



# Sustainable Development for Public Administration

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Deniz Zeynep Leuenberger  
John R. Bartle

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We dedicate this book to our spouses, Derek Leuenberger and Lori Elliott-Bartle, with love and admiration, and to our children, Kelsey and Jocelyn Leuenberger and Alex and Sarah Bartle, in the hopes that their world will be safe, fair, and sustainable.

—DZL and JRB

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# 1

## Focus on Sustainability

### A New Direction for Public Administration

“Sustainability,” “environmental sustainability,” and “sustainable development” are becoming increasingly important concepts in public administration. With increasing demand on resources, governments, civil society, and organizations all over the world are focusing their attention and energies on managing the impact of humans on their environments, integrating environmental sustainability and sustainable development while still preserving the welfare of citizens. This is, of course, not an easy charge. The complex work of the public administrator balances citizen equity, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, and, now, sustainability in day-to-day practice and planning.

As public organizations adopt environmental sustainability as a tenet of good practice and theory, certain questions arise. Why is environmental sustainability important to public administration? What is the role of public administrators in planning and implementing sustainable development within agencies and communities? Few people would argue about the connection between sustainability and efficiency and reduction in waste. All agencies and communities benefit from increased efficiency and reduced waste as long as other tenets, such as participation and equity, are not compromised. Environmental sustainability moves beyond economic efficiency and incorporates these other tenets of public administration as well. Further, sustainable development requires the cooperation of professionals and experts from a variety of practices and disciplines. In public administration, profession-

als with backgrounds in community development, economics, psychology, education, ecology, sociology, transportation, engineering, geography, and many other fields work together. Public administration includes practitioners from local, state, federal, and international public and nonprofit organizations. Not only are environmental sustainability and sustainable development therefore, philosophically matched with the tenets of public administration, but the multidisciplinary nature of public administration provides the perfect opportunity to foster an environment wherein sustainable development can be meaningfully applied to community decision-making and practice. Public administrators, as translators and collaborators, may be able to facilitate communication on environmental sustainability and promote meaningful change in communities.

In order to discuss environmental sustainability and sustainable development, a definition of the terms is a helpful beginning. Environmental sustainability is a philosophy that requires the use of natural resources in such a manner that their quantity does not diminish over time or across generations. Environmentally sustainable systems rely on tools and approaches such as renewable resources, reduced consumption, technological advancements, and managerial efficiency to maintain resources at their current level or higher levels. Citizens of the future, under environmental sustainability, should enjoy resources and welfare at about the same level as people do today. Environmental sustainability also offers the potential for citizens to enjoy an increase in resources and welfare in the future. Although “sustainability” has increasingly been used to mean environmental sustainability, it is also defined as long-term success or preservation of organizations, organizational plans, or economic prosperity that may not have an environmental or natural capital dimension. This book will focus on sustainability issues that are rooted in the management of natural resources or capital.

Sustainable development is a plan of action that integrates environmental sustainability into decision-making. This type of planning suggests that any discussion of growth, development, and consumption should include steps to approach environmental sustainability as closely as possible. A completely sustainable system may not be possible in practice, but planners should attempt to make processes as efficient and effective as possible, providing goods and services with the lowest negative impact on the environment. Environmental sustainability and sustainable development depend on the consideration of short-run and long-run consequences of human action on human and environmental welfare.

Environmental resources are a form of capital, often called natural capital (Hawken, Lovins, and Lovins 1999). In general, capital is a stock of a resource; that is, an accumulated value based on previous investments