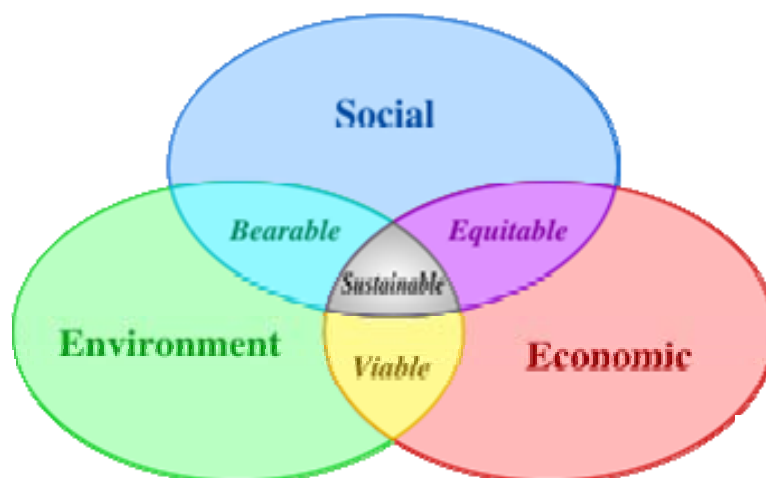


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE

By Audrey Gueho
Schoolhouse Intern, 2009

Climate change, pollution, desertification, poverty, global health issues, endangered species... these are common facts abounding in our daily news. But facing these bad news, we can also hear about renewable energies, environmental protection, reforestation, organic food, microcredit... All these deeds can be gathered in one concept: the **sustainable development**, a realistic but optimistic way of considering future. During the past decades our growth, focusing on economic gain, has caused a lot of damages to people and environment. Today we have to, but above all we can, keep on growing, preserve nature and benefit people at the same time.

The Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) provides the most spread definition of sustainable development: "*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of **needs**, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of **limitations** imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.*" This definition of sustainable development is translated through the following diagram.



Picture credit:
www.ac-nancy-metz.fr

What is important to understand through this definition is that our planet and its resources are limited. Thus a sustainable development is possible only if these resources are protected, the living environment healthy and the wealth well-distributed among people.

The current global issues and their solutions brought through the concept of sustainable development have rightly become a topic of a lot of books, movies, websites... If you want to learn more about this subject, we advise you to look at:

1. *Earth from Above*, the pictures book by the French photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand showing the beauty, complexity and fragility of our planet and visit the website www.yannarthusbertrand.org.
2. *An Inconvenient Truth*, the world-famous documentary on Global Warming by Al Gore, the former US vice-president, winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Peace (more information on www.climatecrisis.net).
3. www.globalissues.org, a comprehensive website about current global social, political, economic and environmental issues.
4. <http://earthday.net/footprint/index.html> to calculate your ecological footprint.
5. www.thegreenguide.com, a National Geographic website helping you to become more eco-friendly for everyday living.
6. <http://greenleapforward.com/>, a popular and cutting-edge blog on energy, technology and environmental policy in China, written by Julian Wong.

At **The Schoolhouse**, we are committed to acting sustainably at our local level, **Mutianyu village** and in our field, **tourism**. Indeed tourist success of the Mutianyu Great Wall section brings wealth and open-mindedness to people but leads to several issues such as environmental damages, waste growth, loss of culture and habits for the villagers... The tourism we stand up for in our village is economically and socially beneficial but also preserves its cultural and natural environment.

More precisely **sustainable tourism** can be defined as all kinds of tourist developments or activities that respect and preserve natural, cultural and social resources on a long term, and that favorably and fairly contribute to economic development and to well-being of people living and working in these areas.

Beyond this corporate conviction, being concretely sustainable is acquired little by little, thanks to big but also small changes and ideas. The following page can give you an idea of how we figure out sustainability at The Schoolhouse.

Our social missions:

We provide employment and training to people in our local community, support other local businesses and promote handicrafts. We preferentially hire residents from our own and nearby village. When we transform existing buildings we take care to involve neighbors and local government in our plans.

Sustainable Food Project

Our goal is to serve only local or our own organic products, grown in our kitchen garden or harvested from our trees. We have changed our T-Bone steak from Australian to Chinese in order to reduce energy needed for transportation. No meat is imported anymore. The fish species we serve are not under threat according to International Marine Conservation Society. We serve also many non-animal protein choice.

Concerning our waste...

We have launched a composting program letting us reduce our organic waste and grow our own organic products. We recycle plastic and paper garbage as well as solid toilet tanks. We do not offer pre-packaged amenities or "use&throw" crockery.

Energy policy

We try to reduce as much of our energy consumption as possible thanks to efficient heating, isolation and natural ventilation, and seasonal adjustments.

"Community Service Day"

Once a year we take part of cleaning the village and donate part of our gross receipts of the day to the Mutianyu Community Center.

Environmental protection

All our restaurants, rental homes and hotel started off as existing buildings which means we did not make our ecological footprint worse. To protect local biodiversity our garden plantings are limited to native flora long cultivated by our neighbors.

And water?

Most of our rental homes have showers only. We avoid chemical cleaning products as an operational principle. We change linens only weekly unless guests have soiled.

Local culture and ways of life

We operate a public service website (www.mutianyugreatwall.net) to inform people about the Great Wall and our village. We publish and sell books relative to the local environment, nature, culture, history, people and traditions.

Thanks to these initiatives, we have obtain four green stars on Eco Hotels of the World!

More information about these initiatives and Eco Hotels of the World on:

www.theschoolhouseatmutianyu.com
www.chinacountrysidehotels.com
www.ecohotelsoftheworld.com

The Schoolhouse Curriculum

We have created three programs for children teaching them about the importance of eco-friendliness and sustainability.

But sustainable tourism is also the result of what tourists do during their travel! To become a **responsible traveler** you can follow the advices given by the World Tourism Organization:

THE RESPONSIBLE TOURIST AND TRAVELER

Travel and tourism should be planned and practiced as a mean of individual and collective fulfillment. When practiced with an open mind, it is an irreplaceable factors of self-education, mutual tolerance and for learning about legitimate differences between peoples and cultures and their diversity.

Everyone has a role to play creating responsible travel and tourism. Governments, business and communities must do all they can, but as a guest you can support this in many ways to make a difference:

**Open your mind to other cultures and traditions – it will transform your experience, you will earn respect and be more readily welcomed by local people. Be tolerant and respect diversity – observe social and cultural traditions and practices.*

**Respect human rights.* Exploitation in any form of conflicts with the fundamental aims of tourism. The sexual exploitation of children is a crime punishable in the destination or at the offender's home country.

**Help preserve natural environments.* Protect wildlife and habitats and do not purchase products made from endangered plants or animals.

**Respect cultural resources.* Activities should be conducted with respect for the artistic, archaeological and cultural heritage.

**Your trip can contribute to economic and social development.* Purchase local handicrafts and products to support the local economy using the principles of fair trade. Bargaining for goods should reflect and understanding of a fair wage.

**Inform yourself about the destination's current health situation and access to emergency and consular service prior to departure and be assured that your health and personal security will not be compromised.* Make sure that your specific requirements (diet, accessibility, medical care) can be fulfilled before you decide to travel this destination.

**Learn as much as possible about your destination and take time to understand the customs, norms and traditions.* Avoid behavior that could offend the local population.

**Familiarize yourself with the laws so that you do not commit any act considered criminal by the law of the country visited.* Refrain from all trafficking in illicit drugs, arms, antiques, protected species and products or substances that are dangerous or prohibited by national regulations.

Source: www.world-tourism.org

I hope this short discussion has helped you to better understand what is thought behind the name "sustainability". Thank you for your interest!

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT QUIZ

1. Sustainable development is primarily an issue of investment in developing countries.

- True
- False

Answer: false, it's much more far-reaching!

2. When was the concept of sustainable development first evoked?

- In 1972
- In 1987
- In 1992

Answer: in 1972, during the Earth Summit of Rio de Janeiro.

3. Sustainable development is synonymous with conservation of the environment.

- True
- False

Answer: false, it is just one dimension beside the social and economic ones.

4. An objective of sustainable development is ending the use of non-renewable resources.

- True
- False

Answer: false, it is using them in an efficient way.

5. What is the leading cause of death in the world?

- Hunger
- Unsafe drinking water
- AIDS

Answer: unsafe drinking water.

6. If all of the Earth's inhabitants consumed resources at the same rate as inhabitants from developed countries, how many planets would be needed to meet the entire population's needs?

- 2
- 3
- 5

Answer: 3.

7. Which of these modes of transportation is the most polluting?

- Plane
- Automobile
- Train
- Bicycle

Answer: plane.

8. How many animal species are currently threatened with extinction?

- 163
- 1,630
- 16,300

Answer: 16,300.

9. At current consumption rates, when will we exhaust the world's known reserves of petrol?

- In 20 years
- In 40 years
- In 60 years

Answer: in 40 years.

10. What is the average quantity of waste per inhabitant per year in developed countries?

- 300 kg/660 pounds
- 500 kg/1100 pounds
- 750 kg/1650 pounds

Answer: 500 kg/1100 pounds per year per inhabitant.

Sources: <http://developpementdurable.suez-environnement.com>
www.international.gc.ca