



Envisioning the Future: Sustainable Models for Rural Communities

Envisioning the future: introduction

Arguably, one of the most critical tasks facing the global population today is the creation of a shared vision for a sustainable future within the biophysical constraints of the real world. Towards this end researchers in virtually every discipline have been working hard to define 'sustainability' within the bounds of their particular fields. The resulting plethora of research findings publicised through books, conference papers and journal articles has gradually led to a notional international consensus on the 'core' interrelated aspects of sustainability, social, economic and environmental, and the associated indicators of sustainability (Jenks, 1996). However, when it comes to applying sustainable principles to local conditions, policy-makers at national, regional and local levels have encountered real difficulty in understanding the multi-dimensional dynamics of the existing heterogeneous condition, let alone finding mechanisms to steer change towards integrated sustainable futures. Despite these very real methodological problems the concept of 'sustainability' has become a kind of politically correct 'meta-fix'. Indeed, the word 'sustainable' has become so potent that everyone involved in change has now to declare, whether reality bears this out or not, that they are