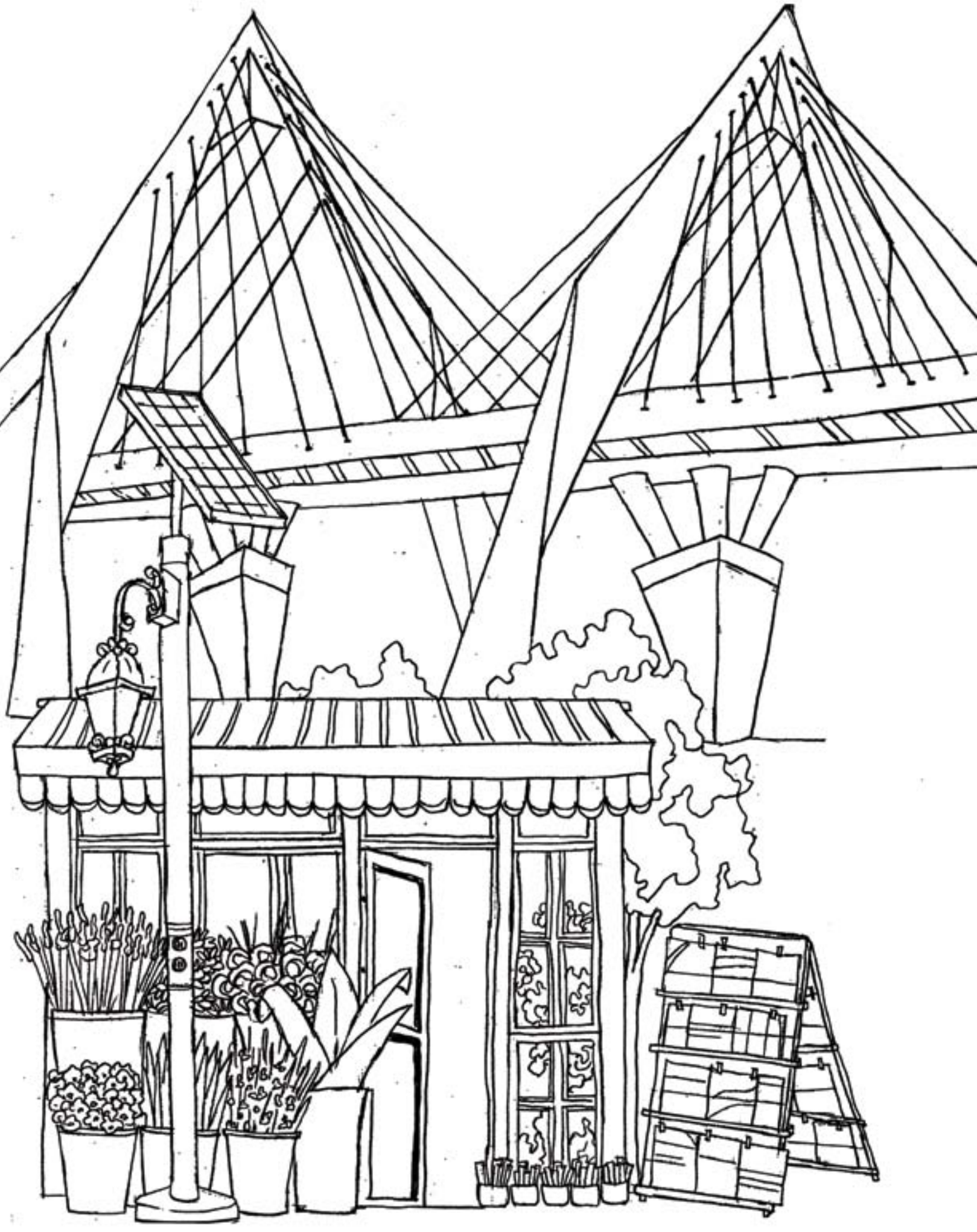


Introduction: Toward Sustainable Cities

Today, the word is facing a new phenomenon: since 2008, for the first time in the history of mankind, over half of the population lives in cities. More than 90% of urban growth is found in developing countries, which represents approximately 70 million new inhabitants in cities each year (WB, 2010). By 2030, urban settlements in the developing world will account for 80% of the world's urban population (UNFPA, 2007).

Over the course of the next 20 years, the *Homo sapiens* (the wise man) will become the H*omo sapiens urbanus* in virtually all the regions of the planet (UN-HABITAT, 2008: VIII). It has been estimated that, within 20 years, there will be almost 2 billion new urban residents, and it has been estimated that cities already contribute with approximately 70% of the world's GDP (WB, 2010). A large part of this new phenomenon is found in cities in developing countries, such as those of the Latin American region.

Cities are places of opportunity, the engines of the economy. They promote the creation of prosperity, social development and employment, the provision of fundamental goods and services, innovation, industrial and technological progress, the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity; they generate economies of scale, facilitate interaction, and promote specialization and competitiveness.[1] However, they can also be sources of problems if they are not properly led and governed, if public policies and institutions are dysfunctional, if the socio-spatial distribution of opportunities and the costs of development is unfair. And that is when inefficient and unequal cities that prey on the environment, unsustainable cities, emerge (UN-HABITAT, 2008; Maskell, 2001; O´Sullivan, 2008; Porter, 1998; Satterthwaite, 2007).

One way or another, it is clear that whatever happens in the cities of developing countries will shape the future of the planet in terms of economic growth, poverty and inequality reduction, demographic stabilization, environmental sustainability and the exercise of human rights (UNPF, 2007).

Successful cities thrive, improve their finances, generate development opportunities for all, create business opportunities and take care of their most vulnerable inhabitants. All of this is leading to a new paradigm that highlights the *benefits* of urbanization and raises red flags on its major risks. Unlike the 1980s, the question now is not how to stop urbanization, but how to take advantage of the different opportunities it offers while minimizing its contingencies (WB, 2010); how to achieve cities that are efficient, fair and responsible when it comes to environmental management. In other words, how to achieve *sustainable cities*.

1 In addition, the opportunity costs of staying in disadvantaged, and even oppressive, rural settlements, especially for women, are too high, and that is why migration to cities does not stop (Garrocho, 2011).

In Mexico, sustainability at the level of the discourse has been present in the main planning instruments for at least two decades. However, in the case of public policy, there is not an agreement on the meaning of the term sustainability that is really operational for the design and implementation of development strategies and actions at different spatial and time scales.

The definition of sustainable development

Since the last decade of the last century, sustainable development (SD) has become a dominant theoretical and political paradigm due to the fact that the scale of environmental problems has become a central concern of the current development process.

The best-known definition of sustainable development is that of the 1987 Brundtland Report, which states that SD must meet the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the process of fulfilling the needs of future generations. The different interpretations of this definition have emphasized at least three aspects:

i. Promoting courses of development that preserve and improve the environment for present and future generations;

ii. Improving living conditions within the limits of the capacities of local ecosystems; and

iii. Avoiding, or reducing to a minimum, the transfer or environmental costs in social, territorial or temporal terms (Burgess, 2003: 196).

This discussion proposed an agenda for the solution of global environmental problems in a context that promoted economic development to address the needs of the most disadvantaged groups. In other words, the environment was integrated into the economic agenda (see Chapter 2).

In this global political process, the concept of sustainable development attempted to integrate society's most pressing needs into a single scheme, in particular:

i. Accelerate economic development to overcome poverty;

ii. Protect the environment and preserve the natural resources life depends on, and

iii. Advance social justice and tolerance (*e.g.* cultural diversity), so that local communities can express their values. In other words, sustainability was presented as a multidimensional concept that required the integration of economic, environmental and social objectives as part of the same task (Newman and Kenworthy, 1999: 4). But, above all, the conclusion was reached that sustainability should not be seen as an ideal state that must be achieved as quickly as possible, but instead be a *guiding principle* for government policy (Hall, 2003: 55-56).

In this regard, sustainability must be seen as a *process that guides public policy* in all its dimensions so that it can group the different needs of society (*e.g.* economic, social, environmental, political, population and cultural needs, among many others).

In other interpretations of the SD concept, the suggestion has been made to add two other dimensions to the three basic dimensions already described (*e.g.* economic, social, environmental): the political and demographic dimensions. The *political* dimension, because it is necessary to include the role of the State, democratization processes and participatory planning; and the *demographic* dimension due to its direct relationship with key processes such as demographic growth, the distribution of population in the territory, migratory flows and ethnic components (Drakakis-Smith, 1995: 665-666) (see Chapter 1).

Thus, sustainability is a challenge that involves *spatial and temporal scales*. Two examples:

a) The deterioration of the different dimensions of sustainability increases as the population living in a situation of poverty grows;

b) The product growth is unsustainable beyond a certain scale, which means that, over time, adopting the concept of sustainability becomes urgent. Climate change is a proof of that. One way or another, earth will survive, but it will up to human beings to select the timing and particularities of the transition at levels that are sustainable to mankind and, in general, to the natural capital (*e.g.* land, the atmosphere, forests, water, wetlands), which provides the flow of goods and services necessary to sustain the human economy, as Goodland (1995), Daly (1990) or Ehrlich & Ehrlich (1989) claimed some time ago.[2]

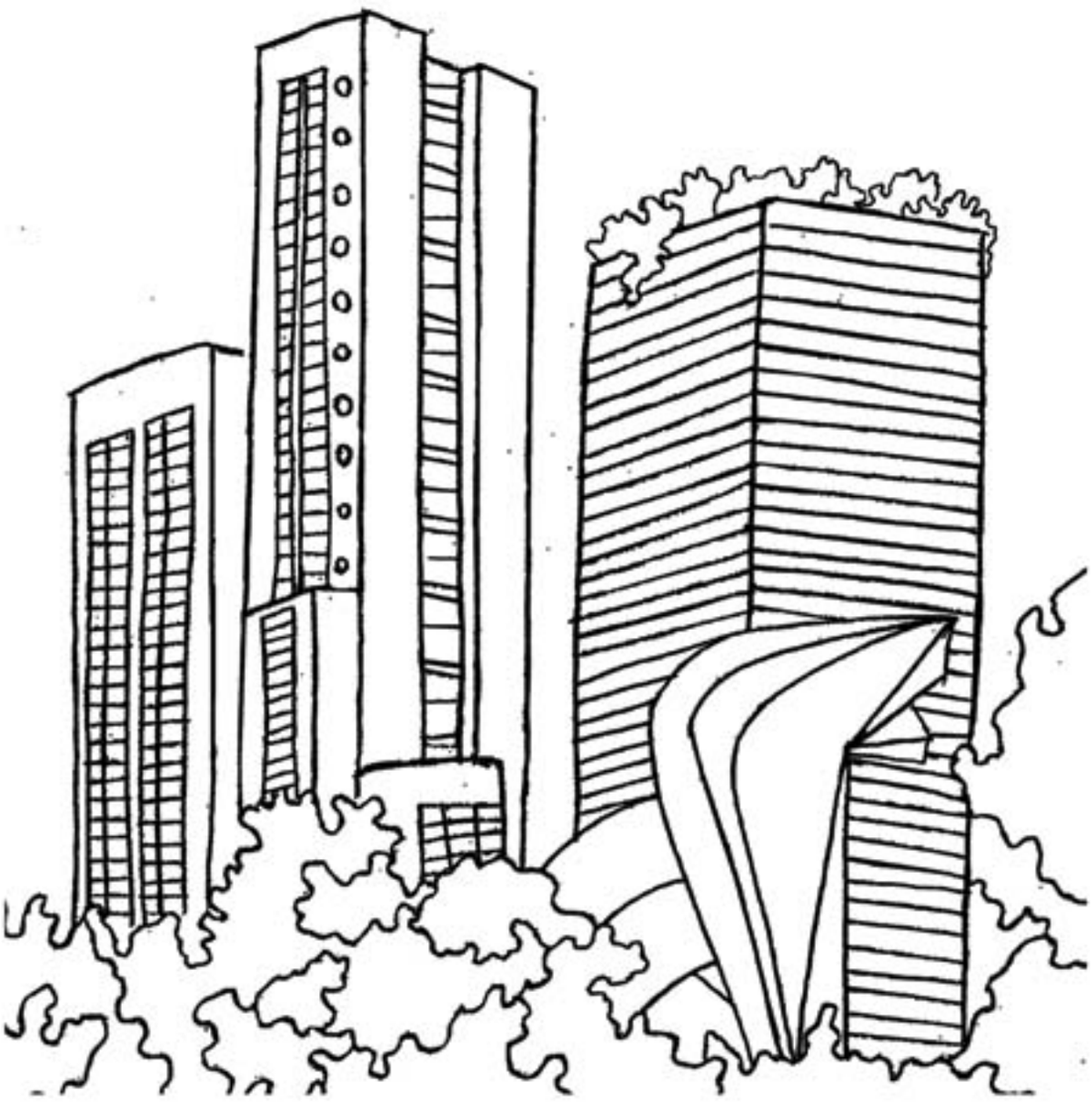
It became evident that, with its emphasis on different dimensions, sustainability generated significant expectations, and it was presented as an antidote for the majority of the most destructive impacts of the global development process, both in urban and rural settings. Thus, we saw the emergence of a new way of thinking about the multiple relationships established between the different dimensions of sustainability with the purpose of identifying deficiencies and formulating long-term responses to the benefit of society (Aguilar, 2013b: 25).

However, one initial problem with the SD concept has to do with the different emphases associated with it, which often distort its multidimensional perspective. It is common for the concept to be related only to the preservation of the natural capital (e.g. natural resources and ecosystems), to more specific aspects, such as the environmental footprint, or to a priority focus on the satisfaction of social needs. In other cases, it is only related to maintaining a certain level of productive activity. It is evident that this circumstance leads to partial interpretations where the perspective of the other dimensions is lost, a situation that only leads to ambiguous and vague definitions (Satterthwaite, 1999: 7-8; United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 1996: 421).

2 Daly, H. (1990), "Sustainable growth: An impossibility theorem", *Development,* 3/4; P. Ehrlich & A. Ehrlich (1989), "How the rich can save the poor and themselves", en *Pacific Asian Journal of Energy*, 3: 53-63.

One important aspect is that little attention is paid to the socio-environmental process that lies behind the most serious environmental problems (see Chapter 2). In other words, behind a certain resource consumption pattern there are social actors that exert pressure and determine the level of impact on the environment. The discourse around sustainability must not consider society as a homogenous whole; it is necessary to examine the differences between social groups, both in terms of their socio-economic condition and their access to resources, as well as their contribution to the degradation of the environment. We cannot deny social inequalities and fail to address the power relationships between the different social actors involved (Rogers, 2008: 66-67).

The interest in SD necessarily generates tensions in the process of maintaining a balance between the different dimensions it consists of. It is important to know how to resolve these tensions, for example, between economic growth, social equity, environmental preservation, and institutional forms and policies, because the different actors and institutions have the capacity to formulate and implement certain policies and not to implement others, that is, to adopt a strategic selectivity that may prioritize competitiveness and the entrepreneurial perspective over environmental sustainability and the quality of life of the poorest (Gibbs and Krueger, 2007: 102-103).



Urban sustainable development: different angles

During the 1990s, there were several compelling reasons that led to the need to address the issue of SD linked to cities. In the context of accelerated urbanization in developing countries, the adoption of sustainable urban development (SUD) policies was deemed urgent. It became evident that cities largely contributed to modifying environmental conditions and urban centers were the agents of many of the most important bio-geo-chemical changes. It became clear that the main problem of sustainability is related to the deficient functioning of cities. In fact, cities represent the predominant social habitat. Therefore, if our concern has to do with the sustainability of the planet, then we need to focus on the sustainability of cities.

Cities stand out for at least three main reasons. The first is that, at present, one half of the world's population lives in cities, and the trend is that this demographic concentration will increase in the short and mid-term, in addition to the fact that a significant proportion of this population lives in conditions of poverty. Second, urban centers concentrate a significant number of productive activities, which includes most manufacturing activities and the generation of contaminating industrial waste. Third, the demands generated by the presence of the middle and upper classes that live in urban centers create a strong pressure on natural resources, which produces a large amount of waste and generates a high proportion of greenhouse gases (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2003: 244).

The 1992 Rio de Janeiro Summit led to the adoption of the so-called Local Agenda 21, which outlined the basis for local-led actions for urban centers. With it, sustainability almost instantly became a universal guideline for urban development plans that suggested cooperation between different government offices to address the complex and multidisciplinary nature of a possible and sustainable urbanization. Sustainability seemed to provide a better path to protect the environment and regain a certain quality of life on the individual and community levels. The sustainable city emerged as a new paradigm in the dark landscape of the urbanism of neoliberal times (Brand and Thomas 2005: 1).

Ever since then, there has been a proliferation of interpretations of the definition of the term sustainable urbanization, and multiple efforts have been made to conceptualize and operationalize its principles in the process of planning and constructing cities. However, in practice, there has been no consensus or a clear definition. In simple terms, a sustainable city is one that is *environmentally sustainable, socially fair and economically viable*. However, the problem is that sustainability is an integrating concept that involves multiple dimensions interrelated in a very complex manner, many of them valued subjectively: the meaning of *the fair or the economically viable,* a situation that makes it difficult to agree on priorities, objectives and strategies. One way or another, this interdisciplinary quality is the distinctive trait of this approach to sustainability.

On the other hand, one of the most important arguments in connection with sustainable urbanization claims that cities will never achieve sustainability, because they depend on the import of foods and energy, both from distant and close ecosystems. Therefore, the approach to reducing the environmental impact of urban centers would require intra and extra-urban actions that reduce the transfers of environmental problems to other ecosystems, which is virtually impossible (Satterthwaite, 1999: 82).

Thus, the shift toward a *sustainable city* must be seen in the context of a sustainable society, and in relation to its contribution to sustainable global development, which demands political action on different geographical scales: from the local and urban to the regional and global (Haughton and Hunter, 1994: 26-27). A sustainable city is not a specific entity, *it is not a final state*; it must be seen as a *process that contributes to sustainable global development.*

In order to move toward sustainability, it is necessary to implement urban policies that can establish a balanced link between environmental care, social development (e.g. poverty and urban inequality) and economic development. However, politically speaking, that it something very difficult to achieve in urban contexts with low economic growth, unemployment, inequality and poverty (which is the case of Mexico and other Latin American countries). In cities in emerging countries (but also in those of many advanced countries), the most powerful economic groups make an unequal distribution of the benefits and burdens of development among society. Thus, the number of poor people grows, and situations of widespread inequality, both in the present and the future, become endemic (Haughton and Hunter, 1994: 26-27; Satterthwaite, 1999: 82).

It is essential for sustainable urbanization to be understood as the *balanced* interaction between economic growth (see Chapter 3), social development (see Chapter 2) and environmental protection (see Chapter 4). Urban policy must achieve this balance between the three dimensions, with effective regulatory frameworks (see Chapter 5), and with no priority whatsoever assigned to any of the different dimensions. For example, the neoliberal policy shows a keen interest in the *glamour* of being economically competitive, urban renewal, large infrastructure projects or attracting new businesses, without assigning the same weight to aspects such as the modification of consumption patterns, recycling of urban waste or the legitimate reduction of poverty and social inequality.

It is necessary to consider that, generally speaking, cities *are not valid environmental management units*; they are not autonomous entities that can become sustainable through endogenous change processes. It has become evident that urban centers not only relate to their immediate *hinterland* but, in the current context, are intensely linked to national and international networks and flows of trade, capital or innovations. The global dynamics of urban development tends to weaken and reduce local efforts to advance toward the sustainability of cities (Aguilar, 2013b: 33).

In other words, the city does not constitute a *closed system*, and it exerts a strong environmental pressure in broader geographical contexts. The appropriate *scale* of analysis of sustainability, but all the area of influence reached by the environmental footprint and exchanges of supplies and waste.

It is advisable not to make a rhetorical use of the concept of sustainability (especially by the public and entrepreneurial sectors), which tends to label and justify as "sustainable" a wide range of actions different in nature, forgetting about the multidimensional essence of the concept (Aguilar and Vieyra, 2009: 192-193). Local authorities must *secure* the advancement toward sustainability through policies, laws, and/or regulations that point in the right direction; this is particularly important for Latin America, where the governance factor of the urban system often fails, not only from the standpoint of handling the relationships between social actors, but especially in the application of the formal rules of the institutional and normative framework of the local government (Winchester, 2006: 8; see Chapter 5).

In order to go beyond the discourse, the concept of sustainability must be translated into a *multidimensional* model that allows for the generation of orderly, mutually agreed, hierarchical and quantifiable urban development policies, based on *operational instruments* applicable to different spatial and temporal scales. The model and key instruments proposed in this book are shown in Figure I.1 and Table I.1, and are explained in detail in the following section.

The dimensions of sustainability

In this book, sustainable urban development is understood as a *guiding principle* for public policy that is multidimensional in nature, and not as an ideal state to be achieved as quickly as possible. The dimensions we consider strategic are the social, economic, environmental, political, demographic, mobility, inclusion and institutional dimensions, as well as that on access to urban opportunities. These dimensions are equally important; they are not only closely interrelated, but also overlap, and they are presented here in a separate fashion to limit them as *analytical categories* (see Figure I.1).

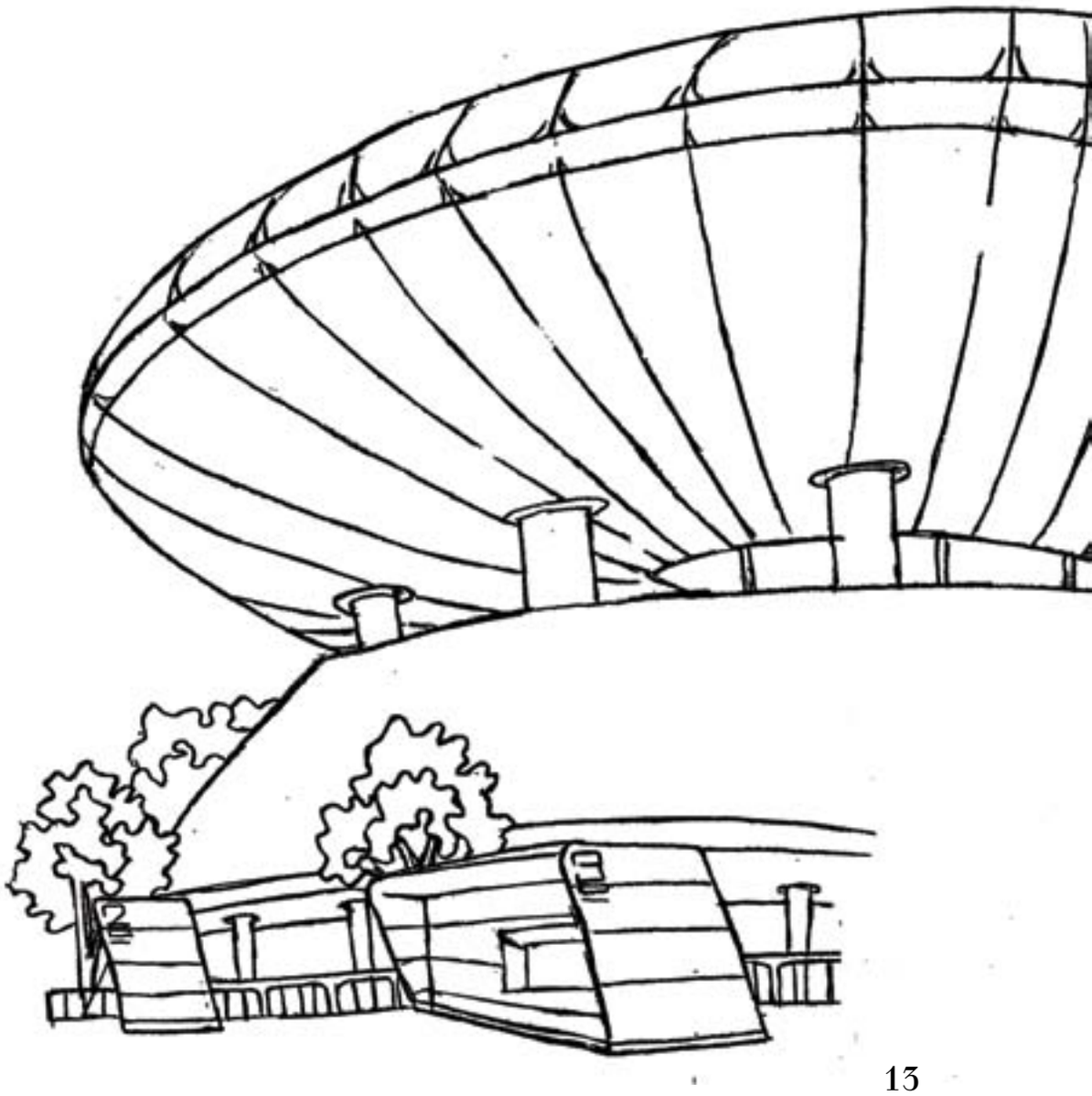


Figure I.1

STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL

- POPULATION, ACTIVITIES SCALES AND TIME
- ENERGY, TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING
- SOLID WASTE
- ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTS
- COMPACT CITY
- METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENTS

MOBILITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO URBAN

- MOBILITY INEQUALITY
- LABOR MOBILITY
- EVERYDAY MOBILITY
- INTRA-METROPOLITAN MIGRATION

INSTITUTIONS

- FORMAL
- NFORMAL: VALUES, ATTITUDES
- EXEMPLARY CHANGE AGENTS

POLITICAL

- INSTITUTIONAL CAPITAL
- LEGAL FRAMEWORK
- CAPACITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: FINANCE, PLANNING, TAX COLLECTION

POPULATION

- GROWTH
- AGE STRUCTURE
- AGING
- TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION
- SEGREGATION
- FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS
- MIGRATION

SOCIAL

- POVERTY AND INEQUALITY
- HEALTH AND EDUCATION
- WATER, SEWAGE SYSTEMS AND ELECTRICITY
- COMPUTER, INTERNET, MOBILE PHONE
- INSECURITY AND VIOLENCE
- VACANT HOMES

ECONOMIC

- DYNAMICS AND SPECIALIZATION
- EMPLOYMENT
- COMPETITIVENESS

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY
- DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

SOURCE: OWN, BASED ON DRAKAKIS, 1995.

The earliest direct reference to this conceptual approach is Drakakis (1995). However, we differ from it in two major aspects –the most important factors in each dimension fit into the Mexican context, but we have added two dimensions:

i. Mobility, inclusion and access to urban opportunities, and

ii. Institutions (*e.g.* incentive systems, norms, regulations, values, traditions, laws, beliefs, power relationships, cultural practices and interests that limit, both formally and informally, the interaction and behavior of individuals and public and private organizations).

The first dimension is key in the case of large cities in developing countries, which usually pay significant costs in terms of traffic jams, severe spatial imbalances between the workplace and housing, lack of land use planning and an accelerated aging process (*e.g.* the main cities in Mexico, notably Mexico City). The second dimension has proven key in the process of triggering any development process (Arellano and Lepore, 2009; Dellepiane, 2010).

We have translated the general conceptual model (see Figure I.1) into key elements of policies for sustainable cities (see Table I.1). These elements also correspond to the reality and the development priorities of Mexican cities, but are highly likely to coincide with those in different Latin American countries. We have identified five purposes of the highest level, four fundamental public policy instruments and five evaluation criteria to measure the advancement of sustainable urban development policies.

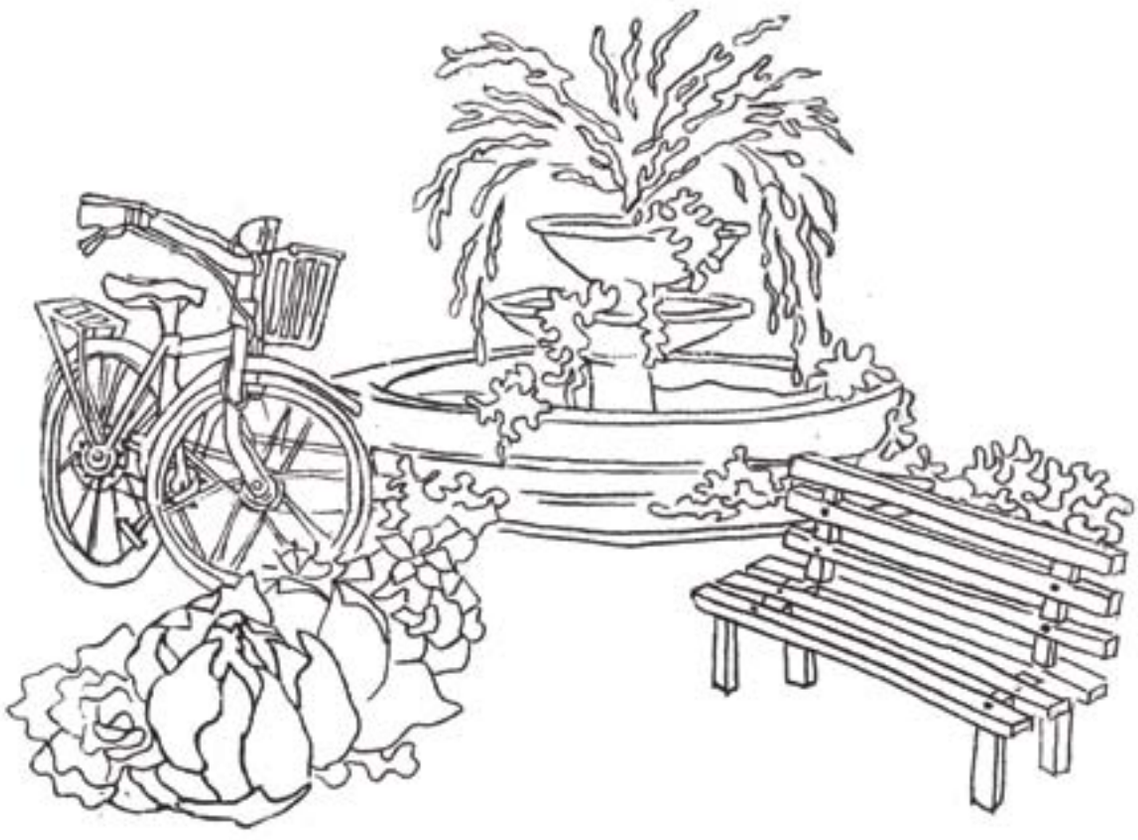


Table I.1

KEY ELEMENTS OF POLICIES FOR

SUSTAINABLE CITIES

PURPOSES

1. REDUCE (MULTIDIMENSIONAL) POVERTY
2. REDUCE INEQUALITY
3. MAKE A RATIONAL USE OF NATURAL CAPITAL AND RESOURCES
4. FOSTER LOW-CARBON ECONOMIC GROWTH
5. GENERATE AND INCREASE ACCESS TO DECENT (QUALITY) EMPLOYMENT
6. ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

INSTRUMENTS

1. QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SERVICES
2. LAND USE CONTROL
3. LOCAL PUBLIC FINANCE
4. URBAN-METROPOLITAN LAWS AND REGULATIONS

EVALUATION CRITERIA

1. EFFICIENCY (COST-BENEFIT)
2. EQUITY (IN TERMS OF ACCESS OR CONDITIONS)
3. EFFECTIVENESS (HOW)
4. TIMING (WHEN) 5. TERRITORIAL SCALES (WHERE)

SOURCE: OWN

The highest level Purposes are the following:

i. Reduce poverty;

ii. Reduce inequality;

iii. Make a rational use of natural capital and resources;

iv. Foster low-carbon economic growth; and

v. Increase access to urban opportunities. On the other hand, the central policy instruments we propose are:

i. Quality and inclusive public services;

ii. Land use control;

iii. Strong and orderly local public finance; and,

iv. Urban-metropolitan laws and regulations.

Finally, the criteria to evaluate achievements in connection with the guiding principle for sustainable urban development are:

i. Efficiency (cost-benefit relationship in a broad sense);

ii. Equity (*e.g.* access, use, conditions);

iii. Effectiveness (the contribution of strategies to achieving the highest level purposes: the *how*);

iv. Timing (opportunity and duration of public policies: the *when*); and

v. Territorial scales (the partial scale of application of policies: the *where*).

As is clearly evident, the definition of a sustainable urban development conceptual model and the key elements that make it operational (purpose, instruments and evaluation criteria) involve a theoretical and political stance. We take care of that. We are open to debate and also to suggestions to improve our proposal.

The Montevideo Consensus on population and development

As regards the issue of population and sustainability in Latin America, one of the most important documents is the *Montevideo Consensus*. From August 12 to 15, 2013, the first meeting of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Montevideo, Uruguay. This Conference revolved around two central issues:

i. Outline a post-2014 Plan of Action, based on the achievements made over the last 20 years in the area of population and sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean; and

ii. Identify the fundamental measures to accelerate development in the region, with a focus on regional emerging issues in the area of population and development, human wellbeing and dignity, and their sustainability.

Among the most important conclusions of the conference, we find that, despite the significant achievements made by the region in the promotion, protection and guarantee of human rights over the last 20 years, these efforts have not trickled down to all individuals and, while economic and social inclusion policies have increased opportunities and wellbeing, many persons continue to live in extreme poverty conditions, facing huge inequalities deriving from deeply-rooted historical patterns and new forms of discrimination that limit the full exercise of their rights. At the same time, it is recognized that preserving our planet and its ecosystems is fundamental to achieve a *fair balance* between the economic, social and environmental needs of current and future generations.

On the other hand, it is recognized that population dynamics influence human development opportunities.[3] Since they are sensitive to public policy, it is key to establish a framework for their planning aimed at sustainable development in its three pillars: social, economic and environmental (ECLAC, 2013: 5)

The *Montevideo Consensus* defines ten priority measures to be integrated into the population and development agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean beginning in 2015 (ECLAC, 2013: 7-27):

a) Full integration of population dynamics into sustainable development with equality and respect for human rights.

b) Recognize the rights, needs, responsibilities and requirements of girls, boys, adolescents and youth.

c) Recognize population aging, social protection requirements and the socio-economic challenges it involves.

d) Promote universal access to sexual and reproductive health services.

e) Guarantee gender equality.

f) Recognize international migration and the protection of the human rights of all migrants.

3 For example, growth and growth decline, changes in age structures, urbanization, migration and change in households and family structures, territorial distribution.

g) Formulate strategies to fight territorial inequality, vulnerability and spatial exclusion.

h) Protect and respect indigenous peoples, promoting their rights and interculturalism.
i) Integrate afro-descendants, fight racism and racial discrimination and guarantee the enforcement of their rights.

j) Strengthen frameworks for the implementation of the future regional agenda on population and sustainable development.

k) A permanent follow-up on the advancement of the regional agenda.

In order to promote the implementation of these measures, a request was made to include them in the strategic plans of the different organizations, funds and programs of the UN agencies, as well as in agreements reached with countries in the region in the following years. All of this is helping to bring attention to the concern over population and sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sustainability in public policy instruments in Mexico[4]

The use and the practical application of the term sustainability in public policy instruments are closely linked to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Since the 1983-1988 period, public policy in our country has been led by the National Development Plan (NDP). In it, the term *sustained* is used with an emphasis on the country's growth and economic stability. In the 1989-1994 Plan, it is identified as the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems. It was only in the 1995-2000 Plan that the term *sustainable development* was explicitly introduced and became a programmatic objective.

Between 2001 and 2006, this same expression appears in different strategies as an *adjective* of economic growth to refer to the preservation and rational use of natural resources. The 2007-2012 NDP distinguishes the human dimension from the environmental dimension in the process of development by introducing the term *sustainable human development,* the aim of which is to create an atmosphere for the multiplication of opportunities for all and the expansion of opportunities for future generations. Another term that appears is that of *environmental sustainability*, which is used to refer to the efficient and rational management of natural resources to improve the population's current wellbeing, without compromising the quality of life of future generations. Finally, in the 2013-2018 NDP, sustainable and comprehensive development is cited as essential for the achievement of the country's goals: different strategies recognize the importance of the natural capital, environmental goods and services for the development of countries, and the population's wellbeing.

4 The references cited in this section are: DOF, 1983; PR, 1995; PR, 2001; PR, 2007; PR, 2013; PEF, 1995; CONAPO, 2001, CONAPO, 2008, CONAPO, 2014.

In the field of demographic planning, the term *sustainable development* first appeared in the 1995-2000 National Population Program (NPP), which recognized that people's quality of life cannot be detached from the quality of the environment, and also that it is possible to have an impact on both dimensions through a territorial distribution of the population that is consistent with the availability of natural resources and the quality of the environment. The 2001-2006 NPP followed the same direction and recognized the need to influence sustainability by harmonizing growth and the population's territorial distribution in order to improve the quality of life of Mexicans.

The 2008-2012 NPP maintained the same approach of the two previous plans: it proposed the geographical distribution of the population based on the potential for sustainable development in the territory, promoting urban-regional systems and fostering the rational use of natural resources and the preservation of the environment. The 2014-2018 PNP highlights the importance of promoting the territorial distribution of the population by building local capacities and building infrastructure to generate productive chains, integrate excluded territories and lead the urbanization process in safe and sustainable directions.

In Mexico, sustainability at the level of the discourse and programs has been present in the main national development and demographic planning instruments for at least two decades, and ever since its inclusion, the terms *sustained* and *sustainable* have been used interchangeably. However, it is important to note that these concepts have different implications and, therefore, consensus must be reached on the use of one or the other.

As far as public policy instruments are concerned, it is necessary to reach an agreement on the conceptualization of the term *sustainability*, as well as its meaning in terms of specific and horizontal coordinated actions in order to avoid rigid and too fragmented policies. The relationship between demographic policy and sustainability is a typical example of a relationship that must address economic growth, the creation of employment, reducing poverty and inequality and environmental care. All of it in a fair and balanced context.

In the use of the term *sustainability*, we can observe an evolution that favors the comprehension of the complexity of the concept. This has led to the denomination or separation of the different dimensions of the process (the human and the environmental). Nevertheless, while this distinction is useful for purposes of assigning powers and competencies of the public administration, it is necessary to reflect as to whether this has fostered the design and implementation of policies by sector, as opposed to coordination and the generation of synergies (*e.g.* public and private actions) that would strengthen the capacities of the population in the management of the territory.

From the perspective of demographic planning, the most explored facet of the relationships between population and sustainability is the one that corresponds to the territorial distribution of the population (see Chapter 1). Without a doubt, that interrelationship is close and cross-cutting to government actions and requires coordination between the different sectors of the public administration and the different population sectors for the creation of sustainable employment, migration and residency options, something that, in turn, requires going beyond management by sectors.

It is necessary to reflect on the meaning of sustainability based on the singularities of developing countries. And, in particular, on the associations between economic growth and sustainable development in the context of a globalized market economy, as well as on how this translates into strategies to promote competitiveness and productivity in the region that improve the wellbeing of the population, beyond conventional income measures.

Document structure

The document is divided into five chapters and a brief final comment. The first chapter explores the relationship between *population distribution and sustainable development.* The conceptual starting point is the interaction between population and environment. It then analyzes recent trends in the distribution of the population in Mexico (which is predominantly concentrated in cities), and ends with strategic public policy recommendations. After establishing the country's population concentration context, chapter two shifts the focus to *sustainable urban development.* It begins with a review of the main ideas and concepts on this elusive concept and, after defining its profile, it outlines an agenda of recommendations in very different areas, with an emphasis on the most important ones for Mexico.

The third chapter focuses on the *economic dimension*. It establishes a conceptual link between the idea of competitiveness and sustainable urban development, to then evaluate competitive performance in the national urban system and link urban competitiveness to energy use and sustainability. This chapter, like the previous ones, ends with key public policy recommendations. The fourth chapter focuses on the *environment, poverty and natural resources* link. It begins by examining the relationship between population and the use of resources, which reveals the environmental impact of the population. It delves deeper into the meaning of resources as natural capital and highlights the complex interactions between environment, poverty and use of natural resources. Finally, it presents innovative proposals in connection with the most appropriate scales for the implementation of sustainable development policies.

After a review of the demographic, social (in its broadest sense), economic and environmental dimensions, the fifth chapter focuses on four key recommendations in the area of sustainability for local governments, which are considered here as key change agents to advance sustainable urban development. These recommendations are:

i. Establish national and regional programs for the training, supervision, evaluation and certification of municipal treasurers and urban planners;

ii. Implement a national land-use planning strategy;

iii. Integrate the demographic perspective into urban and regional planning, and

iv. Implement regional strategies to promote the creation of metropolitan authorities.

The text concludes with a final comment that summarizes our stance in connection with sustainable cities in Mexico, which could also be applicable to different countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. At the end, we present the bibliography consulted for the preparation of the text.