

TEXTO- SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable urban development: it's time cities give back

TESIS DEL
AUTOR

With dwindling natural resources to feed cities, urban planning needs to be regenerative from the start

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Our understanding of cities, in both theory and practice, is at a turning point. Urban areas across the world face complex and rapidly evolving challenges.

But what are the changes we need in order to transform our cities into liveable habitats? What shape does a city that inspires and engages citizens, governments and the public sector and private sectors to work together actually take? Is "sustainable urban development" still the best guiding concept for policy makers, urban planners, architects and investors in building the cities of the future?

Preguntas
Retóricas

The classic definition of sustainability comes from the Brundtland report of 1987: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." But the term has since become like a rubber band that can be stretched in all directions. Whatever the interpretation, one thing is clear: Sustainable development is not enough anymore. This is because "the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is already compromised.

ARGUMENTOS

Humanity is eating into the natural capital of the planet and eroding its resilience when it should be living off the income it regenerates. When we consider how degraded our ecosystems already are, there is far less to sustain today than there was 20 years ago. Not surprisingly, cities and urban areas are major contributors to this trend.

Over 400 million people in Africa currently live in urban areas, a number that will triple by 2050. Rapid urbanisation in many industrialising countries can be traced to push factors such as displacement due to violent conflict and a worsening of livelihoods due to natural disasters, including climate change. The mass migration into cities can also be attributed to the attractive pull factors of urban areas from improved access to food, healthcare and education and perceived prospects of a better life.

Ejemplo

We can trace the increasing resource intensity of the urbanisation process back to the industrial revolution. Since then, disregard for resource generation and use has significantly contributed to climate change and the loss of soil carbon, natural fertility of farmland and biodiversity all over the world.

An overwhelming share of charcoal produced in rural areas in Africa is transported to urban areas to be used for cooking. This is one of countless examples illustrating the dependency of a metropolis on the area outside its borders. Almost everything we touch in a city is manufactured and originally sourced from the hinterland. That is, **most of the raw materials a city absorbs are not generated from inside the city itself but rather from the rest of the planet. It is high time the city gave back.**

Regenerative urban development

A new urban agenda is necessary in ensuring that cities not only become resource-efficient and low carbon-emitting, but go beyond that to positively enhance the ecosystems which provide them with goods and services. The solution lies in thinking beyond the vague and unambitious notion of sustainability and, instead, actively working towards regenerating soils, forests and watercourses. The aim is to improve rather than merely sustaining their currently degraded condition.

This new urban agenda transforms urban areas into regenerative cities that dramatically reduce their dependency on fossil fuels, boost the deployment of renewable energies, reintroduce water to the hydrological cycle and make sewage reprocessing and nutrient capture a central plank of urban waste management. A wide range of technical and management solutions towards this end are already available, but so far implementation has been too slow and too little.

From vision to reality

Enabling policy frameworks constitute the foundation of progressive social and economic development, achieving climate protection goals, and meeting ever-increasing global energy demand. The political environment plays a critical role in enabling businesses to invest in future-just and sustainable technology.

CONCLUSIÓN

Transforming urban infrastructure into regenerative systems consequently requires an integrated approach, coordinated action and policy dialogue. It looks to straddle the public, private and civil society spheres in a multi-stakeholder participatory process. It also asks for a cross-sector approach among authorities.

Fiona Woo is policy officer of climate and energy at the [World Future Council](#). Follow @Good Policies on Twitter. The 3rd annual Future of Cities Forum will provide a platform for multi-sector dialogue on the challenges and opportunities for regenerative urban development. For more information please visit www.futureofcitiesforum.com.
