustainable? A healthy ecosystem and community should not impair the adjacent ecosystem/community.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 01:44 PM:

That is why I say the geographic boundaries of a 'sustainable community' vary according to the item under discussion. One may export its garbage to another but the other could also export some goods to the first one. They sustain each other.

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 01:45 PM:

There probably is no such a thing as 100 % sustainability. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has done several studies where they identified sustainable aspects of communities and then evaluated actual communities against that checklist. There was not a single community in Canada, which was 100% sustainable.

With regard to waste, the ultimate aim must be to substantially reduce or totally eliminate any waste, but if it is done within a community at the cost of another resource, i.e. energy, then that is not sustainable either. For example if you have to excavate a new pit to bury the garbage, this may take more energy than to send it away. Waste is an externality, which is fairly easily quantifiable in monetary terms. The next step, which is more challenging, is to calculate the lifecycle costs of waste and of waste disposal within a community, compared to the lifecycle costs of disposing of it outside the community. Not that this is a desirable option. But there well could be cases where the export option may be more sustainable.

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 01:46 PM:

We are getting at concepts such as the ecological footprint: we are talking about a whole new level of understanding, reporting and accountability so we can understand as individuals and communities what we are consuming, what results from that and where it's all going: having a holistic ecosystem sense of ourselves could lead to closing the loops: finding ways to use wastes as inputs to other processes within our communities, but even to other communities: I think we could look at options within a looping framework that includes other communities.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 01:44 PM:

Alright, let's get personal, what about Toronto's plan to export its garbage? Is Toronto unsustainable, and what alternatives do they have?

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:47 PM:

Here's an important aspect with respect to the 'waste' discussion: In a sustainable community, there is no such thing as 'waste'. In the biotic world, nothing is waste – all materials are used in some way or another. An obvious example is leaves or the duff on a forest floor, which decompose and nourish the soil. A backyard compost bin operates on this idea.

So, in general, I prefer the term 'refuse' – it may not be useful for the person or entity that created it, but it is useful somewhere else. With that said, a community may still be sustainable even if it 'exports' its refuse – if this is part of a broader, more complex system of recovery and adaptive reuse, it's not so bad. We can set up strong interdependent networks in this way.

And as for Toronto's plan to export its waste: boo, hiss!

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 01:48 PM:

Thanks for the reminder Nik: I am supposed to say RESOURCE RECOVERY now: waste is old think!

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 01:50 PM:

In response to Ann--- Toronto's current practice of exporting its garbage to Michigan is not sustainable because it is an 'out of sight - out of mind' approach. Toronto could do lots more in terms of reducing garbage before it decides to export, to either Michigan or to Northern Ontario. Until it reduces to the maximum possible, its practice is not sustainable.

Alastair Moore on December 02, 2002, 01:50 PM:

Toronto may just be transporting its waste to another site (which in an of itself shouldn't be a problem). In many ways, jurisdictional boundaries may be irrelevant as long as the waste is disposed of properly, costs are covered, maximum benefits are achieved, and the minimum amount of waste was generated in the first place.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 01:48 PM:

Continuing on the theme of exporting wastes, I don't believe any community can be totally self-sufficient. I think communities need to co-exist in a sustainable region - like the bioregional concept. This means mutual support and reinforcement in living within ecological limitations.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:52 PM:

Thanks, Tony, for bringing in the bioregion concept. The interdependence seems most effective and sustainable only to a certain geographical threshold (e.g., Toronto shipping its refuse off to Michigan is a bit silly ...)

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 01:53 PM:

Nik! Yes, I agree although the bioregion does not necessarily recognize administrative boundaries. I was thinking of the Pacific Northwest and the concept of Cascadia that was introduced a few years ago by Alan Artibise.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:54 PM:

We should have learned about this interdependence between regions with cases such as Walkerton but we often forget the role of the rural versus urban communities for sustainability of our regions.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:55 PM:

I quite agree that 'real' regions are rarely, if ever, reflected in jurisdictional boundaries. It's one of the most frustrating problems working at sustainability in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), even years after the Crombie report on watershed planning was released.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 01:55 PM:

Well, the idea, like many, has been around for a long time. Remember the Waste Materials Exchange program that MOST initiated and Oregon carried on for a good many years?

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:56 PM:

And we know that almost all regions comprise places and landscapes that are more 'urban' and more 'rural' ... it's not a dichotomy so much as a continuum!

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 01:58 PM:

In terms of integrating rural concern I agree that the bioregion is an excellent concept. The size of the region, of course, becomes a political definition, for example, the concept of development zones used in various provinces are political not ecological.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 01:49 PM:

Ah, Louise, "community of sustainable practices" and "looping framework that includes other communities". Can we expand upon these concepts, particularly from a waste and transportation perspective?

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 01:51 PM:

The regional lens also allows us to have an urban/rural understanding of sustainability: there is a perception that somehow all us urban folks are somehow not relying on rural communities, but in fact we are very connected to the resources and agriculture products being produced in non-urban areas. A bioregional approach allows for greater integration: watershed planning for example. We have discovered it is an important rural/urban mechanism for protecting water sources at source: a key component of sustainability in my view: pollution prevention as a driving principle rather than end of pipe solutions.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:51 PM:

First, waste is an inherent part of any system... entropy.

As for the idea of sustainable community in Canada, it's right that no sustainable community, in fact no country can be considered sustainable since we all exploit others.

The level/threshold of sustainability is for me more related to concepts such as impairment on other ecosystems, overexploitation of resources (e.g. cod), etc. The reasons why unsustainable uses are coming from ourselves but can also be from natural origin... for example, we have winter. We still need to heat our houses. So we have to find a way: wood, oil, electricity, coal, etc.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 01:54 PM:

Al brought up an important point "out of sight, out of mind". As we know, nature produces virtually no waste, how about re-designing communities that produce virtually no waste, or communities that are linked for "resource recovery"?

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 01:56 PM:

If we were considering Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and looking at the natural system with the biogeochemical cycles, we should be able to reduce quite a lot. But can we really go to zero? Under current socio-economic activities, it would be dramatic changes in life style, no?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 01:57 PM:

Perhaps the next question should be addressed: "are there limits to the growth of cities?" Since Canada is mostly urbanized and likely to stay that way, then sustainability to most Canadians is related to city living. I think we should consider the Oregon model of putting limits to urban growth.

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 01:57 PM:

Michael, thanks for the reference to systems: More and more I am coming to the conclusion that general systems theory and systems thinking is the key here: we need to develop mental maps of ourselves individually and as communities around how we are connected to everything else.

One of the most important things we can do is to move our management structures and reporting systems to report on a life cycle basis so that we know when we're leaking (exporting waste when there are options for dealing with some of it closer to home through resource recovery), and when we are in fact reducing in one location to only increase somewhere else: we need lifecycle financing reporting to allow for better understanding of the relationship between capital and operating costs (higher capital costs for efficient products but lower operating) and lifecycle consumption/emission reporting.

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 01:57 PM:

Achieving a no waste community is certainly a challenge. However if Interface carpets can do it with industrial production, then a community should be able to also do it. Let's plan such a community!

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 01:58 PM:

Also, we need tools that can be used and understood by our rural communities. I wonder whether or not LCA's are an appropriate tool!

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 01:59 PM:

Liette is right, that having almost-waste-free communities would entail massive changes in lifestyle, etc. This is ultimately what is necessary, of course,... so how do we get there from here?

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 02:03 PM:

Nik, I don't entirely agree that reducing waste is such a change in lifestyle. During the Toronto's garbage strike people vastly reduced their waste habits. It's largely a question of necessity and education.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:08 PM:

Jiri, quite so. I was playing devil's advocate to some degree, by throwing out that rhetorical question.

Continuing on that 'lifestyle' point: in my own work, I stress the need for understanding and respecting people's attitudes and psychological well-being as vital social components of sustainability. This involves understanding how people perceive and evaluate things: how they think, what effects their decision-making processes. This means recognizing that even where form and process in a place may clash with aspects of ecological or economic sustainability, they may well represent something important and meaningful for their users. For instance, I do a lot of work in postwar suburbs, which are often considered anathema to sustainable development. Yet these settings are emotionally charged and constitute a vital part of their residents' self-identity. And far from being barriers, if we understand these aspects, we can work with people to show them that the changes that are perceived as 'massive' are in fact quite possible.

Posted by **Liette Vasseur** (Member # 406) on December 02, 2002, 02:01 PM:

This is a good point, we all have different perceptions of what a community is. For example, the case of Hong Kong. It can be considered a community and a very unsustainable one too since they even have to import water. In terms of limit for population or community growth... this would be an interesting challenge, not like Oregon.

In terms of almost-free-waste, I would like to know how you deal with this for an island community like Hong Kong?

Alastair Moore on December 02, 2002, 02:02 PM:

Good point Liette, much of what we're talking about relates to lifestyle. Achieving zero waste and cycling waste into reusable materials will impair our current lifestyles given current technologies. The benefits of developing material loops upon our collective 'lifestyle' will only be realized over the long-term - a term that most citizens cannot afford to wait for. It may be a matter for our social marketing experts.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:02 PM:

We seem to have consensus upon a bioregional approach, which would at least eliminate or at least help to reduce the urban/rural tension. Does producing no waste mean 'massive' changes in lifestyle, or do we just have to use the brains we have been given?

For example, how about seeing the computer as a shell which stays in place, and it is updated electronically, thereby effectively reducing the materials flow? There is now a washing machine on the market that uses laser technology and no soap?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:08 PM:

To Ann's point of bioregional approach-- it makes sense to me for the environmental aspects of a sustainable community, but what about the economic and social aspects?

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:11 PM:

Al, I think diversity of economic enterprise is more achievable within some kind of regional context than within a single community. This in turn would provide the leverage to begin to bring about social change.

Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs on December 02, 2002, 02:11 PM:

The bioregional concept is not a new one... Indigenous Peoples all over the world have developed an

intimate knowledge of their surroundings. The concepts of a kinship relationship evolved as a matter of respect for everything that allows us to be here... and as a matter of survival. We never pick the first medicine or kill the first deer we see... in case it is the last... so they can have a chance to renew themselves if needed. This is sustainability in action since time immemorial.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:12 PM:

Tony, doesn't the bioregional approach encompass all three imperatives, ecological, social and economic? Second question, is there a boundary that becomes unsustainable, as Katsitsaronkwas pointed out some of the innovations in her community, but maybe you need a community of a certain size to effect change? and how does the bioregional approach fit?

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:14 PM:

Ann, yes it does although the original concept was based primarily on biologically and culturally defined regions.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:17 PM:

I am interested in the bioregional as well. Is it defined by geography or accessibility? For example, Katsitsaronkwas' region is the reserve. In coast communities it may be defined by a larger bay. Smaller communities have a strong sense of geography and place. From a social and economic perspective this often becomes competitive where one community works against another. Look at the struggle for fish plants in coast Atlantic communities.

Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs on December 02, 2002, 02:35 PM:

I see what you're getting at Maureen but our bioregion is not the reserve... It actually encompasses a much larger traditional territory in which our people hunted, traded, farmed, harvested, and interacted with other nations... The point is that we need to look beyond the limited and meaningless borders that have been created around us. When we look at a map of the world we do not see "Canada" or the "United States" etc.. we see Turtle Island (North America) and the traditional territories and environment of our brothers and sisters throughout it. Many of the problems related to our environment today stem from the concepts of political borders.

Michael Masson on December 02, 2002, 02:39 PM:

Katsitsaronkwas, you're absolutely right, but how can we shift the paradigms that exist out there so that political issues don't continue to be such a major obstacle to getting things done.

Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs on December 02, 2002, 02:55 PM:

In North America (and elsewhere), I think we need to reconcile that this land was used since time immemorial by peoples who intimately know this land. That Indigenous Peoples are not just one of many "stakeholders" in "Canadian" or "American" decision-making... but should be given an appropriate and meaningful voice that transcends the boundaries that have been created around us. Our spirituality and way of life is being compromised on a daily basis by the contamination of our territories. We are part of the biodiversity that is being destroyed.

More education and interaction amongst our peoples is required to share this knowledge in a respectful

way. I think instilling a sense of responsibility (beyond your political boundaries) in everyone at a young age is also key.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:42 PM:

Tied to the question of traditional territory is also the question of resource use and the sustainability of the resource which again links back to education and common shared values.

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 02:03 PM:

Ann, I agree that a major redesign/development revolution is required: we can build our cities/neighbourhoods (since most cities are already here) so that our infrastructure is in fact our environment (green roofs, constructed wetlands, more permeable surfaces for storm water runoff, forest cover for source water protection) and we can design our buildings so that they are in fact infrastructure (community energy systems, fuel cells; solar roof systems, etc.). What we are learning is that:

1. Changing human behaviour (and trying new things is risky and about behavior change) requires social marketing approaches: peer teaching, public commitments, public rewards, financial and non-financial incentives (awards programs) and most of all "trying it on." Pilots are critical to learning new approaches and to gaining experience and confidence in the new approach.
 2. There are major barriers to this new kind of community: liability: surrey's East Clayton project has to have traditional infrastructure backup for liability reasons: project costs twice as much.
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Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:07 PM:

Louise, I think this is an excellent point. Certainly at the Canadian Climate Impacts and Adaptation Research Network (C-CIARN) Ontario conference the concept of liability was mentioned by municipal councilors in attendance. But personal commitment to a 'sustainable future' made it possible to move the sustainability agenda forward.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:02 PM:

Some communities are charging by the bag for waste, has this decreased community waste. Does anyone know of any studies on this subject?

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:04 PM:

Maureen! Yes, I believe the City of Seattle tried this but I think it was very expensive to run.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:06 PM:

Weighing bags didn't really work in more than one city. Nova Scotia tried the approach of green, blue and other bags. Sounded great at the beginning for reaching the 50% diversion but now we have begun to discover other problems such as contamination, wild dumping, etc. It's not only a question of changing behaviour but also attitudes.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:07 PM:

By the way, a question... has the strike in Toronto helped to reduce garbage for the time of the strike or more. In Montreal, it did reduce for the time of the strike but the worst came after.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:06 PM:

Ah, the thorny issue of trying to change human behaviour. To respond to Maureen and Tony, my understanding is that charging for the bag in Europe has dramatically reduced the waste stream, on the other hand, there are always ingenious people who seek to push their extra bags on someone else? Again, I remind you of Al's point, "out of sight, out of mind". It's a little like climate change, you can't see, taste it, or feel it, until you fry!

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 02:09 PM:

Ah yes, the issue of responsibility: it is central I agree.

It's not really culturally embedded in my view: we don't take personal responsibility, and we don't take responsibility for our impact on our communities, the planet today, nor the future impacts.

It's not clear to me how we mature in this area: do we look to ways to develop individual responsibility (apparently called moral responsibility feelings denoted by guilt) or to we develop it through social norms. This apparently is called conformity or conventional responsibility and it's denoted by feelings of embarrassment and shame.

So, do we try and develop our capacity to be responsible by developing our feelings of responsibility toward ourselves our social networks?

Michael Masson on December 02, 2002, 02:11 PM:

Louise, I guess that my thoughts on a systems thinking approach are based in the concept of connection. Senge's model for creating learning organizations can be applied to everything we do and the process of developing a shared vision and learning to apply it through mental modeling is directly applicable to building sustainable communities.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:12 PM:

Louise, this brings us back to Katsitsaronkwas' point of planning for future generations and changing the mindset of a me/now generation.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:13 PM:

To go back to Katsitsaronkwas' comment on future generations. I would like to know how many people in communities are thinking about them and responsibly work towards their well-being versus their image and inheritance (fame)? At this level, waste is not considered a resource and therefore, we don't advance in the debate.

There is also the question of why do I have to restrict myself since you (talking about previous generation) didn't care about the use of the resources?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:15 PM:

"All things are possible once enough human beings realize that everything is at stake".
-- Norman Cousins

Do we need to reach some sort of crisis for human beings to realize that everything is at stake. This raises the issue of education/awareness about the perils we are facing. Most Canadians do not understand the issue nor would they understand much of this dialogue.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:15 PM:

Louise, those are good questions. We are certainly in an era of 'rights' instead of 'responsibilities'. In this regard, Katsitsaronkwas' points are especially important. I think we are starting to talk about how we get people to engage more completely with their environment.

Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs on December 02, 2002, 02:22 PM:

I agree that responsibility is not necessarily a culturally limited value. I do think that it requires some sense of collective cohesion to bring meaning to it. But then we go back to Lindsay's question about "how do we define community?"

I don't think guilt or conformity are the way to go because that's like making a law... sometimes you only follow it because you have to ... not because you want to. We need to interact more with each other and learn from each other... and build that respect and responsibility in our children... in schools and at home. Our children need to have a hands on interaction with the natural world to build that respect. Most children today don't even have an awareness, let alone an appreciation, of where their food comes from (beyond the grocery store).

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:18 PM:

Al, I knew someone would bring up the "crisis" question sooner or later! I tend to be rather cynical as far as human nature is concerned. Historically the rise and fall of nations has been based on monumental crises - are we any different?

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:17 PM:

Yes, the issue of engaging people is a challenge. You are right, most people would not understand this dialogue. The main reason is that this is not considered a crisis unless it touches our 5 basic needs: health care, education, shelter, food and water.

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 02:24 PM:

I fully agree with the notion of responsibility. The good news is that a value system can change rapidly. For example, it did not take very long for accessibility to become an accepted mainstream feature of buildings. And now green buildings are becoming almost mainstream.

Alastair Moore on December 02, 2002, 02:19 PM:

Moving toward sustainable communities requires broad based understanding of the relationships

between our personal actions and the impacts these have on society/environment etc. In Canada we emphasize the individual rights and freedoms but have yet to develop a 'Charter of Responsibilities'. Rethinking the way we perceive our roles (individually and collectively) is an important first step to a more sustainable future. Education, education, education!

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:19 PM:

Al, I am not sure that most Canadians wouldn't understand this dialogue (or maybe just some of the academic pointy-headed language). My research on social capital and sustainable development connections in communities is showing how sophisticated and knowledgeable people are intuitively: the problem is they don't feel they have the ability to influence change, their voices aren't heard, they feel disempowered, they disengage. There are some fundamental disconnections going on.

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:24 PM:

Yes, I agree with you Ann, people are quite well educated in many places and not necessarily from formal education. They have their own way of acting and reacting. There might be a disconnection between what we consider the crisis and what they consider the crisis. In most small Atlantic communities, the concept of watershed and sustainable ecosystem is almost intrinsic but they cannot necessarily articulate the issues as we try to do it here.

Alastair Moore on December 02, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Liette, I share your concern regarding the different languages that various groups use to describe the same world. Policy and legal institutions must be able to bridge this linguistic gap so that substance and reality remain in our sustainable development strategy. It's vital that we be able to engage the views of those who can make or break any progressive sustainable development initiatives.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:21 PM:

The question of education is an important one. How do you get the message across? I don't think the Kyoto newspaper and TV ads are as effective as they could be. The counter dialogue seems to be getting the message across at the level of the pocket book.

Louise Comeau on December 02, 2002, 02:23 PM:

Empowerment: what's central are approaches that are designed with what people can do in mind. We need to be aware of what people's capabilities are and design to accommodate those capabilities, or design to strengthen those capabilities.

People will not act if they feel their actions will have no impact. Programs have to show the impact of actions (lots of reporting) and feedback loops.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:25 PM:

Following upon these points, Etzioni argues that "healthy communities are communities that engage in moral dialogues, what it means to be a community?" and that is one of our rationales for this e-dialogue project, can we encourage new ways of dialoguing electronically that are more sustainable and allow one to listen and talk from their office, their homes, and ultimately 'connect' us in new ways?

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:27 PM:

Good point Ann, we have a proposal for something like that here in the Maritimes. Hope it works and I'll be able to tell you later!

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:28 PM:

Ann, as I have argued before, the moral dialogues are the means by which we attempt to agree on a common set of values - the shared norms - and the starting point for any form of community empowerment.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:30 PM:

Building on Ann's point: I have consistently found that people are thrilled when given the chance to dialogue in a meaningful way about themselves, their own lives, their communities, etc. With my Québec City research group, there have been excellent results in terms of participative planning/design work with residents of postwar suburbs to move them closer to sustainability.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:30 PM:

I have some concern about the universality of the electronic dialogue in support of community dialogues or , perhaps, the evolution of social capital!

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:31 PM:

Ah, but Tony, they are not substitutes, but complements, we need both, do we not?

Lindsay Cole on December 02, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Ann - your points are interesting ones. I think that there is great potential for the use of dialogues like this one.

But there is also great danger.

The danger is in assuming that these dialogues are truly representative, diverse and engaging. For many, they are not. Many people of the world - and even in our own uber connected nation - do not yet have access to these electronic fora. And most often, these are the people for whom community sustainability is perhaps the most important. They tend to be the impoverished, the disenfranchised, the young and the old, cultural minorities... In my mind the most critical voices in the exploration of 'sustainable community.' So - how can we get past this great challenge?

Michael Masson on December 02, 2002, 02:35 PM:

Ann, I agree that the dialogues that we find ourselves in must be at least partially based in an acceptance that it will take place in many ways including electronically.

A key point for me is that we have to be prepared to listen to one another in a manner that tosses out the pre-conceived assumptions that we often have of one another and be willing to hear information as if its

for the first time.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:29 PM:

I would now like to move to questions from our distinguished audience. First question.

System thinkers define leverage points as the path of least resistance to achieving the resultant change. Our discussion is oriented to influencing complex community systems and hopefully come to terms with what a sustainable community might look like. My question to the panel is this, what or where do you feel are these leverage points in today's Canadian urban communities?

Liette Vasseur on December 02, 2002, 02:33 PM:

I am not sure about the question of leverage in urban communities. But I have a point unclear... how long can we afford to be unsustainable? For how many generations? Or will we be able to find new band-aid technology to make us sustainable as communities?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:33 PM:

One leverage point is certainly transportation. As cities grow bigger, sitting in traffic is certainly a point of contention. But, transportation can be planned in a sustainable way and avoid the crisis stage.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:36 PM:

Al, your point is a good one! I worked with a transportation planner some years ago who was seriously advocating planned congestion. Of course, that was only part of the solution as one had to offer the carrot as well as the stick!

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:37 PM:

Tony - yes! In Copenhagen, they have successfully dealt with traffic congestion by aggravating it: where there is heavy traffic, they close off lanes, thus increasing the odds that drivers will use transit, ride a bike, or walk (or not travel unnecessarily...!)

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:33 PM:

In response to the question - it is a bit difficult to be specific. I think as a generalization the leverage occurs in any situation where the general public perceives an immediate benefit!

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:36 PM:

In response to the question about points of leverage: I'd agree with the point re transportation. Also, in the Québec City project, I found that the idea of 'greenery' is consistently important - almost sacred - to people living in places with sterile green lawns, etc. If we can therefore deepen people's understanding of biodiversity and encourage retrofitting existing structures, we can move forward.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:36 PM:

Tony - could a leverage point be a perceived or real threat as well as a benefit?

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:37 PM:

Al, yes, I think so although I don't know how many times one could "get away with" crying wolf!

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 02:36 PM:

The most powerful leverage, of course occurs when there is a crisis. Besides that, anything which affects the pocketbook is also a powerful motivator for change. At the community level, for example, developing a new sustainable business in a local economy would be a very powerful leveraging agent. And then of course there is education of kids.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:39 PM:

Further on the transportation angle... Urban streets with vitality (such as sidewalk cafes, merchants, places to stroll etc) are very sustainable and enriching but they do not exist on streets without congestion. Look at Hamilton's fast and efficient one way street system and its barren landscape.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:42 PM:

Al, yes, there was some excellent work done in the seventies on the relationship between traffic volume and community streets - the heavier the volume, the less community and the more rooming houses!

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:38 PM:

Perhaps the leverage point is in the building of common values and shared futures? It seems to me that we have lost 'shared meanings' somehow or other.

And Al, maybe we can use congestion creatively to have people see traffic congestions as education points, if we could once again have the 'citizen forums' on radio as they were in the 40s.

One thing that has come out loud and clear, is that we need 'informed' and 'engaged' citizens to move to more sustainable communities.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:39 PM:

Yes, but I think the key here is that you take a policy or initiative to new heights of unpleasantness, knowing that you have a solution to offer! Otherwise it doesn't work!

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 02:45 PM:

Al, your point about urban streets is a good one You can also increase density and diversification through an urban development which can lead to more efficient use of infrastructure.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:41 PM:

So, we need to slow down and connect on the street, Al. Recently in Toronto at a workshop, someone told me that they have conversation cafes on climate change, what better way to capitalize on addiction, build conversation around coffee:)

Another question from the audience, and Lindsay what do you think? as it brings up the question of virtual communities.

What are the characteristics of communities that give their residents a sense of belonging and inspire them to steward their environment?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:44 PM:

I think that a sense of belonging is perhaps in being happy with one's community. Unless there is some joy in living there, then it must not be sustainable to the individual. How do we measure happiness???

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:45 PM:

Interesting question about the characteristics of communities. There are many answers to this depending on whether the sense of belonging has evolved through serendipity or design. One of the keys is to have a champion in the community - leadership, I guess - that will inspire others to share towards the common good.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:47 PM:

I think it may be easier to measure the sense of belonging to a community than happiness, how does one participate in a community? To what organizations does one belong, etc.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:48 PM:

On how to measure happiness - difficult, to be sure, but lots of work is being done in environmental psychology, having to do with belonging and attachment ... and it really depends on the user. To respond to that question raised a moment ago, people will practice stewardship when they are attached to their home landscape. The issue may be more one of how can we encourage people to 'come home to natural process': to develop a sense of belonging in biodiversity, etc. - e.g., many of the points Katsitsaronkwas has made.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:48 PM:

I would agree with Maureen! One can ask questions such as "when you leave the community, what is it that you remember about it?" In other words, the sense of belonging is often firmly grounded in sense of place.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:51 PM:

Another very important thing to ask has to do with aspirations: how long a person plans to continue being part of a given community - e.g., how long do you intend to live in this place?

Michael Masson on December 02, 2002, 02:51 PM:

In regard to the question on what are the characteristics of communities that cause residents to want to be stewards, in my opinion, its closely linked to a community incorporating sustainable community concepts into its development planning process.

By focusing on the natural assets of an area and paying close attention to the interconnectedness of those assets with the lives of the local inhabitants when development processes are being considered, is a critical component of becoming a steward of your environment

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:48 PM:

Leadership and commitment are extremely important within a community. How can you engage good potential leaders to participate in the process?

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:47 PM:

We have time for one more challenging question from the audience:

"Your forum has mentioned 'changing attitudes' several times. What are the mechanisms to engage local business communities in the concepts and discussions about sustainability so they will be involved in the solutions?"

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:48 PM:

Perhaps our planning/development regulations should require projects etc to be assessed against a wide variety of criteria. We now have environmental assessments. Perhaps we ought to move to 'sustainability assessments'.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:53 PM:

Al's comments are appropriate. This was raised last week as well. How do you educate the planners and designers given the long time frame in which changes to municipal plans/regulations often operate.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:55 PM:

Maureen! Is it the planners or the politicians who need to adjust to longer timeframes?

Jiri Skopek on December 02, 2002, 02:51 PM:

The way local business communities will become engaged in discussions about sustainability is either as a result of a crisis or the perception that there may be a market advantage.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 02:52 PM:

In reply to the last question, I think the first step is probably to have an articulated policy framework within which community businesses can operate. We have this proposed Community Charter here in BC and

although there are many skeptics, in principle it is going in the right direction.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:55 PM:

Maureen touches on a favorite topic of mine. Many of our current university courses are lacking in sustainability content and changing the content of a university curriculum is very difficult, especially when it involves hard work.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:57 PM:

Al, you have hurt me terribly as a professor who teaches exclusively sustainable development curriculum:)

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 02:59 PM:

Ann, all professors are not as enlightened as you!

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:59 PM:

Ann - I said many of our existing curricula, not all. I am sure yours is a fine example.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:57 PM:

On educating planners and designers, I agree (as one who educates planners and designers!) ... It's important to ensure that the curricula for professional schooling in planning, architecture, etc. have mandatory courses in aspects of sustainability, such as ecosystem functioning and biodiversity, and holistic ecological design approaches to problem-solving.

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 02:55 PM:

Any final postings before we end our discussion for today?

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 02:58 PM:

As a final posting, may I offer the following I found on the net.

Ahwahnee Principles:

Preamble

Existing patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impair our quality of life. The symptoms are: more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles, the loss of precious open space, the need for costly improvements to roads and public services, the inequitable distribution of economic resources, and the loss of a sense of community. By drawing upon the best from the past and the present, we can plan communities that will more successfully serve the needs of those who live and work within them. Such planning should adhere to certain fundamental principles.

Community Principles:

1. All planning should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents.
2. Community size should be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of each other.
3. As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.
4. A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
5. Businesses within the community should provide a range of job types for the community's residents.
6. The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
7. The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses.
8. The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
9. Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
10. Each community or cluster of communities should have a well-defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
11. Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting; and by discouraging high speed traffic.
12. Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage and vegetation of the community should be preserved with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.
13. The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.
14. Communities should provide for the efficient use of water through the use of natural drainage, drought tolerant landscaping and recycling.
15. The street orientation, the placement of buildings and the use of shading should contribute to the energy efficiency of the community.

Regional Principles:

1. The regional land-use planning structure should be integrated within a larger transportation network built around transit rather than freeways.
2. Regions should be bounded by and provide a continuous system of greenbelt/wildlife corridors to be determined by natural conditions.
3. Regional institutions and services (government, stadiums, museums, etc.) should be located in the urban core.

4. Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting a continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

Implementation Principles:

1. The general plan should be updated to incorporate the above principles.
2. Rather than allowing developer-initiated, piecemeal development, local governments should take charge of the planning process. General plans should designate where new growth, infill or redevelopment will be allowed to occur.
3. Prior to any development, a specific plan should be prepared based on these planning principles.
4. Plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.

If you would like more background information on the Ahwahnee Principles (including where the name came from), please read the article reprinted from Western Cities Magazine.

Nik Luka on December 02, 2002, 02:59 PM:

This has been a very stimulating discussion and I look forward to tomorrow's !

Ann Dale on December 02, 2002, 03:00 PM:

What a good lead into tomorrow. Thanks one and all for your time and reflection. Day 2 we will look at the issues of scale, limits and diversity for sustainable communities?

I would also like to remind the audience that an evaluation form can be found at www.e-dialogue.ca, as all communities are dependent upon feedback to improve or change their behaviour.

Until tomorrow, same time, same place.

Al Cormier on December 02, 2002, 03:00 PM:

Looking forward to tomorrow.

Maureen Woodrow on December 02, 2002, 03:01 PM:

Good luck on the remainder of the dialogue. I am sorry I can not participate the next two days. It is certainly a learning experience for me.

Tony Boydell on December 02, 2002, 03:03 PM:

Thanks Ann! Interesting experience.

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Day 2: Scale, Limits and Diversity

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:19 PM:

Welcome back everyone. Yesterday we discussed the meaning of sustainable communities.

Recurring emergent themes included the importance of connection; a systems approach; reciprocity and balance; and quality of life dependent upon reconciling that quality with ecological system imperatives. In response to a question concerning possible leverage points from the audience, the panelists raised the following: transportation, biodiversity, educating youth, developing collective norms and values as well as shared futures, sustainable development planning processes, and articulated policy frameworks.

Before we begin today's theme of scale, limits and diversity, I would like to re-introduce the last question posed from the audience and invite responses.

"What are the mechanisms to engage local business communities in the concepts and discussions about sustainability so they will be involved in the solutions?"

Let's rock and roll.

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 01:33 PM:

In regard to the question of business engagement strategies, I think that if processes were established at the local municipal level that invited affected stakeholders to identify common concerns amongst all stakeholders such as the importance of protecting greenspace or the need to provide a clean, safe drinking water source, stakeholders including small business owners could work together to clarify what their basic values are.

Once a set of common values have been agreed upon, they can begin to define ways in which their business practices can be aligned with them.

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 01:35 PM:

Another thing businesses can do to make communities more sustainable is to green every building in this country. The Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) and the Canadian Earth Energy Association (CEEA) studies have shown that with existing technologies we can reduce GHG emissions by 30%. With new technologies we can achieve a reduction of 60%.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 01:36 PM:

I agree with Michael. It has to be done at the local level. For instance, here in Toronto, there is a private sector alliance set up to work with City Council on local issues of economic development, tourism and sustainable development.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 01:38 PM:

But I also think that to be able to do anything effectively at the local level, you need to be empowered, which means senior governments typically need to give up something!

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:38 PM:

It seems to me that one of the ways to fully engage businesses in the sustainable development revolution is to demonstrate the economies of scale and benefits to be derived. For example, the National Research Council (NRC) states that new networks of collaboration and strategic alliances are key to responding to global imperatives.

Lindsay Cole on December 03, 2002, 01:40 PM:

Business needs to be engaged in community sustainability in terms that they understand and work with (a broad generalization - I know). These being community economic development, job stability and creation, new business opportunity development, retention/recruitment of a highly qualified work force, providing job opportunities for young people...

Of course some businesses will be interested in water and air protection, but not all. I think that these are some common entrance points for most businesses to understand sustainability in their terms. It can then broaden out to include environmental protection issues.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:46 PM:

Lindsay, good points. I liked the approach of the former B.C. Green Economy Initiative, linking energy conservation with job creation and innovation. It gets back to reconciling ecological, social and economic imperatives.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 01:41 PM:

Tony - True business people don't have time to waste just for reports to sit on shelves. Some form of up front agreement is required to convince them that their views will be listened to.

Often, the action is with local municipal council and if the city has representation by ward, it is often the case that few Council members think at the city wide level but instead at their ward only.

Katsitsaronkwes Jacobs on December 03, 2002, 01:45 PM:

Business owners are integral parts of a community. In many cases their contributions to environmental degradation are not necessarily because they don't care about their community. They have children, grandchildren etc. who live in the community as well. Sometimes it's just a matter of them not knowing what damage they are doing and what their alternatives are. I think there should be more information/education about this not only for the average person but also for business people specifically. Maybe conferences dedicated specifically to this important aspect of their business... greening their operations.

And I really like the concept of starting with the building itself that they're operating in.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:41 PM:

Tony, we all know how difficult it is to get people to give up something, it seems to be that we need to move to new models of governance, based on partnership and power with, not power over.

Again, to return to engaging the business sector, one of the things I learned while leading an energy

efficiency program for the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) was the power of peer group influence in promulgating best practices and encouraging innovation. What about a "Business Council of Champions" for sustainable development? Leading by example from the leading firms in the area?

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 01:42 PM:

I was looking the other day at some work being done in rural Maryland. It seems that rural areas typically offer lower labour costs, land, and buildings. Developers have the Bait to attract them but we need the means to control how.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 01:44 PM:

Ann, of course this presupposes that you have leading firms in the area. I think this highlights the dichotomy between urban and rural communities.

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 01:45 PM:

Thanks for the suggestion on building standards Jiri.

We are proposing a policy for measuring performance objectives for provincial buildings that is intended to produce similar results.

As you stated, a number of off the shelf technologies are available now that can contribute a great deal towards reducing GHG emissions

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 01:45 PM:

The cost of doing business is a key consideration. Here in the greater Toronto area, we have municipalities competing for private sector investments with all sorts of incentives that distort the normal decision process. An example, the Royal bank moved its HQ's from the Toronto core to the NW corner of Mississauga where the transit is very limited. So much more traffic on the road is the result of cheaper municipal taxes. Some region wide approach is needed to deal with sustainability issues. As we said yesterday.

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 01:47 PM:

Big part of the business engagement relates to the level of investment. Initiatives such as Sustainable Development Technology Canada are a good example but perhaps they should be focused on a local level. The Municipal Green Fund also has a local impact.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 01:50 PM:

One last point: I have been engaged in an ongoing discussion on very good terms with the CEO of a major transnational corporation on many of these issues. He (and by extension, his corp.) is not averse to changing modes of production, etc.. It seems to me that many major firms are quite aware of the need to re-engage with local stakeholders, and to move their operations closer to sustainable states. In other words, they know they're perceived as 'the bad guys' in many ways, and want to move forward proactively.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:51 PM:

A related question from the audience. "How can public/private partnerships be used to bring together economic and social interests?"

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 01:53 PM:

Mayors, if they are so inclined, can be the best individuals to kick off this kind of process. Perhaps the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) ought to give them some sort of training or coaching in this area.

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 01:57 PM:

I have a question related to the False Creek Development in Vancouver. As far as I know this development followed some of the best sustainable community development criteria. Is there any notion of public/private partnerships there?

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 01:59 PM:

The idea of public private partnerships projects are really just another way of procuring a service.

That being the case, when an RFP goes out on the street, proponents should be advised of the social, economic and environmental expectations associated with it and that an evaluation criteria for the project will include the proponents approach to these issues.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 01:56 PM:

Let's now move to the meaning of scale for sustainable communities.

For example, the urban population in Asia and Africa increased from 17 to 37% between 1950 to 2000 and is expected to reach 55% by 2030. By then, according to current projections, most of the cities with a population of over twenty million will be located in the non-western world (Malik 2001).

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 01:58 PM:

Size cannot always be controlled. So long as the growth is planned in a sustainable way, with enough of all the right things, then size may not be a limiting factor.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 01:59 PM:

Regarding scale, not necessarily, but much depends on: physical constraints (overcrowding); political support for growth management strategies; and capacity- not just having the resources but having the powers to acquire and allocate sufficient resources to get the job done. We have "mega-cities" that have greater resources than many small countries but they don't have the jurisdictional authority to make meaningful decisions!

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:00 PM:

I would agree. I do not think there are limits to the growth of cities. In the historical evolution of cities there was the urban core surrounded by the green space. Lately, with the growth of metropolises we are surrounding green spaces with an urban space in a pearl-like development of urban areas interspersed with more or less protected green spaces.

I think even in very large cities it is possible to have a sense of community or village.

Certainly more successful large cities, such as London or Toronto have that. In Toronto, we have the Greek town, the China town, the Beaches, Rosedale, St. Clair. Each of these areas identifies a type of a community. Each of these communities is about 1 square mile, in other words, the golden mile, - the physical distance a person can easily cover on foot. Then the community jumps to another center. So successful cities have these successful smaller communities. The success of the city to evolve and grow in a sustainable fashion depends on the ability of the communities to provide the sustainable features we mentioned.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:00 PM:

Size is not innately problematic. As long as growth is characterized by robust structural attributes - e.g. modularity - then large metropolitan areas can be quite sustainable. How this can be ensured in the developing world is a very serious question indeed, however.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:03 PM:

Nik! I agree. When I was in Sao Paulo, their greatest problem was not knowing the size of the city within about 5 million people! Creating mechanisms to manage growth is indeed problematic!

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:03 PM:

It is not always a given that local governments will act in a sustainable way. When they see development \$\$\$, all precautions may go out the door. Perhaps the provincial planning legislations, regulations and policies ought to mandate the kind of review that might move projects towards sustainability. This would at least give all cities in one province an equal footing.

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:05 PM:

I was intrigued yesterday with the question of an eco footprint related to a bioregion. Would a bioregion impose a limit on growth?

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:07 PM:

Jiri, I think the idea of communities beginning to use ecological footprinting routinely in their annual reports to assess their impacts on the environment is an excellent idea. Perhaps FCM could get a "competition" going between cities for the lowest ecological footprint.

I also think we may want to explore the idea of networked communities further, that is, smaller constellations of communities networked in a sustainable way.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:05 PM:

To reiterate what we were stressing in yesterday's discussion, I think that an important prerequisite is the regional coordination of planning for sustainable growth.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:06 PM:

Nik - you are right on. There has to be 'regional' coordination. Some large Canadian cities are blessed with such groups that act regionally, at least on some of the issues.

Lindsay Cole on December 03, 2002, 02:08 PM:

I think that there should be a limit to the size of cities. Many cities are growing without a consciousness of place. They are growing beyond the ability of their water source to supply their population. They are growing without local agricultural lands to support their food needs. They are growing without space to deal with their wastes. They are growing in spite of rising cultural conflict, poverty...

Can well planned and managed cities move beyond these (and other) issues? I think that this can help to alleviate some problems, but there has to be an ultimate limit to growth. This will vary from city to city according to the nature of their place. Some communities are starting to do this. I believe Whistler has capped their allowable population, and is enforcing it by not allowing development of land beyond a certain cap. Some cities are so ultimately unsustainable (Las Vegas comes to mind) that no matter how efficient they become, they will never become sustainable - in my mind anyway.

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 02:08 PM:

Thinking again from a systems perspective, limits to growth can be managed in a manner that is acceptable to the majority of stakeholders if they are of the opinion that their concerns have been considered.

The concept of bioregionalism is also interesting to me in that if applied, decisions about how to go about "growing" will be done so in a much more holistic manner than what we have become accustomed to in North America.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:03 PM:

Al, Jiri and Nik, is there not more violence in cities than in smaller communities? When any species becomes crowded it tends to begin to act more aggressively to define territory.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:05 PM:

Ann - as to violence, I am not sure that on a per capita basis there is much difference in crime. But, I have not studied that point.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:07 PM:

Ann, re: violence, I am not sure that there are meaningful comparators. There was a study done several years ago in US cities over 100,000 and crime rates/violence were used as indicators of sustainability, or not!

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:09 PM:

In response to Ann's point: this may be true, but I'm not aware of a causal relationship (I have seen work strongly suggesting that people who live in larger settlements tend to walk more quickly, though!). At any rate, we are infinitely adaptable. Societies learn to adapt to living at higher densities ... but very s l o w l y! This means that we need to be wary when places are growing by leaps and bounds ...

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:09 PM:

I remember that all the studies I read indicated that statistically there is not necessarily more violence in cities than in smaller communities. The violence is generally more visible

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:11 PM:

Nik - They probably walk more quickly because they have farther to go, in roughly the same time.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:17 PM:

With respect to violence, there is considerable evidence that if you increase density of population beyond certain limits, then crime does increase. Some of it is due to anonymity of large cities, in smaller communities people tend to know one another and to look after each other's properties more. Of course, there is also a dark side to this, less diversity, and so forth.

And the amount of violence in large populations appears to be correlated with the amount of green space a community has, or even common space. In Ottawa, for example, a dense apartment complex had experienced a number of assaults and murders. When the landlord simply created a common room for people to meet, the violence decreased over time.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:12 PM:

Lindsay, could you clarify: are you suggesting that population should be limited, or land coverage -- or both?

Lindsay Cole on December 03, 2002, 02:16 PM:

Nik - I mean that limits need to be set based on the capacity of place to deal with the impacts that I mentioned. Carrying capacity, like all ecosystems. This would be based on a complex of population size, resource (including land) use, socio-economics... It would vary widely, I would imagine. How you figure out this carrying capacity would be amazingly complex. Eco-footprinting only partially gets it.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:11 PM:

Thank you, Lindsay and Michael, for moving us to the next topic of limits. Look at Vancouver, for example, one of our most beautiful cities, and yet geographically bounded by mountains. More and more people are moving there because of the beauty, increasing traffic gridlock, and decreasing air quality, without a lot of options before of previous poor planning decisions. Thus, limits be geographic. As well, look at the number of street people in Vancouver and the addiction rates, thus limits may also be social and we know that they are ecological.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:16 PM:

I think that limits that occur because of physical constraints, or , for that matter, resource and capacity constraints, exist because they have not been defined up front. Coming back to the thread on bioregionalism, one of the basic principles is that you must consider all of these in the context of the capacity of the land to support growth, governed by a set of commonly agreed upon principles.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:16 PM:

What you are suggesting, Ann, is that certain issues reach their limits before others. It could be waste, geography, street people, etc. There should be some acknowledgement that a city ought not to grow or be allowed to grow if it cannot handle its environmental, social and other issues. Who could decide that??? Provinces, local people, local politicians or all?

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:20 PM:

Al, your point about who should decide! I think that is part of the issue but as I noted earlier, if the communities do not have the requisite powers to make decisions in the first place, then it is very difficult to move forward. I heard this complaint often among the members of the World Urban Forum , for example.

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:17 PM:

Ann, re: your example of Vancouver - as long as the city is growing you can do something about sustainable growth. The big trouble starts when the city stops growing.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:19 PM:

Jiri, do you mean growth, or development? And is development dependent upon diversity?

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 02:20 PM:

Jiri, can you explain how you think the big trouble starts once a city has stopped growing?

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:29 PM:

Touché Ann! I meant development. I think as long there is an increase in economic activity, which can be measured in sustainable terms, such as numbers and variability of companies and industry types, dollars spent in the local economy, percent of local economy based on renewable local resources etc, then there is a dynamic potential to direct change and development. When there is a reversal or stagnation, it is very difficult to do address sustainability.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:22 PM:

Ann raises a good point: what is growth, and how does it differ from development? I think of 'growth' as physical expansion (e.g. more houses, taller buildings, more urbanized land), whereas 'development' has more to do with a qualitative increase: in complexity, diversity, resilience, and so on. We tend to confuse the two concepts, and (certainly in Canada) it is frequently assumed that growth is good, when in reality it

often is not - as alluded to in the points made about carrying capacity.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:26 PM:

I agree, Nik, that growth is generally an increase in physical capacity although whether it is outwards or upwards can make a difference. There isn't necessarily anything wrong with density!!

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:24 PM:

Michael - one of the problems when growth slows down is the slowdown in revenues from developer fees. A good case is here in Mississauga. It is now reaching it fully built up state and revenues are declining such that the city is now short of funds for programs that contribute to sustainability.

Managing growth is always easier than managing no growth.

However, having reached the point of reduced growth, our Mayor now looks back at all the unsustainable development that took place and now says it was a big mistake. The city may not have the resources to maintain the infrastructure that resulted from growth.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:28 PM:

Building on Al's point - indeed. This is one of the core problems in the Québec City region, where I have been working for several years on sustainable renewal of postwar suburbs. There is net population loss (smaller families, plus out-migration)... and yet, new housing is still being built on the fringe. A host of issues are raised in terms of maintaining existing infrastructure, and even in encouraging people to stay in built-up areas. This underscores the importance of building adaptability and resilience into our urban settlements...

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:26 PM:

This idea of who gets to decide, seems to me, to be a major barrier to action. Can we not move beyond that to making decisions in partnership, power with rather than power over?

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:28 PM:

Ann, the question remains as to who gives something up in order for that to happen? Yes, we need to move beyond the "command and control" mentality of governments if we are ever to truly share the power to make decisions.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:28 PM:

Powers are now allocated to various orders of government. They can listen to advice but cannot legally share their power. They are accountable at the end of the day.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:31 PM:

Al, I did not mean to imply that governments would be giving up their "residual powers" from a constitutional point of view but simply that they have the option to delegate and to step back from the controlling framework to one in which more flexibility is created through broad sustainability principles and

standards.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:29 PM:

So, Al, if Mississauga had planned with the perspective that there were scale, limits and diversity factors, perhaps options would not have been foreclosed?

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:32 PM:

True Ann, for Mississauga and other cities. Perhaps the biggest criteria ought to be the ability to financially support (now and in the future) the infrastructure, lifestyle, services etc offered by a city.

Planning with all the good things we are talking about would likely avoid the messes we get into.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:32 PM:

Jiri, social capital is a catalyst for economic development, the efficient functioning of companies, and for making communities safer places to live.

Putman asks the question, "Do you want more people knowing their next-door neighbour, or more policemen?"

Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs on December 03, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Although the discussion is very interesting, urban issues are a bit outside my area of work and knowledge. But as far as diversity is concerned, what concerns me alot about the urban environment is the disproportionate impacts on the poor people. Environmental racism is a big problem and governments tend to let money (or industry) speak when making important siting decisions for the biggest polluters.

We live just outside the city of Montreal and our surrounding neighbours have pushed all their industry to the edge of our community... in one case, an industrial park right beside our high school.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:36 PM:

Katsitsaronkwas! I think a major problem is this disparity between urban and rural communities. I don't know if you have some specific ideas as to how to deal with encroachment but it seems to be that unless we can view everything in a broader regional context, these kinds of cumulative impacts will continue to occur.

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 02:33 PM:

I agree that we need to move to a model of collaborative decision making.

In order to do that, people/affected stakeholders etc. have to be prepared to put time and effort into the things in their communities that really matter to them.

In my experience, going to local community meetings etc. its always the same bunch that attend and decisions get made that are in their personal best interests and not necessarily those of the community.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:34 PM:

Katsitsaronkwas raises the important issue that what one community does affects all others in an increasingly globally connected world. Again, this seems to point to bioregionalism, but Nik, can planners ever get their act together at that level?

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:38 PM:

Ann: Hmm... good question! As it stands, we continue to encourage atomized thinking, and atomized approaches to problem-solving. I think that as long as planners have been exposed to / trained in / made to understand the capital importance of systems thinking, the bioregional perspective would flourish. I remain optimistic!

Lindsay Cole on December 03, 2002, 02:41 PM:

Further to Ann's response to Katsitsaronkwas comment- It is more than just one community affecting another. It is often the case that the community being negatively affected is one that is in the 'minority', and is often not invited to the negotiating table. Examples are everywhere - the lower income community living near the Sidney Tar Ponds, the black community near Halifax with a dump in their backyard, shopping mall and condo development kicking the homeless out of the downtown eastside of Vancouver, many First Nations communities in Canada...

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:37 PM:

And Michael brings up the critical point of diversity, so often it is the same old people at the table, we need diversity of spaces, diversity of places, economic diversity, and diversity of stakeholders.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:39 PM:

And yet it seems to me that the greater opportunities for diversity exist in the larger urban communities!

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:42 PM:

Re. Tony's comment, I think size isn't everything. A successful large community- a sustainable city, for example, is generally a collection of successful smaller sustainable communities. Because of that, I do not attribute size of a community as a critical attribute to sustainability. There are some very successful small communities but also very miserable small communities just as there are successful large cities and miserable large cities. Naturally larger communities offer more choices, more opportunities and therefore greater diversity.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:43 PM:

I think that the regional imperative is hampered by squabbling over power: local politicians representing their constituents (whether they do this well or poorly is another matter) don't relish the idea of granting some regional body authority over the decision-making process. I think this points to the importance of bottom-up systems in which easily-accessed local input mechanisms feed a regional planning process!

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 02:45 PM:

I think that one of the issues that has to be dealt with when discussing rural vs. urban impacts is that over the last many years, a large portion of urban society has lost touch with the importance of rural communities.

Be it through education or communication strategies, steps must be taken to recognize the significance of our rural communities so that decisions made in an urban context consider the downstream rural impacts.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:48 PM:

I agree that the 'rural' tends to be disregarded. Yet, the bioregional perspective responds by integrating rural settings as well as urban settlements ... I think that it explicitly recognizes the interdependence of its elements.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:46 PM:

Bioregions based on a framework of ecological limitations, social equity and economic viability and a diversity of voices? A pipe dream or concrete reality for communities?

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:50 PM:

Not to be a cynic, but in the Toronto area it's a pipe dream for at least a little while ... thanks to the provincial government's refusal to create a Greater Toronto Area regional authority (which would probably be the most powerful government in Canada...) That said, there are lots of us working on making it a reality 😊

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:40 PM:

A question from the audience:

"Growth and development lead to a discussion around qualitative aspects and how we measure them. My question to the panel is what do you feel are the most relevant indicators, or frameworks for indicators in assessing community sustainability?"

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:43 PM:

To answer the question, I will duck the first part in favour of frameworks!! I think we need to come back to the model of ecological limitations, social equity and economic viability as the framework. Apologies, this is my model, not a universal one! What this means is that when we look to progress in achieving sustainability, the starting point might be where a community has to meet at least one factor in each of those areas.

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:44 PM:

And indicators should be measured in terms of flexible performance dimensions rather than rigid standards or benchmarks.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:46 PM:

Nik! I agree, for the most part although I think that ecological limitations can be defined in terms of numerical measurements of environmental quality - air, for example.

Al Cormier on December 03, 2002, 02:47 PM:

Some of the indicators that come to mind are: energy use, health, education, ease of access, variety of employment, skills, infrastructure costs etc...

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:48 PM:

In response to the question regarding the frameworks for indicators and excellent reference is at <http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Indicators/TraditionalVsSustainable.html> which compares traditional vs. sustainability indicators

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:48 PM:

I think that it is achievable although it would take a concerted effort by all - back to sharing again! This is not a plug but people might be interested in the New Society Publishers Bioregional Series as a follow up to the references to bioregionalism.

Michael Masson on December 03, 2002, 02:51 PM:

On the topic of bioregions, as peculiar as it may appear, there is a considerable amount of work going into how London, England should attempt to come to terms with the massive growth that they face.

The bedzed project is an important first step that will contribute to decisions on how the city will grow over the next 20 to 30 years.

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:50 PM:

A fundamental question from the audience:

"Discussion has largely been around multistakeholder interests, shouldn't it be framed around the common good?"

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:50 PM:

Who defines the common good?

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:52 PM:

The people of course. Last postings everyone.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:53 PM:

Exactly, Ann. But you need a process to arrive at some definition - isn't that what multi stakeholder

participation is all about?

Nik Luka on December 03, 2002, 02:56 PM:

Ostensibly multiple stakeholder participatory approaches act as proxies for the common good, i.e. the people.

This has been a good discussion. Till tomorrow!

Jiri Skopek on December 03, 2002, 02:58 PM:

I am more familiar with the development of standards than policy. There are definitive formulas and rules for ensuring a broad stakeholders representation. Does something similar not exist in the world of policy making?

Ann Dale on December 03, 2002, 02:55 PM:

Ah, but Tony, as you and I both know, who gets to decide who is at the table, which brings us back to the importance of diversity?

Until we meet tomorrow.

Tony Boydell on December 03, 2002, 02:56 PM:

As a final post, we didn't really take a good look at the differences between urban and rural communities, so I thought I would put up some ideas:

Large communities have more resources, higher degree of sophistication (capacity to use resources effectively), greater availability of technology, economies of scale, greater socio-cultural diversity, greater economic diversification.

Small communities have cheaper labour, building, and land; a stronger sense of identity; strong social capital; challenges are scaled down; decisions more immediate; greater quality of life likely; less traffic and alienation of land to automobile uses; less residual contaminants, i.e. soil-lead concentrations in old communities of large cities are 10-100x greater than in comparable rural communities.

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Day 3: Community Innovation and Diversity

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:26 PM:

Welcome. Today, I would like to continue from yesterday for a few minutes and let me be provocative.

Some see urban centres as new engines of growth, with vibrant cultural diversity, access to arts, resources, expertise, and critical infrastructure services, most particularly health services.

Others see cities as spewing their garbage and air pollutants into the hinterland, drawing more from adjacent land than they are entitled to, places of noise, traffic congestion, and homeless people.

Between these two paradigms lie rural communities, places people perceive as safe, good places to raise kids, where everyone knows their neighbour, quiet, peaceful places to reside, and yet, many smaller communities are struggling, particularly single-resource economies.

Instead of entering into a big versus small debate, can we concentrate on what are the strengths of urban centres and similarly, the strengths of rural communities?

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:29 PM:

Hi Ann! Well, carrying on from my last post yesterday, I think what has been happening for a while now in urban design is that people are attempting to recreate rural characteristics in an urban setting.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:31 PM:

In other words, it is more than greening the city, is it about bringing the "wilderness" back into the city, in other words, learning to live with the raccoons, rather than getting rid of them?

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:32 PM:

And conversely, should we be trying to bring some of the benefits of cities into smaller communities?

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 01:37 PM:

In response to the comment on bringing the wilderness in, work that is being done on the subject of biomimicry has a lot of potential for all of us to learn how to better co-exist with the environment and in that way begin to adopt more sustainable practices both in our personal lives and in our communities.

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 01:32 PM:

As you mentioned Ann, one of the strengths of cities is access to needed services while on the other hand, a strength of rural communities is the level of connectedness that exists amongst inhabitants that for the most part doesn't happen in the big city.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:35 PM:

Michael! I agree about degree of connectedness although I also think that much of that has to do with the

opportunities for it to occur that seem to be denied within the large urban environments.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 01:32 PM:

Perhaps we ought to distinguish between large and small urban areas. Rural communities are closer to small towns in characteristics. Many of the good things in sustainability are found in small urban areas and rural areas, not in large cities.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:33 PM:

I think greening is part of it, for example, the long standing policy in Curitiba, Brazil but I think it is more the creation of the more traditional type of neighborhood, whether rural or urban, and the degree to which a higher level of socializing can then take place.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 01:35 PM:

Large centres typically offer greater choice (consumption, leisure, work, education, etc) while smaller communities have one park, one garden store, one gas station, etc. Whether or not choices regarding some of these elements make a community stronger is debatable depending on who you ask. I think we're told that the more choices we have (regardless of what's on the menu) the better. I disagree with this quantity over quality perspective.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:36 PM:

I came across this wonderful description, "Cities are not just to deal with housing people and economic activity, or building streets and architecture; they are also the places of struggle for social and spatial justice and equitable distribution of resources as well as places of art, culture and civilization" (Malik 2001).

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 01:37 PM:

I sometimes see little difference between a neighbourhood and a community. Even in large cities, there are very nice neighbourhoods/communities. In the Greater Toronto area, residential developers that offer small town designs in their plans sell their houses very fast. Surveys of potential homeowners show they all want small town type neighbourhoods but official plans/guidelines make it hard for developers to build them.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:38 PM:

Ann, or perhaps this quote from Jaime Lerner: "There is no endeavour more noble than the attempt to achieve a collective dream. When a city accepts as a mandate its quality of life; when it respects the people who live in it; when it respects the environment; when it prepares for future generations, the people share the responsibility for that mandate, and this shared cause is the only way to achieve that collective dream."

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 01:38 PM:

East Clayton in Surrey, BC has been experimenting with alternative design standards. Much of what they've found is that typical 'small town' features built into a community within a large urban centre makes

it more livable for inhabitants (i.e. people-friendly house/store fronts, garages and garbage pickup etc at the back of the building, swales instead of storm water pipes, shade trees on boulevards without curbs, etc.).

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 01:39 PM:

I want to stress again, as I think Ann is implying, that we must look at structural attributes rather than 'large' vs. 'small' or 'urban' vs. 'rural'.

Connectivity is a vital structural attribute, as are complexity, diversity and malleability (so that places can adapt to changing needs)

Tony is right, in that we also strive in good urban design to 'build' positive attributes of rural communities into urban settings. I think this could also be expressed as making places by creating manageable units or 'modules' to which people can easily relate - whether that's a village, town, or an urban neighbourhood.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:42 PM:

And connectivity is both physical, that is transportation and the choices we have, as well as social connections between people.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:41 PM:

Hi Nik! Yes, and I think the connectivity is critical. We see a great deal of residential development that calls itself sustainable or Traditional Neighbourhood Design (TND) but all it really is a facade - making a neighborhood look pretty doth not sustainability make!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:40 PM:

Little difference between a neighbourhood and community, maybe we need to change our language, that it is really about neighbourhoods, some of us prefer to live in larger ones, and others in smaller ones.

But from your discussion, it seems to me that they have common elements--access, choices, and connectedness, and diversity?

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:43 PM:

Ann, Yes and I think there are some other key attributes as well. I think neighborhoods have to have a focus and they have to have some basic ability to meet immediate needs.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 01:45 PM:

I'd like to echo other comments about the importance of having a wide range of 'types' of places. Green swales, shade trees, and a rural ambience appeal to some, but not all. Much of that has been ideologically built into Anglo-American culture over centuries. But at any rate, very robust and credible work has been done in environmental psychology demonstrating that North Americans categorize landscape and urban form into no more than four basic types, or cognitive categories:

-City
-Suburb

-Small town
-Rural/wilderness areas

(Of course, these categories have many variants, but they represent the basic classification).

This work has also shown that most people identify fundamentally with one of these basic types, although this can change over the course of their lives (for a wide variety of reasons).

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 01:46 PM:

One way to get more connectivity going is to make sustainability a goal at the municipal level and ensure that sufficient community engagement and outreach strategies are in place to keep people involved and interested.

From the design perspective, adaptive reuse of older buildings, building and maintaining an efficient and reliable transportation system, and adopting environmentally based procurement policies can all contribute to community sustainability.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:48 PM:

Again, Michael, you raise the importance of diverse activities occurring simultaneously, but within the overall context of sustainable development?

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 01:49 PM:

Connectivity also means integrating transportation planning with urban design. Land uses and activity patterns have to be designated in conjunction with their level of accessibility (e.g. only permitting shopping districts or major employment areas where there is excellent rapid transit access, etc.).

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:51 PM:

Nik! Wouldn't that be wonderful if we could do it effectively, particularly in more rural areas. In BC our Ministry of Transportation & Highways could have the name Ministry of Rural Land use Planning!!

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 01:54 PM:

Connectivity in terms of small community sustainability... To me, living in a town of about 2,000 with limited work (and other!) opportunities, connectivity means the ability to work and study virtually - via the internet and telephone - in larger communities. I think that this is another interesting sense of the word.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:56 PM:

Hi Lindsay! Yes, interesting and clearly valid as part of a greater degree of connectivity that exists, whether in face-to-face encounters or via the net.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 01:59 PM:

I think that Lindsay raises a good point. With advances in technology, a previously isolated and small

community can now be integrated into various networks via the internet or high-speed transport (air, train, auto, etc). These networking 'vehicles' give us all an opportunity to be connected. And more importantly, opportunities to choose those with which we will connect. 'Choice' is born.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 01:57 PM:

One important aspect of connectivity is access. Communities that pay attention to pedestrian needs, i.e. pedestrian friendly communities, certainly seem to offer a greater sense of belonging as opposed to just passing through.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 01:45 PM:

Again, in East Clayton, the standards call for a diversity of building types and land-use. 0.8 jobs for every 2.6 residents of the community helps to ensure choice with respect to employment and transportation needs. To achieve this requires a strong council and bending of some traditional planning/building/zoning rules. Fitting a development like this into the larger Greater Vancouver Regional District context is a challenge but headway is being made.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:47 PM:

Alastair! Having had some experience with this, I wonder if you know how East Clayton has been faring with respect to provincial standards, particularly in road design?

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 01:52 PM:

Good question Tony, certainly the alternative design standards are not consistent with traditional road standards. As to the degree to which the East Clayton model fits with Provincial standards, I sadly do not know. I'm no road design expert, but perhaps the municipality has greater flexibility over local road standards. If in fact they don't, perhaps this is one of the major obstacles standing in the way of more sustainable urban infrastructure.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:54 PM:

Alastair! I have been out of the loop re: design standards in recent years but I know that it was a huge issue in the days when I was involved in the design of a sustainable community - in fact, it created an impasse!

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 01:55 PM:

Tony - it's true. But we just need to ensure that the planning of transportation infrastructure is not being done without design of activities and built form, etc. This is where connectivity comes into the planning process itself - instead of having overspecialized experts in their own departments ...

Ann, I think it's important that settlements comprise mosaics of different types of urban form, where individual neighbourhoods are of a fairly discrete and identifiable type - the legibility that is important to sustainable urban places... All this depends of course on the definition of 'neighbourhood' - I think of it as a fairly small unit. But a very 'urban' place could be fairly adjacent to a very 'suburban' type place.

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 01:59 PM:

To get back to what some specific ingredients might be for developing a framework for community sustainability whether its in a rural or urban setting, aside from those that have already been mentioned, the development of local sustainability indicators and publishing progress for all to see is one key thing that can be done.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:01 PM:

Michael! I agree, and there are some good examples - Austin, Texas for one and their indicators of sustainability. I think it is perhaps overly complex in terms of reporting but a good idea!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:46 PM:

Nik, you bring me to what I see is a critical issue, that of diversity. Neighbourhoods can (and perhaps should) include a little of all four categories (city, suburb, small town, rural/wilderness) to realize their potential?

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:48 PM:

Ann, I am wondering, in this context, what you mean by diversity?

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:51 PM:

Diversity of place (both built and non-built); diversity of space (intellectual, emotional, social and cultural) and diversity of species (human and non-human).

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 01:52 PM:

Ann, I had a feeling you might say that. I can understand how you might create the first category but how do you then create the other two?

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 01:56 PM:

I think you create the other two by deliberate design, and I believe the human species is at a stage in its evolution that we now dominate the planet. We now need to, go back to Michael's comments, get more connectivity going, ensure sufficient community engagement and outreach strategies are in place, with the planners, to deliberately design in diversity of space, as well as space for other species. In other words, looking at how much space people need in order to live more peacefully with one another, what densities are sustainable, both population, but with a mix of green space and houses. Why do we all have to travel so far for work? Why is work so separate from where we live? Nik, over to you.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:00 PM:

Ann, I will try that one. I think separation of work and living began as the need to distance from the industrial of the industrial revolution. That became reinforced by the rise in use of automobile and the decline of the inner city cores. Now land is so expensive that we have great difficulty in reversing the trend.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:06 PM:

Tony, re: land prices. Vancouver is enabling the development community to provide inner-city housing (mostly in high-rises admittedly) at a great rate. Many people (including me) are moving in, selling our cars, getting healthier by walking EVERYWHERE and even getting to know our neighbours who are walking down the same sidewalks.

I think this is evidence of a meaningful change in our society's collective attitude. Most importantly, Mr. Joe Average non-sustainable development guy, is espousing the benefits of this new way of designing one's lifestyle. Ultimately, this new trend was only made possible by providing an enabling environment for the traditional power and money brokers (developers, bankers) to move in a certain direction (i.e. it took strategic regulations and incentives).

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:01 PM:

Ann - community engagement is important. Perhaps we can learn from the laws governing condominium corporations. At least here in Ontario, these laws place a lot of obligations and rights on the owners and on the elected directors. The owners do not defer to the elected condo Board of directors to the extent that citizens defer to their councils. Conversely, the condo boards are obliged to dialogue with the owners. The end result often is a sense of community and belonging among the owners that we don't often see elsewhere.

Perhaps laws governing municipalities could be changed along these lines.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:07 PM:

Al, I think you have hit upon a key point, engagement, if people are engaged, they will act. And engagement it seems to me is linked to connectedness, to access, linked to choices and all of these are dependent upon diversity.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:03 PM:

Al, I think that is a worthwhile model. Are you familiar with the Kentland, Washington, DC citizens group that does just about that?

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:04 PM:

Indicators are indeed important. In transportation, we are quite advanced in developing indicators to determine if we are moving towards or away from sustainability. This was never done before and we are attracting a lot of interest with this project.

The project stemmed from first having a definition of sustainable transportation that we deconstructed to see how it could be measured and monitored.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:09 PM:

Alastair! Yes, and they are to be commended for it! Part of the challenge, of course, is to get people away from thinking that ownership of a single family residential building is a fundamental right!!

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:10 PM:

Tony, and so we return to the question of rights and responsibilities again.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:04 PM:

If planners were more architecturally literate (i.e., if they could visualize different types of built form when coming up with planning guidelines), this would make a difference. My work in Québec City, in combination with good work being done in Western Europe, shows that perceived density is vastly more important than actual density. So if we understand urban design as a sophisticated, systems-based approach to organizing urban structure (time, space, meaning, communication), we can create places that have densities high enough to give the critical mass needed to support good transit, and to make it possible to walk and bike to places of work/school/leisure/shopping, ... but by making them visually complex, diverse, and interesting, we can give the impression that they are lower in density than they actually are.

You folks out in BC have lots to work with: hilly urban places can be made quite dense, but since people can overlook others, there can be a much greater sense of space! In flat places like here in Toronto, it's a bit trickier.

As for living far from where we work, let's not forget that in North America there is a great deal of social/societal meaning associated with mobility. People like to separate their place of work from their home setting.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:02 PM:

Access appears to be a recurring thought, so all communities need access to resources? And each community will define their needs differently in plural, complex post-modern societies like Canada.

Can we now move to the relationship between diversity and innovation? It seems to me that access to resources is highly dependent upon diversity. For example, here on Vancouver Island, the non-timber forest products industry is now moving forward, a sector now worth about 22 million dollars. But it is in reaction to the losses in forestry. What if we had actively planned for a more diverse economy as a strategic imperative rather than reacting to a crisis?

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:05 PM:

Ann, I am not sure that we need to view diversity as linked directly to economic enterprise! The greater degree of diversity, the greater the likelihood that innovators will tend to seek out and borrow ideas, processes etc. from their own backgrounds or areas of experience, thereby enhancing the richness of the innovation process.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:10 PM:

And Tony, you are right, diversity is not just economic, but is linked to innovation. There may be an interesting trend happening (based on some preliminary research here) that smaller communities are actually diversifying as a result of many retirees coming in, with new ideas, different experiences, and this then is kicking back into the community. One example is Vancouver Island itself and another community in Australia, Broken Hill. And don't forget the Baby Boomers who are going to be retiring.

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 02:10 PM:

Ann - I think that this question of innovation is a critical one. In order to be able to live, and make a living, in a small community innovation is a necessity. Work is hard to find, and cultural and community events are sometimes few and far between. In terms of finding paying work opportunities for oneself, finding social and cultural outlets, and finding solutions to community ecological challenges the innovative entrepreneurial instinct is required. Small communities would be pretty boring - or perhaps non-existent - without innovation.

Not to take these urban/rural distinctions too far, I think perhaps this drive to innovate is less so in cities - for the 'average' person anyway. Just to be a bit provocative to all you city dwellers... It is easier there - to find work, to entertain yourself, to meet people...

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:13 PM:

Lindsay, you are bang on, and one of my personal reasons for this research project on e-dialogue. I live in no community, in the bush, by a small lake outside of Ottawa. One of the things I found is that I could work rather effectively electronically (given the nature of my privileged work) but I was so lonely and isolated. Thus, the idea of participating in on-line substantive dialogue. And what about being able to connect to the vast knowledge and wisdom of older retired people.

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 02:22 PM:

On the topic of connecting to older people, we need to increase this in our society and to look upon them as sources of wisdom rather than dismissing them as just being old.

In my opinion, there is so much that we can learn from them if we would only take the time and effort to engage them on a more equitable level. Involving them as mentors and valuing their thoughts and opinions just might be a key to figuring out how to proceed from here.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:15 PM:

If I had a stock broker, she'd tell me to diversify my holdings so that I'd be resilient to market fluctuations. Somehow, when it came to developing many rural Canadian towns, no stockbrokers were consulted. The good news is that one-industry towns are rebounding in some cases. Unfortunately, all too often they are looking to tourism as the cure to their woes. Tourism's focus on low-paying service industry/seasonal jobs is problematic. I like the BC case where the forest industry is finally investing in value-add activities to effect the diversification of the industry.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:19 PM:

We are getting into some intriguing aspects of this discussion. Baby Boomers retiring into more rural areas (and/or 'exurbs') are the focus of the research group I'm now affiliated with at the University of Toronto.

I'd agree that there might be great opportunities to diversify rural settlements (esp. if they have single-resource economic structures), perhaps in terms of social capital? ... if the newcomers don't smother the 'locals', so to speak. This has been a problem in many Dutch and Flemish villages.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:21 PM:

Nik, in my research we are finding that many communities have terms such as 'outsiders' and 'insiders' and in one in Australia, the 'A graders' and 'B graders'. It seems we don't accept difference easily.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:20 PM:

Diversifying a community is often seen as developing multiple employment opportunities. Examples are Ottawa lessening its dependence on government jobs and Sudbury from mining jobs.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:15 PM:

So, we seem to have a convergence of ideas. Can we move to examples of communities that in your opinion are sustainable?

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:21 PM:

In that case, I might be tempted to argue that there is no such thing as a sustainable community! Of course, that depends on how we choose to define it! If we come back to my suggested approach, that is, that a community must meet, as a minimum, sustainability criteria or practices in each of the three "building blocks" – ecological limitations, social equity, and economic viability, then there are examples around. However, I think this is only the starting point, and I would want to see evidence of progress in developing more sustainable policies, practices, and procedures in each of the three "building block" areas.

I would also suggest that there are conditions under which sustainable communities are more likely to evolve, and that many of these conditions can be created by design, rather than by chance. An example of this would be the Traditional Neighborhood Design approach to community development and re-development that was pioneered by Andres Duany in the early nineties. Creating opportunities for a higher level of social interaction to occur, and therefore the development of social capital, is quite typical of this approach.

So, putting these two observations together, I think it is fair to say that while there may be a few sustainable communities out there, depending on how you define them, the majority of communities are either unsustainable or "in progress".

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 02:21 PM:

I think the community of Roberts Creek (also on the Sunshine Coast in BC) is a good example of a 'sustainable community'.

The population is quite small (about 1,000 - 1,200), and they have no local government (they have a representative to the regional government). They have an active and dynamic community center, they have done very well at protecting natural areas - both on private and public lands, and they have quite a few (relatively speaking) local business.

They have a library and a vibrant community hall with all kinds of social, cultural and political events. Their official community planning process is unique in BC - the community elects representatives on a 2 year rotation to review and enforce the OCP - even though this is not mandated by anyone. It was a community-developed process. They are promoting alternative developments - the most current being the Roberts Creek Co-housing project.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:22 PM:

Tony, an example of a sustainable community in progress is the Ride the Wind project in Calgary. It is an excellent example of innovation in sustainable communities.

The Ride the Wind initiative will position Calgary as the first city in NA to power its transit system with 100% emissions-free wind-generated electricity. The city is pursuing wind power for its light rail transit system, the "C-train" from ENMAX Energy Corporation and Vision Quest Windelectric Inc.

This system became operational Sept 1, 2001 and will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 26,000 tonnes per year- the emissions that would have been produced by generating electricity through coal or natural gas.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:24 PM:

Yes Ann, it is one of many innovative approaches that would label a community as "in progress".

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:25 PM:

Tony - I agree. Until we have an agreed definition of sustainable definition, we cannot measure progress.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:26 PM:

Or rather, Al, stimulate every community to become 'engaged' in defining it for themselves.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:26 PM:

If I were to respond to the points just raised by Ann and Al, I would say that one of the keys to approaching sustainability lies in effectively integrating the new into what already exists, so that what exists can diversify. (And yes... I found the same thing in a study I did in Beauport, Québec: the 'locals' resented the arrival of newcomers!)

Again (responding to Tony), I think we need to remember that we probably won't ever achieve sustainability, but we can get an awful lot closer as long as we try.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:29 PM:

Nik! I may sound like a cynic but not really! I just think it is somewhat presumptuous to go around referring to sustainable communities as if they were some utopian dream! That is why I prefer the term "communities of sustainable practices" but of course, that is a mouthful, so perhaps we should refer to them as COSPS!!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:25 PM:

Al, any examples of communities with sustainable transportation?

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:28 PM:

Ann - there are few examples in Canada and there are pockets of larger centres. An important aspect of sustainable transportation is having choices and few cities offer decent choices. Smaller communities offer even fewer choices.

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 02:29 PM:

On sustainable transportation, amongst the most forward thinking ideas are coming out of Europe. Some municipalities require that public transit lines and bicycle paths are installed before the first house goes up.

If they are not in place, the development permit won't be granted.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:31 PM:

Now that is innovative thinking, planning it in at the beginning, not in the middle or as an add-on, but fundamentally integrated design.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:31 PM:

Also on sustainable transportation, my favorite is still Curitiba in Brazil. I found it most interesting when I was there, and of course they did integrate the urban planning with the transportation system. I think this is absolutely critical if you are going to be successful in moving people away from dependency on the car!

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 02:30 PM:

I have been in many conversations about defining sustainability. They are definitely important, especially in terms of defining a common vision of what a group, community, etc. is working towards.

That being said, the most powerful motivation for me (and many others, especially those less theoretically minded than many of us) in sustainability-related work is the positive example. It is seeing and participating in making change. It is in the application and acting upon the concepts of sustainability. Let's not get too wrapped up in this debate of broad definitions here!!

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 02:35 PM:

Lindsay, I agree. When I think of all the opportunities that exist to do "good works", it makes my head spin.

I've decided that the best way to approach this is to work on what I'm passionate about and hope that others will do so as well.

By focusing on what we are good at or at least what we know something about is far more effective than trying to solve the really big picture issues.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:30 PM:

Diversifying a community's primary industry can push it toward sustainability. In BC, some within the

fishing community are pushing to develop special fish-pens (related to those used by fish farms) to effectively hold fish (Halibut) for example. Normally, these fish are caught at one time of year and flooded all at once on the market. The per fish yields are lowered by the number of fish on the market as a consequence. The fishermen want to diversify, hold on to stock, and sell them throughout the year when prices are more stable/desirable. The same is happening in Chile where fish farms are allowing communities to sustain their livelihoods year round, rather than for 2-3 months per year.

Examples of diversifying an industry and making the community more sustainable? I think so, but I haven't mentioned the environmental debates around fish farming.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:32 PM:

Another good example of innovation is the Livable Region Strategy Plan in Greater Vancouver.

It provides the framework for making regional land use and transportation decisions in partnerships with the GVRD's 21 member municipalities, the provincial government and other agencies. The purpose of the plan:

- Manage population growth
- Protect and enhance environmental health and quality
- Create livable and complete communities linked by effective transportation systems through coordinated actions.

The plan's four main goals: protect the 'Green' Zone, build complete communities, achieve a compact metropolitan area, and increase transportation choice.

Key results of the LRSP include: increase in protected habitat of around 60,000ha with the Green Zone occupying two thirds of the regions area; substantial development of regional town centres with housing, shopping, community, and education facilities (almost 70% of new housing built is multi-dwellings); the target of containing 70% of new growth within the growth concentration area is being realized (new dwellings have been concentrated around regional centers and along major transit corridors); the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority has also been established. Transit trips have increased at peak periods and the proportion of people walking and taking transit is higher in regional centres.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Achieving sustainable transportation is indeed strongly dependent on sustainable land use. And, sustainable land use leads to sustainable communities. All is integrated and connected.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Yes, plenty of exciting examples of (closer to) sustainable transportation are to be found in parts of Western Europe. I worked in Basel about five years ago, where there is an incredible array of choices: excellent, frequent, punctual transit service; superb bike roads with their own traffic lights; very pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, etc. When I was there the transit authority (<http://www.bvb-basel.ch/>) was in the midst of inserting low-floor sections into all of its old trams, which they were able to do after ridership had doubled in about 10 years' time because of (guess what) regional tax pooling, among other things!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:33 PM:

Nik and Al, any thoughts on integrating transportation fundamentally with urban planning and development permits?

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:34 PM:

I think you guys just answered my questions. Some other examples out there, or works in progress??

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:38 PM:

Ann, I referred to it in passing earlier, but I like Kentlands outside Washington, DC. Quote: "It's the people I meet and am friends with—that's been the most rewarding thing to me. I don't know how many more people I know here than I knew in the neighborhood where I lived for 39 years. I have countless more friends and acquaintances here than I ever did!

"I moved here because I didn't want to live in a retirement home, I wanted to live in a multi-generational community. I like that all age groups are respected—right down to the youngest. We don't have a 'fortress' mentality. "I love how active a role the residents have in the planning process of Kentlands. The people here are involved; they care about how it looks, how it functions; we know we can continue to make it better. It's different here, unusual. It's not like suburbia."

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:37 PM:

Most urban planners will say that over 50% of urban planning is transportation planning. The two cannot be separated. Ideally, the urban plan has an incremental and sustainable element of transportation built into it. The problem is that municipalities often allow development to leapfrog the transportation elements and we end up with traffic jams, limited choices and more dependence on automobiles.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:37 PM:

But Al, what is not integrated and connected currently are the imperatives of those who control investment: banks, developers, insurance companies, etc. Until they see the value of participating in the sustainable land-use/transportation/community design game, we will I think achieve little success. Currently, they see many of these innovative ideas as 'bleeding edge' and highly risky from an investment perspective.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:40 PM:

Alastair, you are right. There is no immediate financial gain in building transportation infrastructure before a crisis occurs. The process is very much dependent on the developers making a profit.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:39 PM:

I wholeheartedly support the explicit integration of planning/growth etc. with transportation. The example that Michael brought up was perhaps the Dutch ABC planning model, where activities are permitted based on the degree of accessibility (e.g. major shopping/work/education facilities only within 5 minutes' walk of fixed rail service). Let growth and development permits follow transit access in policy and in law.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:41 PM:

Nik! I agree provided that the two go hand in hand. We had some unfortunate experiences of that not happening with the Sky Train in Vancouver!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:41 PM:

Alright, more innovation!

Another good example of community sustainability is the Waste-Free by 2005 project in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is one of the leading provinces in waste diversion in Canada. They achieved 50% of their waste reductions in 2000. They have the most comprehensive set of disposal bans in NA, beverage container deposits that reward refillables, and other progressive programs.

The Zero Waste 2005 is Annapolis Royal's low-tech, cost effective, locally managed and very successful waste management initiative. To achieve its waste free goal, the town implemented its "Only in your backyard" project in 1999 to facilitate the on-site composting of waste. Using food/waste digesters (Green Cones) along with traditional backyard composting units the 'Earth Tubs', the majority of households can now dispose of all food and yard wastes on-site. This means Annapolis Royal is able to dispose of its organic wastes within the town's limits, an achievement that delivers significant cost saving to the community.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:45 PM:

Ann - As usual, innovations more often comes from individuals not from corporations and governments. In Nova Scotia, I believe the lead came from the Director of Waste Management in the Halifax region who took a worldwide training on sustainability issues. At the end, he was passionate about his mission.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:42 PM:

And yet provincial transportation ministries are still hell-bent on sinking millions, even billions of tax dollars into building new expressways, while (in Ontario at least) they are no longer funding the provision of transit infrastructure. There's the rub!

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:45 PM:

Nik! Same experience here. We spent huge amounts on widening the TransCanada into Victoria to alleviate congestion. Now, after five years, congestion is back up to the same level and funding to public transit is being reduced!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:43 PM:

And have we never wondered about the connection between transportation and health. If we don't have choices to walk anywhere (one of the dark sides of rural life), then some of us frantically try and make the gym. Lack of transportation choices and obesity are directly related!!

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:45 PM:

In Poland they are experiencing another phenomena. They have 75% public transit ridership but this number is plummeting. The transit system is awesome compared to Vancouver's and many Canadian cities. However, private automobile ownership (offered by car companies at 0% interest and next to nothing paid up front) is seen as a far better alternative to the run-down public transit facilities. Traffic congestion is crazy, but people are still flocking to their cars. Finding investment for transit is very unpopular as everyone now wants better/bigger roads. They're quickly removing their transportation choices, which is worrisome.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:47 PM:

Alastair! I think the root of the problem is "public" transit. To go back to the Curitiba example, there 10 private sector companies who compete to maintain an appropriate level of quality and service provide it.

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 02:50 PM:

Tony - ooh, privatization of (currently) public infrastructure as a sustainability solution. That is opening a can of worms!

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:54 PM:

Lindsay - privatization is often misunderstood. For a public agency to contract out work (after setting out standards. monitoring process etc) is quite OK by me.

But for public agencies to simply wash their hands and let the private sector do as they wish, is not acceptable.

The former (contracting out) maintains expertise in the public service. The latter (privatization) does not. We then end up with governments that are unable to judge what is happening.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:51 PM:

Tony, I note that the government is actively seeking public-private partnerships to help address the current transit infrastructure crisis in Poland. Thanks for the Curitiba insight.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:56 PM:

I should add that the Poles are the most amazingly fit people as they have historically walked everywhere. Moreover, they're also very comfortable with sharing space, ideas, resources, etc. Why should we pay a fitness club to keep our bodies healthy when we could sell the car and walk/bike/transit?

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:44 PM:

Lets address one of the questions from the audience:

"The comment that 50% of urban planning is transportation raises the question: Does efficient transportation bring us connectivity, or do inefficient forms like walking and bicycling do a better job of connecting people?"

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 02:47 PM:

I wouldn't say that walking and biking are inefficient at all. Quite the contrary.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:47 PM:

I would not use the term inefficient when talking about walking and cycling. They are most sustainable in terms of environmental and societal goals.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:48 PM:

In response to that question: I think that good transportation planning seeks to maximize the possibilities for exchange (of information, ideas, goods, services, etc.). Thus, the more walking, biking and transit you can achieve, the better, since these are sociopetal forms of mobility (rather than being isolated in the personal space bubble of an automobile). In other words (and this was transportation policy in the Swiss canton of Basel that I just mentioned), provide automobile infrastructure only where no other mode is possible.

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 02:50 PM:

Nik, thanks for reminding me of the exact location that I was referring to.

Another community that is very much in the preliminary design stages is the site of the former mental health facility for the state of Oregon in Salem.

There's approximately 0.275 acres on the outskirts of town and a local consortium of sustainably minded people have purchased it and intend to turn it into a sustainable community showcase using entirely green energy sources, sustainable agriculture practices and homes that will be designed to operate on a minimal ecological footprint.

They intend to keep approx. 175+ acres in green space and they are working on a financing model in which inhabitants won't actually own the land but they will sign a long-term lease.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:49 PM:

I guess that begs the question about efficiency and sustainability. Being a cyclist I have to agree with the others!

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:50 PM:

It is odd that we often define the choices that take more time as "inefficient" but as Al and Nik have so eloquently pointed out, it increases social capital in communities, and social capital is related to connection, and connections lead to safer communities.

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 02:51 PM:

And while we're on the topic of efficiency, let's not forget the benefits of getting more Canadians to walk &

bike places (the health implications of urban form!) - especially since we are becoming a pretty flabby society!

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:51 PM:

A good check list for transportation planning would be transportation modes with the following priorities:

1. Walking
2. Cycling
3. Public transport
4. Goods movement
5. Private automobiles

or something like that...

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:55 PM:

We are now moving into the final moments of this dialogue. There is a wonderful example about alternative waste water treatment from the audience that points out some of the governance issues, but unfortunately, we will have to leave it for another day, another time, another place, another space.

Final postings, dear colleagues, and any suggestions for more rapid diffusion of sustainable community practices.

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:57 PM:

Ann! I suppose we can look to technology to assist if rapidity is of the essence. But I think that the good old use of pilot projects seems to have some measure of success in the diffusion of ideas and practices. However, what is important about all of this is that people need to understand that sustainable community design and development is collaborative in nature. The process itself is very important, as it should bring the community together in the context of shared values, goals, and vision. One of its outcomes, of course, is the enhancement of social capital.

Al Cormier on December 04, 2002, 02:57 PM:

One needed solution is for municipal and provincial governments to let their senior staff travel and see innovative stuff. Too often, they are homebound or province bound.

The Australians are good at traveling the world over.

Lindsay Cole on December 04, 2002, 02:57 PM:

Thank you all for this interesting discussion!

Michael Masson on December 04, 2002, 02:58 PM:

Thanks for the opportunity to participate and I have to reiterate that in my mind, solutions for developing more sustainable communities lie in the way in which decision makers, affected parties and interested

parties get together to arrive at unique local solutions based on local issues and concerns.

Ann Dale on December 04, 2002, 02:58 PM:

Thank you to the panelists, to our audiences, and our very best wishes for a joyous, peaceful Christmas and a riotous New Year. May it be sustainable!

Tony Boydell on December 04, 2002, 02:59 PM:

Thanks Ann! I found this process interesting and informative!

Nik Luka on December 04, 2002, 03:00 PM:

I have always been perplexed by the fact that people here drive everywhere, then complain that they don't have time to exercise; but if they do, they pay huge sums of money to run on a treadmill or use the Stairmaster.

My last thought: we need to ensure that our settlements are complex, diverse, malleable, accessible, well-connected, and more responsive to our needs and wants.

This has been a great dialogue. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to take part! I look forward to keeping in touch with all of you.

Alastair Moore on December 04, 2002, 03:00 PM:

Thanks everyone. I look forward to our next e-chat!

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