



# Civil Society and Sustainability

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## Outline

- Sustainable Development
- Civil Society
- Sustainable Development and Civil Society
- Forms and Methods of Participation



# Sustainable Development

Definition in „**Our common future**“:

“Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

*Source: WCED (ed.; 1987): Our Common Future. Oxford, New York*



## Central Elements of Sustainable Development

- **Integration of different dimensions:** Ecological, social, cultural and economic aspects are taken into account in an integrative way.
- **Justice:** Sustainable development quests for
  - intragenerational justice: distributive justice between the North and the South, the rich and the poor.
  - intergenerational justice: equalization between today's generations and future generations.
- **Global Orientation:** The analysis of the problems of unsustainability and their solution demand a global orientation.
- **Participation:** Sustainable development is a societal *process of learning, communication/mutual understanding and shaping societies*. It requires the participation of many actors in order to include their ideas and visions.



## Civil Society – different understandings

Michael Edwards distinguishes three different understandings of Civil Society:

- Civil Society as associational life
- Civil Society as the good society
- Civil Society as the public sphere



## Civil Society as Associational Life

*Civil Society as a part of society which is distinct from states and markets (third or non-profit sector):*

Civil Society in this sense contains all associations and networks between the family and the state in which membership and activities are voluntary – formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labor unions, political parties, churches and other religious groups, professional and business associations, community and self-help groups, social movements and the independent media.

➡ Dominant understanding/school



# Civil Society as the Good Society

*Civil Society as a society that is strong and civil:*

A desirable social order or self-image of modernity defined in normative terms like tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, trust, cooperation, freedom and democracy.



# Civil Society as the Public Sphere

*Civil Society as the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration:*

A non-legislative, extra-juridical, public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated.



## Civil Society – an integrated approach

- Each of the three perspectives has a great deal to offer.
- The relationships between civil society in each of its forms are reciprocal.
- All models are each incomplete and an integrated approach is necessary:

*Civil Society as a goal to aim for (good society), a means to achieve it (associational life) and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means (public sphere).*



## Civil Society and Sustainability

Sustainable development is a societal *process of learning, communication/mutual understanding and shaping societies*. It requires the participation of many actors in order to include their ideas and visions.

➔ Sustainable development requires a strong associational life in a functioning public sphere to achieve sustainable societies:

- **Associational life:** participation of different groups/engagement for sustainability
- **Public sphere:** public spaces for communication about sustainability
- **Good society:** goal of sustainable development (shared by the whole society)



## Forms and Methods of Participation

- Associations and NGOs
- Round Tables
- Stakeholder Dialogue
- Consensus Conference
- Future Conference
- e-participation
- Citizen Forum
- Local Agenda 21
- ...



## Some Preconditions for Participation

- Absence of poverty and inequalities
- Guaranteed independence of associational life and the public sphere
- Free flow of information
- Politics that encourage more participation
- ...



# Thank you for your attention!

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