

# Governing Sustainable Cities

A photograph of a group of people on a boat at sunset, with a city skyline in the background. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting the sun is low on the horizon. The people on the boat are silhouetted against the bright sky and water. The city skyline in the background consists of various buildings of different heights, some with lit windows, creating a hazy urban landscape.

**BOB EVANS**  
**MARKO JOAS**  
**SUSAN SUNDBACK**  
**KATE THEOBALD**

# Governing Sustainable Cities

---

*Bob Evans, Marko Joas,  
Susan Sundback  
and  
Kate Theobald*

**earthscan**  
from Routledge

First published by Earthscan in the UK and USA in 2005

For a full list of publications please contact:

Earthscan

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Earthscan is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

Copyright © Bob Evans, Marko Joas, Susan Sundback and Kate Theobald, 2004.

Published by Taylor & Francis.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

#### Notices

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

ISBN: 978-1-84407-169-2 paperback

978-1-84407-168-5 hardback

Typesetting by JS Typesetting Ltd, Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan

Cover design by Ruth Bateson

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Governing sustainable cities / Bob Evans ... [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-84407-169-3 (pbk.) – ISBN 1-84407-168-5 (hardback)

1. City planning—Environmental aspects—Europe. 2. Local government—Europe.
3. Sustainable development—Europe—Citizen participation. I. Evans, Bob, 1947 October 17-

HT169.E85G68 2005

307.1'216'094—dc22

2004019518

# Contents

---

<i>List of Figures, Tables and Boxes</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Acronyms and Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<b>1 'The Level of Governance Closest to the People...'</b>	<b>1</b>
Governing sustainable cities	2
Sustainable cities in Europe	5
The DISCUS Project	7
The chapters	10
<b>2 Government, Governance and Local Sustainability</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction	11
What is 'good' governance?	11
'Good' governance and sustainable development	13
Understanding 'social capital'	14
The elements of social capital	16
The level and nature of social capital	17
Social capital and local sustainable development	18
Understanding 'institutional capital'	20
The interplay between social capital and institutional capital	21
Institutional capacity-building	23
Institutional capital and capacity-building within local government	25
Local government capacity-building as a step towards governance?	27
Capacity-building for urban sustainable development	28
Partnerships and cooperation	30
Local politics and institutional design	30
Defining 'success' in urban sustainability	31
The theoretical model: Explaining the relationship between civil society and local government in the sphere of urban sustainable development	32
<b>3 Meeting the Sustainability Challenge</b>	<b>35</b>
Introduction	35
Areas of progress in the 40 case studies	37
Social equity topics	40

*iv Governing Sustainable Cities*

	Sustainable economy topics	41
	Top 20 cases in the research	43
	Top five cases in Eastern Europe	46
	Top five case studies in Western Europe	49
	Top five case studies in Southern Europe	54
	Top five case studies in Northern Europe	58
	Conclusions	62
<b>4</b>	<b>Institutional Capacity and Social Capacity</b>	<b>65</b>
	Introduction	65
	Institutional capacity	66
	Social capacity	68
	Capacity-building	70
	Top 18 case studies for institutional capacity, social capacity and capacity-building	72
	Top four case studies in Eastern Europe	73
	Top five case studies in Western Europe	75
	Top five case studies in Southern Europe	78
	Top four case studies in Northern Europe	81
	Conclusions	83
<b>5</b>	<b>Local Government and Civil Society</b>	<b>85</b>
	Introduction	85
	Understanding the concept of sustainable development	85
	Relative importance of local government departments	86
	Role of government and civil society in raising awareness of sustainability	86
	‘Partnerships’ between local government and civil society	88
	The responsibility of local governments	91
	Experience of joint sustainability projects between local governments and civil society organizations	96
	Conclusions on local government and civil society relations	99
<b>6</b>	<b>Governing for Sustainability</b>	<b>101</b>
	Introduction	101
	The Developing Institutional and Social Capacities for Urban Sustainability (DISCUS) research questions	101
	Key trends for sustainable development process and progress	103
	Dynamic institutional capacity and sustainable development policy achievement: A model	107
	Conclusions	108
<b>7</b>	<b>An Agenda for Action</b>	<b>117</b>
	Introduction	117
	Local government as a learning organization	117
	Links between departments	118
	Alliances with external agencies	118

Creative policy-making	119
Facilitation and leadership	119
Communication with civil society	119
Environmental awareness as a catalyst	120
Vision and strength	120
Networking between local authorities	120
Multilevel governing	121
<i>Appendix A: DISCUS Fieldwork Methodology</i>	123
<i>References</i>	135
<i>Index</i>	141

# List of Figures, Tables and Boxes

---

## FIGURES

1.1	Contrasting interpretations of governance	3
1.2	Map of the 40 participating cities	9
6.1	Rankings from the qualitative material	104
6.2	Governing and capacity	105
6.3	Governing and capacity-building for sustainable development	105
6.4	Governing and sustainable development policy outcomes	106
6.5	Local government and civil society capacity for sustainable development	107
6.6	Dynamic institutional capacity and sustainable development policy achievement	108
A.1	The research process	124

## TABLES

2.1	Scenarios for different modes of governance and their impact on sustainable development (SD) policy outcome	33
3.1	Environmental topics	38
3.2	Social equity topics	40
3.3	Sustainable economy topics	41
3.4	Top 20 case studies for policy outcomes	44
3.5	‘Averages’ for environmental, economic and social sum indexes in the top 20 case studies	45
4.1	Institutional capacity	66
4.2	Examples of capacity-building	71
4.3	Top 18 case studies for institutional capacity, social capacity and capacity-building	73
5.1	Understanding the concept of sustainable development	86
5.2	Regional classification of importance of local government departments	87
5.3	Support for local ‘partnerships’ among local authority and civil society respondents	89
5.4	Support for local government initiatives and tools to enhance relationships with civil society organizations	89
5.5	Importance of ‘partnerships’	90

5.6	Extent of local authority support for tools and initiatives to enhance relationships	90
5.7	Evaluations of influence from different civil society organizations/groups on sustainable development processes	92
5.8	Estimate of own organization's influence on local sustainable development policies	93
5.9	Ten case studies with organizations showing highest sense of influencing sustainable development policies	94
5.10	Confidence in local government approach to sustainability policy-making	95
5.11	Cases showing highest level of confidence in local government policy-making capacity	95
5.12	Case studies with highest level of civil society activity	97
5.13	Reported activity in local organizational joint projects during 2000–2003	98
A.1	The 40 case studies	126

## BOXES

1.1	The Ten Aalborg Commitments	6
3.1	The 40 case studies	36
3.2	'Innovative' examples of sustainability progress	42
6.1	The relationship between social and institutional capacity, capacity-building measures and sustainable development policy outcomes	102
A.1	Over-representation of respondents in categories, compared to average representation in all 40 cases	132



# Preface

---

Urban local authorities have been some of the most committed institutions working towards sustainable development during the last decade. A survey undertaken by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002 showed that over 6000 local authorities had started Local Agenda 21 or similar planning processes, with their citizens, the aim being to develop strategies for future development that reconcile a good quality of life with the need to reduce the use of natural resources. In 2000, a consortium of European research partners coordinated by ICLEI began to investigate the outcomes of Local Agenda 21 processes in European cities and towns in the framework of a project entitled Local Authorities' Self-Assessment of Local Agenda (LASALA). The project (which analysed some 150 municipalities in a two-stage exercise) identified 24 cases of 'good practice' for sustainability. Although these cases originate from many different countries and thus represent different cultural, political and economic framework conditions, one question that remained unanswered was: are there any common factors and conditions that allow good practice to occur?

To date, there has been a widely accepted assumption amongst both researchers and practitioners that one way of spreading innovation in local policy is through documentation and dissemination of good examples, which are then transferred, adapted and further developed from one place to another. But what if this transfer fails? What if there are preconditions that have to be fulfilled before a local sustainability process can produce tangible results? To answer these questions, the same research partners formed a new consortium and started to look in greater depth at the processes operating within European cities and towns – in particular, considering those that had already been identified as implementing 'good practice' in local sustainability. The project in which this assessment was conducted is entitled Developing Institutional and Social Capacities for Urban Sustainability (DISCUS), and its results are presented in this book.

The DISCUS project contributes to the ongoing debate about the relationship between 'government' and 'governance'; but it has had a further aim: to analyse the links between these processes and sustainable development policy processes. Local governments from across Europe usually consider a participatory approach to governing a town or city as being an integral part of sustainable development. In fact, a majority of the 'good practice' cases are 'successful' in the way that the local authority works together with interest organizations and involves citizens in a dialogue about the future of their municipality. So, is this a contribution to sustainable development?

The common assumption here is that this shift from a top-down ('government') to a more dialogue-oriented ('governance') approach increases awareness, shared responsibility and acceptance among citizens of the necessary, yet so far unpopular, policy steps towards less resource use and better social inclusion. This suggests that at some stage in the future, citizens – encouraged by this shift and led by their local governments – take ownership of their municipality and respond in a spirit of cooperation to the challenge of sustainability. This may sound idealistic and, indeed, it requires a good deal of stepping back from immediate short-term interests for both local government and civil society. For this to happen, certain capacities have to be built up and in place before local 'government' and 'governance' will contribute to more 'sustainability'.

In order to examine and understand the forms of institutional and social capacities that are required for sustainable development policy achievements, the DISCUS fieldworkers undertook research in 40 cities and towns all over Europe. The analysis of the enormous amount of data gathered during the one year of fieldwork confirms that a shift from 'government' to 'governance' is not sufficient to create more sustainable towns and cities. While it is clear that the rules of interaction between local governments and civil society need to be modified in order to prevent the sustainability agenda from running against citizens, rather than taking them on board, strong and self-confident local governments are central in bringing about tangible and long-term results for sustainability.

The 'art' of *Governing Sustainable Cities* is thus to create competent local governments that, in interaction with a highly responsible (and responsive) civil society, apply a form of governing that brings about the most sustainable solutions. Building up the institutional and social capacity needed in order to achieve this goes beyond weekend courses in new public management or an 'environment day' every year. It is a long-term process that includes education and awareness-raising, but also the creation of a new societal attitude of shared responsibility for the public welfare (or the 'common goods'), which at present seems to be a straight contradiction to the current paradigm of individualism and enhanced competition.

However, if there is any 'entrance door' to building up this capacity for 'governing for sustainable development', then it is local government: a local government that has genuine concern – not only for the interests of its elected or professional representatives, but for the 'common good' of its municipality – while at the same time engaging in a continuous local debate with civil society of what the 'common good' of the city actually is. *Governing Sustainable Cities* is about changing local governments and thus local society in order to come to a form of local governing that fertilizes local sustainability. This may sound confusing and, in fact, requires more than just applying a handful of new methods of managing a town or city. However, I hope the DISCUS project and its results can help in clarifying these concepts and their interrelations; certainly, it will outline a number of those 'ingredients' needed to enable more sustainable towns and cities to emerge.

I would like to express my thanks to the DISCUS project consortium – composed of the Sustainable Cities Research Institute at Northumbria University,

Åbo Akademi University, FocusLab srl, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, WWF-UK, and the two consultation partners: the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign and the Regional Environmental Centre – for three years of highly inspiring and often intensive, yet always enjoyable discussion and trustful cooperation. On behalf of this team, my thanks also extend to the group of fieldworkers without whom the data for this book would not exist; our academic Advisory Board and our Panel of Practitioners for their critical feedback and encouragement; and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research Fifth Framework Programme, which largely co-funded the DISCUS project.

Stefan Kuhn

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, European Secretariat,

Freiburg, Germany

DISCUS coordinator

October 2004

# Acknowledgements

---

This book has been written by the authors on behalf of the DISCUS project consortium, and we wish to fully acknowledge the role that the consortium partners have played in planning and undertaking the research upon which this book is based. We also thank them for their valuable contribution to the analysis, which is presented here. Although we emphasize that any faults in the book are the sole responsibility of the authors, we also stress that this book is the end result of a genuine team effort, drawing upon the expertise and experience of our colleagues from across Europe.

During the three years of the DISCUS project, we have been privileged to be part of the DISCUS team, comprising:

- Stefan Kuhn, Gino van Begin, Naomi Luhde-Thompson and Sarah Lahmani (ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, European Secretariat, Freiburg, Germany: project coordinators);
- Marko Joas, Susan Sundback, Maria Nordström and Tove Måtar (Åbo Akademi University, Åbo, Finland: project partner);
- Joao Farinha (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal: project partner);
- Walter Sancassiani (Focus Lab, Modena, Italy: project partner);
- Bob Evans and Kate Theobald (Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK);
- Lucy Young and Ken Webster (WWF-UK, Godalming, Surrey: project partner);
- Anthony Payne (European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, Brussels, Belgium: consultation partner);
- Agata Miazga (Regional Environmental Centre, Szentendre, Hungary: consultation partner).

Their support and friendship throughout this project is most gratefully acknowledged.

The DISCUS project was fortunate to have the support of an academic Advisory Board who provided valuable comment on the research programme and the analysis. Our thanks go to Katarina Eckerberg (Umea University, Sweden), Rudy Lewanski (University of Bologna, Italy) and Yvonne Rydin (London School of Economics, UK). We were also able to consult sustainability practitioners through our Panel of Practitioners in five local authorities: Mikko Jokinen (Turku/Åbo, Finland), Rita Kellner-Stoll (Bremen, Germany), Jamie Saunders (Bradford, UK), Venelin Donchev Todorov (Bourgas, Bulgaria) and

Katerina Tsakmakidou (Kalithea, Rhodes, Greece). Again, we are most grateful for the time and energy that you all devoted to the project.

For the mammoth task of undertaking the fieldwork in 40 towns and cities across Europe, not to mention the gruelling briefing and de-briefing weekends, we are eternally grateful to our team of fieldworkers who were meticulous in their work and thorough in the presentation of the results. Our thanks go to Katuscia Fara, Sarah Lahmani, Montserrat Reus-Marti and Silke Moschitz (ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability); Ille Allsaar and Mart Reimann (Association of Estonian Cities); Irena Brnada (Regional Environmental Centre, Croatia); Richard Muller (Regional Environmental Centre, Slovakia); Ognyan Enev (Regional Environmental Centre, Bulgaria); Magdalena Chitu (Regional Environmental Centre, Romania); Dalia Gineitiene and Elena Talockaite (ECAT, Lithuania); and Maria Nordström (Åbo Akademi University).

Our thanks go to Sara Lilley and Elaine Ryder of the Sustainable Cities Research Institute of Northumbria University for ensuring the smooth running of the project administration and, in particular, the fieldwork. Thanks also to Sara Lilley, Elaine Ryder and George Dobson for all your help in producing the final manuscript of the book. We extend our thanks to Rob Angell, who worked with the team to set up and run the two internet debates, which provided valuable input as the project progressed.

Our thanks also extend to Brian Brown, scientific officer responsible for the project at the European Commission, who has been unfailingly helpful and supportive through the project.

And, finally, thanks are due to the politicians and officers of the 40 towns and cities who agreed to participate in DISCUS. Without your help, this project could not have been completed. We hope that you will find this book an accurate reflection of your input to the project. Thanks again to everyone who helped and supported us during DISCUS and our apologies to any others whom we have omitted.

Bob Evans, Marko Joas, Susan Sundback and Kate Theobald  
October 2004

*The DISCUS research project was co-funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research Fifth Framework Programme, 1998–2002, Thematic Programme: Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development, Key Action: 'City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage', Contract Number EVK-4-2001-00103.*

# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

---

API	Associazione Piccole e Medie Imprese
DISCUS	Developing Institutional and Social Capacities for Urban Sustainability
DUC	Dunkerque Urban Community
EC	European Community
ECAT	Environmental Centre for Administrative Technology, Lithuania
EIA	environmental impact assessment
EMAS	Environmental Management and Audit Scheme
EU	European Union
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
IFOC	local employment agency for sustainable development jobs (Spain)
ISO	International Standards Organization
KLIMP	Nordic Climate Alliance
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LASALA	Local Authorities' Self-Assessment of Local Agenda 21
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REC	Regional Environmental Centre
SD	sustainable development
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SEKO	Swedish eco-municipality network
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SPSS	statistical package for social scientists
SUSCOM	Sustainable Communities in Europe
UBC	Union of Baltic Cities
UDS	<i>Urban Development Strategy</i> (Munich)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

## *Chapter 1*

# ‘The Level of Governance Closest to the People...’

---

Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives... As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development (United Nations, 1992).

This book is about local government and sustainability, and, crucially, it is concerned with understanding how the first can help to deliver the second. More specifically, it is about cities and towns: the need to create more ‘sustainable cities’ reflects the fact that the world’s population is increasingly an urban one, and that in Europe, in particular, the majority of citizens now live in urban areas. Cities are the source of most of our pollution; they consume our non-renewable raw materials; they have substantial ecological footprints – requiring vast areas of land to provide the food, energy, water and natural resources to keep them operating; and, as centres of population, they contain vast disparities between wealth and poverty.

But cities are clearly more than this. They are the heart of our civilization, the primary source of wealth and enterprise, places of inspiring architecture and the great centres of learning, culture and politics. Perhaps most importantly, though, cities are the locus for change and innovation in all of these things, the places where new ideas, concepts and political visions are moulded into life. The very existence of cities demonstrates the past achievements of humankind and its potential for the future. As Raymond Williams observed: ‘This is what men have built, so often magnificently, and is not everything then possible?’ (Williams, 1973). As the city emerged in what is now Europe, so did the political structures and institutions that gave it life and order. The processes of the internal government of Aristotle’s Greek polis were not so very different from Machiavelli’s Italian city state, which, give or take the question of the extension of the franchise, might be seen to be the precursor of 19th-century Birmingham, Lille or Stockholm. The central point, of course, is that it is impossible to disassociate the geographical form and social structure of the city or town from its government. The two go hand in hand. ‘Good’ urban government presumably

results in successful, prosperous and stable cities, whereas ‘poor’ government does not, and while these two designations are in themselves highly contentious and difficult to satisfactorily define, it does seem reasonable to assume that both states of affairs are inexorably linked.

### GOVERNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

However, the scope of this book is not quite so ambitious. We are not seeking to define ‘good’ or ‘bad’ government. Our task is more specific. We wish to examine the veracity of a proposition that is at the heart of the sustainable development agenda, and implicit to the statement quoted at the start of this chapter, which is that *good governance is a precondition for achieving sustainable development – particularly at the local level*. This proposition naturally raises definitional questions. Apart from those relating to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ noted above, a central issue is that of ‘governance’ – what exactly is meant by this, how can it be conceptualized and, most importantly for this book, does it relate in any meaningful way to tangible shifts in public affairs towards what might be regarded as a more sustainable way of life?

Governance is discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters; but, first, we need to emphasize that, as the title of this book suggests, we are actually interested in the process of *governing*. By this we mean that governing encapsulates two related and intertwined processes, those of *government* and *governance*.<sup>1</sup> We need to be precise in our use of these terms because, within the wide and extensive discourse of sustainable development, there has been a tendency to suggest that, first, governance is somehow unarguably a ‘good thing’ and that more of it should be encouraged; second, by implication, that ‘government’ is somehow less desirable; and, finally, that changes in the processes of local politics and administration can usefully be conceptualized as a continuum moving from government to governance with, as indicated above, a clear assumption that any movement along this continuum towards governance is both progressive and supportive of sustainability. To an extent, these positions reflect the analysis offered by the academic political science community (see, for example, John, 2001; Goss, 2001); but the sustainable development discourse, and the actors operating within it, tend to be more normative in approach. Moreover, there is a tendency within this discourse to conflate government and governance, sometimes using the terms interchangeably. However, as will be seen, for the purposes of this book and the research upon which it is based, it is necessary to be clear that these two processes have distinct identities.

Figure 1.1 illustrates these contrasting interpretations and subsequent chapters provide further explanation of our position. Nevertheless, put simply, we have chosen to regard the sphere of local authority activity, the internal organization of local government, and the legal, financial and political processes therein as *government*. In particular, as will be seen in Chapter 2, we are concerned to assess what we term ‘institutional capital’: the knowledge, resources, leadership and learning that can make local governments effective and