



Episode 7 – What is a Sustainable City

Welcome readers, stakeholders and associates alike to SmartWatt Weekly's first sustainable cities series. Over the next few weeks, we will delve into how sustainability is incorporated in cities across the world and the various facets that must be taken into consideration for sustainable development. We will explore the depth and breadth of sustainable elements holistically and reveal SmartWatt's own sustainable city index. Without further ado lets jump right in!

Sustainability: probably the ultimate buzzword in the last five years. According to the website English Stack Exchange, usage of the word sustainable has grown 3 orders of magnitude in 2012 from 1960. But really what does sustainable mean? Let's examine the word's etymology and get down to the gist of it. In an ecological context, sustainability first appeared in dictionaries in 1972, however, it's root words are much older. In 1965, the term "defensible" had the meaning of "capable of being continued at a certain level." There are many synonyms for sustainable, such as maintainable or endurable however they don't quite capture the connotation or context for our purposes.

Traditionally, the term sustainability was used to describe the function of natural systems, maintenance of diversity and generation of all needs for ecological balance to ensue. Our modern standard of living necessitates the consumption of resources at an alarming rate and this is truer now than ever before. This rate of consumption is propelled by the rise in global population and the urbanization boom, where more people are moving to city centers and leaving the countryside behind. Thus, our highly-urbanized lifestyles and our consumerist culture implore the use of more power to keep our streets and civic buildings lit, ensure our appliances are running, and to heat and cool our lives. Not to mention the industrial sector, which consumes a significant amount of power, and releases substantial greenhouses gasses, all to feed our commercial appetites.

Sustainability considers how to live in harmony with the natural world around us and to protect it from decline and decay. Sustainable development is a matter of optimization, where we attempt to utilize resources efficiently, maintain modernity, stimulate progress and minimize damage to mother earth. Emphasis is on balancing the fine line between competing needs: technological and economic progress in one hand and the consequence of ecological harmony in the other. Ultimately, sustainability is about protecting the resources of our planet and ensuring that the generations to come have the same chance of advancement as we do now.

In 2005, the World Summit on Social Development recognized three core pillars: environmental, economic and social development. These pillars define and contribute to the philosophy and social science of sustainable development. Also help guide our efforts in tackling the concerns our modern society faces. These pillars are the foundation and guiding principles for the solution-oriented thought process.

In the weeks ahead, we will uncover the research we have conducted on sustainable cities, and shed light on the pillars we explored for sustainable city development. Integration and holistic application buttress our research efforts and we hope you as the reader will engage us with your opinions and sentiments on sustainability. We'll leave you with the words of the first person to walk on both the north and south poles, Robert Swan: "The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."